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**Information Request – number of Bay of Plenty firefighters referred to a counsellor or psychologist in the past year**

I refer to your official information request dated 8 October 2018 asking for the following information:

*“figures from Fire and Emergency NZ regarding how many Bay of Plenty firefighters have been referred to a counsellor or psychologist in the past year, and of these what were the reasons (personal reasons, workplace-related reasons, etc).”*

The safety, health and wellbeing of our people is of paramount importance to us. Every person within Fire and Emergency NZ has a right to work in a safe and supportive environment with the tools, equipment and skills that will protect them from hazards they encounter in their roles.

We recognise that the nature of our work means our people encounter a wide range of risks to their physical safety, work-related health or psychological wellbeing. We provide support services that cater for different levels of needs our people may have.

From the establishment of Fire and Emergency NZ on 1 July 2017, external independent confidential counselling and support services were opened up to all personnel, and their immediate families, at no cost to them. These services can be accessed for both work-related and non-work-related issues. We know this support helps our people who respond to critical incidents recover better. People who require additional support are referred through appropriate pathways.

The following information shows the use of support services in Region 2 in 2018, to 30 September 2018.

**Use of EAP Counselling**

Between 1 January 2018 and 30 September 2018, 30 people in Region 2 accessed EAP counselling. This figure includes self-referral to Vitae and EAP Services. We have not provided you with a breakdown by station as the numbers may enable individual staff members to be identified.

Fire and Emergency NZ does not consider that, in the circumstances of this particular case, the withholding of this information is outweighed by other considerations which render it desirable, in the public interest, to make the information available.

#### **Reasons for accessing EAP Support**

In the above time period:

- 91% of referrals to Vitae were for personal reasons and 9% were work related.
- Personal reasons include issues like personal relationships, anxiety and depression, grief and loss, personal stress, personal trauma.
- Work related referrals were for issues such as relationships with peers and one occurrence of work related trauma related to an incident at work.
- Of the 5 people accessing EAP through EAP services, the reasons for their referral is unknown.

#### **Referrals to psychologists**

From 1 January 2018 to 30 September 2018:

- Eight firefighters (career and volunteer) were referred to psychologists in the Bay of Plenty area. Three of these referrals were work related and five were for personal issues such as personal relationships and grief and loss.
- 13 firefighters (career and volunteer) were referred to psychologists in the Central Lakes area (includes Rotorua and Taupo). Five of these referrals related to work related stress and eight were for personal issues including personal relationships, illness and grief and loss.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602. Note also that this response (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Fire and Emergency NZ website.

Yours sincerely



Bella Sutherland  
Director, Office of the Chief Executive