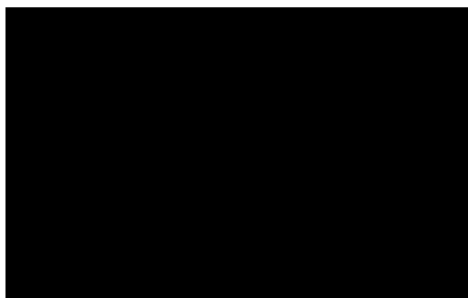




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30 April 2019



Information Request – Volunteer Firefighters

I refer to your official information request dated 4 March 2019 asking the following questions:

1. Could you tell me how many volunteers helped fight the Nelson bushfire? (And still are?) Where any/many people who were not members of voluntary rural fire forces involved in the firefighting effort? And how many of the 1700 career firefighters were involved?
2. What is the compensation arrangement that has been carried over from the old rural fire authorities?
3. Who pays the volunteers the rates cited by Minister Martin's office of \$42 - \$77 per hour and under what circumstances (is this where the "70 different approaches" comes in)?
4. Do you know how many volunteers were paid compensation/ are due it/have sought it from the Nelson bushfire?
5. Was/will every volunteer involved who seeks compensation be paid?
6. What if any is the advice to the employers of volunteer firefighters - to continue to pay wages while they are away fighting the fire, and seek compensation through wages protection insurance?
7. Are employers doing the right thing if they tell staff, who take time off to fight fires, to take that time as annual or unpaid leave?
8. What is the aim of FENZ's volunteer reward and recognition framework, and why was it set up? Was part or all of the aim to address the issue of compensating volunteer firefighters so that they and their employers know where they stand?
9. How unclear is the process at the moment?

I set out the response to your questions below:

Number of personnel

	Number of personnel
Volunteer Firefighters	426
Contractors, includes forestry, machinery operators, specialist fire expertise, tankers, security services	516
Fire and Emergency staff, includes staff working in the Incident Management Team and Forward Control Point	151

Compensation arrangements

Generally, carried-over rural agreements provide compensation for volunteers only when fighting fires that are away from a home area, and/or exceed a certain duration. Compensation is generally based on the role performed on each day defines the rate paid in many rural agreements. There are major and minor variations between the 40 former fire authorities.

Volunteer payments

Fire and Emergency will reimburse volunteers for their time at the incident in accordance with their local agreements and the role they undertook each day. Generally, the role performed on each day defines the rate paid in many rural agreements.

Fire and Emergency has also offered access to the loss of income reimbursement policy for our volunteers who were deployed to the fire and do not have normal entitlement to incident payments. This was offered in special recognition of the size and duration of the Pigeon Valley fire, and because a number of our urban volunteers were spending an extended period away from their home and day job.

Payments

Every eligible volunteer who claims for the reimbursement for the Pigeon Valley fire, either under their current agreement, or under our special loss of income policy, will be compensated by Fire and Emergency.

Advice to employers

There is no obligation for an employer to release and/or pay their employees for any period they are absent from work on Fire and Emergency New Zealand business.

Whilst we actively support and encourage employers to do so, we recognise that releasing employees may not always be practical or possible. For this reason, we would encourage an employer and their volunteer(s) either to make an agreement in advance, or to develop an emergency service volunteer absence policy for their whole business.

Depending on the nature of a person's business they may not be able to release an employee during work hours at all, but there might be other ways they can support them in volunteering such as accommodating their training schedule or helping them manage fatigue.

Reward and Recognition Programme

Fire and Emergency established a Volunteer Reward and Recognition project to develop a single set of volunteer policies to address the variations in compensation carried over from the 40 merged fire authorities. The project is also considering how to better reduce costs that volunteers can incur, and improve employer recognition. Fire and Emergency has information for employers on our public website at <https://fireandemergency.nz/business-and-landlords/benefits-of-employing-a-volunteer/>

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 or freephone 0800 802 602. Note also that this response (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Fire and Emergency website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Raewyn Bleakley', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Raewyn Bleakley
Deputy Chief Executive, Office of the Chief Executive