

Fire Research Reportt

Developing a Strategy to Nurture, Enhance, and Expand the Volunteer Fire Brigade

UMR Research

October 2001

The primary objectives of this study were to develop a profile of volunteers in the NZFS and to provide direction for strategies that will nurture, enhance and expand the volunteer fire brigade movement, including increasing the number of Maori and female volunteers.

The qualitative phase of the research consisted of focus groups with Maori urban volunteers, rural volunteers, urban volunteers and with volunteers from other organisations. Twenty depth interviews were also held with paid fire service personnel. Effort was made to reach a mix of personnel from first year fire fighters to chiefs. Interviews were conducted with volunteers from both the rural and urban divisions of the fire service. Ten depth interviews with former volunteer fire fighters

The quantitative phase of the research consisted of a telephone survey of 500 volunteer fire fighters, including 300 urban volunteers, 150 rural volunteers, and 50 volunteers from composite brigades. A representative sample of urban volunteers was selected from each of the eight New Zealand Fire regions: Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty/Waikato, Eastern, Western, Arapawa, Transalpine, Southern.

Overall, New Zealand's volunteer fire fighters rate their time spent as volunteers highly, and they say they would recommend the experience to family and friends. Volunteers are proud of the services they fulfil as fire fighters. They value the contributions they make to their communities and the professionalism with which they fulfil their responsibilities.

Changing responsibilities at home, work and from the fire service, however, blunt the volunteer experience. These competing pressures are clearly the greatest threat to retaining volunteer membership.

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Final Report

[October 2001]



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I. Introduction

The primary objectives of this study were to:

- Develop a profile of volunteers in the NZFS including:
 - exploring their motivations for joining.
 - expectations of the job.
 - quality of relationship with the NZFS and paid NZFS personnel.
- Provide direction for strategies that will nurture, enhance and expand the volunteer fire brigade movement, including increasing the number of Maori and female volunteers.

■ Specific Objectives

- (a) *To develop an in-depth understanding of the volunteer recruitment and retention process.*
- What motivates people to become volunteers?
 - What motivates the volunteers to choose the NZFS as their particular volunteer activity?
 - What process do they go through to join, what are their main sources of information?
 - What are the key incentives to join and stay as a volunteer with the NZFS including ranking of factors such as work experience, community involvement, social activity, education and training, etc?
 - What incentives are of most value to the volunteer?
 - What issues are of importance for female and Maori/Pacific Island volunteers?
- (b) *To explore the relationship volunteers expect to have with the Fire Service.*
- What level of involvement do they expect to have?
 - What factors would encourage loyalty and commitment?
 - What kind of organisation would volunteers like to relate to?
- (c) *To identify how volunteers would like the Fire Service to communicate with them.*
- Effectiveness of current communication.
 - Identify new ideas for communication to support the recruitment and retention of volunteers.
- (d) *To explore the relationship volunteers have with the paid fire service personnel.*
- Explore the nature of the relationship
 - Identify current levels of contact
 - Identify any gaps between expectations and actual relationships.

(e) To explore the attitudes the paid fire service personnel have toward the volunteers.

- How has the recent Fire Service restructuring impacted on attitudes towards volunteers?
- Investigate expectations for training and support to volunteers.
- Identify any areas of friction regarding job size and definition.

The qualitative phase of the research consisted of the following:

- One focus group with Maori urban volunteers
- Two focus groups with rural volunteers
- Three focus groups with urban volunteers
- Two focus groups with volunteers from other organisations
- 20 depth interviews with paid fire service personnel. Effort was made to reach a mix of personnel from first year fire fighters to chiefs. Interviews were conducted with volunteers from both the rural and urban divisions of the fire service.
- 10 depth interviews with former volunteer fire fighters

The quantitative phase of the research consisted of a telephone survey of 500 volunteer fire fighters, including 300 urban volunteers, 150 rural volunteers, and 50 volunteers from composite brigades. A representative sample of urban volunteers was selected from each of the eight New Zealand Fire regions: Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty/Waikato, Eastern, Western, Arapawa, Transalpine, Southern.

The interviews were conducted out of UMR's National Research Facility in Auckland, from 21 – 26 September 2001. For a sample size of 500 from a fixed population of approximately 11,500, the margin of error for a 50% figure at the 95% confidence level is $\pm 4.3\%$.

As there was no database of volunteers, the United Fire Brigades Association, the New Zealand Fire Service and the National Rural Fire Authority supported UMR Research in contacting volunteers through volunteer brigades to participate in the research.

Tables with questions that relate directly to the New Zealand Fire Service are only based on responses from urban volunteers.

The differences between quantitative and qualitative research should be noted. Qualitative research is essentially about understanding and quantitative research about measurement. Qualitative research can identify the range of views on issues, enable an assessment of the intensity with which views are held and provide a feeling for the language used. Quantitative research was necessary to establish with certainty the extent to which views and attitudes expressed in qualitative research are held through wider populations.

II. Executive Summary

2.1 Recruitment issues

Overall, New Zealand's volunteer fire fighters rate their time spent as volunteers highly, and they say they would recommend the experience to family and friends. Volunteers are proud of the services they fulfill as fire fighters. They value the contributions they make to their communities and the professionalism with which they fulfill their responsibilities.

Changing responsibilities at home, work and from the fire service, however, blunt the volunteer experience. These competing pressures are clearly the greatest threat to retaining volunteer membership. Importantly, higher-ranking volunteers are most likely to report that burdens on their time are increasing and to feel overwhelmed by their volunteer responsibilities. At the same time, volunteer fire fighters do not feel the growing challenges they are facing have been adequately acknowledged by the fire service, and they see room for improvements that they believe would ease turnover and help recruitment.

■ *Recruitment needs and challenges*

Recruitment needs vary by brigade type and region. Volunteers from rural forces and composite brigades report the highest number of vacancies. Many volunteers from growth areas report that recruitment is becoming more difficult as new residents seem less committed to their communities, people have less free time, and more people work outside of their communities.

■ *Recruitment recommendations*

Volunteer fire fighters are often directly involved in the recruitment process, and they offered many recommendations for improving the efficacy of recruitment efforts.

➤ Increase public awareness of volunteer fire fighters' role in New Zealand.

Volunteer fire fighters believe the public is unaware of the extent of their presence in New Zealand or of the critical role they play in providing emergency services. They suggest that if public awareness of communities' reliance on volunteer fire fighters could be heightened, more individuals would volunteer their time.

➤ Word-of-mouth

Many volunteers joined the fire service because a friend, family member or work colleague encouraged them to do so. They continue to believe word-of-mouth is the most effective form of recruitment. Importantly, volunteers also emphasise that word-of-mouth recruitment ensures current brigade or rural force members will have some control over the make-up of the rest of the team.

➤ Tell the Volunteer Story

Volunteers favor recruitment efforts that focus on spreading the stories of volunteer fire fighters through publicity. They say stories or photos of a fire that also mention volunteer fire fighters often bring in new recruits. In the survey, volunteers tended to prefer newspaper articles and TV documentaries highlighting fire service volunteers to advertising.

➤ Messages that work

Volunteers approve of the current messages used by NZFS to recruit volunteer fire fighters. In particular, the line "Ordinary people, extraordinary job," received high marks in the focus groups. Volunteers propose NZFS emphasise the following aspects of volunteering when reaching out to new recruits:

- ❑ Camaraderie
- ❑ Professionalism
- ❑ Emergency service role
- ❑ The importance of volunteers to New Zealand's communities

➤ Emphasise commitment

Volunteers also believe new recruits must be made aware of the commitment and expectations that will be placed on them, as many new recruits drop out early in the recruitment process after realising the extent of their new role.

➤ Keep new recruits interested

Volunteers note that the early stages of volunteering can be difficult for new recruits. They believe it is important that new recruits not experience only training and non-emergency activities. Rather, some volunteers say their brigades have had good luck keeping new recruits spirits up by ensuring that they are invited to observe other volunteers in action at emergencies, even before they are qualified to participate.

2.2 The volunteer experience

Nearly every volunteer interviewed said they enjoy being a volunteer fire fighter. The experience of being a volunteer has not necessarily been what they expected when they joined, however. Volunteers say they receive a host of unexpected rewards and challenges as fire fighters.

■ *Positives of volunteering*

Volunteers list a host of experiences they value as volunteers. Chief among these positive experiences, and in rank order of importance to volunteers themselves, are:

- ❑ Giving back to the community
- ❑ Camaraderie
- ❑ Personal achievement
- ❑ Training/ongoing learning opportunities
- ❑ Development of life skills

■ *Challenges facing volunteers*

Other aspects of volunteering have proved more challenging to volunteers.

➤ Time demands

A significant number of volunteers feel they spend too much time on their volunteer responsibilities. Significantly, chiefs and officers are most likely to feel overburdened by fire service responsibilities.

➤ Changing lifestyles

The busier nature of today's lifestyles hits volunteers hard. Volunteers say as their lifestyles have changed, volunteering has become more difficult. In particular, shift work, working outside of the community in which they live, and having both parents in a family working has made balancing their volunteer responsibilities more challenging.

➤ Balancing work

Volunteers report the greatest challenge to being a volunteer fire fighter is balancing their work responsibilities with their fire fighting responsibilities. Many volunteers also do not believe the NZFS does enough to acknowledge the support they receive from their employers, which, they argue, can increase the burden they feel.

➤ Balancing family

Beyond work conflicts, volunteers say, the greatest difficulty in being a volunteer fire fighter is striking a balance with their family responsibilities. Many volunteers also do not believe the NZFS does enough to acknowledge the support they receive from their families.

➤ Community acknowledgement

Next on volunteers' list of challenges is the perception that their community does not acknowledge their contributions. They tend to attribute any lack of acknowledgement to people's limited understanding of how the fire service works. Importantly, they also believe people's lack of understanding of the role of volunteer fire fighters is one of the greatest challenges to recruitment and retention. More than half of all volunteer chiefs interviewed found the lack of community acknowledgement to be difficult.

➤ Maintenance and non-emergency tasks

Many volunteers believe the time required for non-emergency activities is on the rise, and, they say, too much of this work can diminish their enthusiasm for volunteering. Volunteers were particularly critical of seemingly overzealous health and safety requirements and administrative work.

2.3 Volunteers and NZFS

Urban volunteers hold a very positive impression of the services provided by NZFS as an organisation, but they feel less warmly about the relationships within the organisation.

■ *Relationship with management*

Urban volunteers describe NZFS management as "bureaucratic" and out-of-touch with volunteers. As volunteers, they feel they are marginalised and at the very bottom of the organisational hierarchy. Volunteers say this often means they have to fight for funding and equipment from NZFS, and as volunteers they resent this added burden.

Recommendation: Volunteers would like to see more of their own promoted to NZFS management positions, and they would like more personal contact with management. They express particular interest in having high-ranking fire officials be "more hands on" and in seeing those officials reach out to volunteers by personally visiting volunteer fire stations.

■ *Relationship with paid fire fighters*

The relationship between urban volunteers and paid fire fighters varies substantially by location and brigade type. Tension between these two branches of the fire service is most likely to exist in urban areas with high concentrations of both volunteer and paid fire fighters. In these areas, both volunteers and paid fire fighters blame the contractual disputes between paid staff and NZFS management for ill will between the two groups. They note, that at one time, the presence of volunteer fire fighters was presented as a threat to paid fire fighters' livelihoods. With the resolution of the contractual disputes, both paid and volunteer fire fighters are hopeful any remaining tensions will ease. But, both groups say a lot of work will need to be done to improve relationships in some areas.

- Volunteer fire fighters can be put-off by their impression that paid fire fighters do not respect their skill levels.
- Paid fire fighters have mixed views of volunteers. They have very positive impressions of volunteers from small towns and rural areas where no paid brigades exist. They are most critical of volunteers they believe are only there to socialise and go on calls. They are wary of volunteers' skill sets, believing one night of training per week makes volunteers less qualified.

Recommendation: Tensions have already been eased in some areas, and the fire fighters from these areas say the key has been ensuring both paid and volunteer fire fighters are "treated the same." Fire fighters also recommend measures, like joint training sessions, to establish volunteers' skills and motivations in paid fire fighters' eyes. Such joint training has tended to develop camaraderie, respect, and trust between the two groups.

Recommendation: Encourage joint-area meetings between Chiefs from both paid and volunteer units to help build lines of communication between brigades. These meetings could be used to discuss joint training opportunities and to allow debriefing on any joint incidences attended.

■ *Rural volunteers and NZFS*

Rural volunteers feel no connection to NZFS, whatsoever. And, they feel they are even more marginalised than urban volunteers in the greater organisational hierarchy. Rural volunteers were most likely to complain of equipment and funding shortfalls.

■ *Public education*

Volunteers believe fire prevention and education are key roles for volunteer fire fighters, but they emphasise that many volunteers do not have the time to put into these activities. They say volunteer fire brigades must be given flexibility to fulfill these responsibilities, and they suggest that this could be a good role for older volunteers or volunteers with fewer work responsibilities.

■ *Information from NZFS*

Volunteers often feel they are being inundated with information from the NZFS. Much of the information seems duplicative, and it is hard for them to determine on which materials they should focus. Volunteers could not describe any additional information they would like to receive from NZFS.

■ *Training*

Volunteers find NZFS training courses to be professional and relevant to their fire fighting responsibilities. Their biggest complaints about training regard not being able to attend all the training sessions they want. Courses are considered by many volunteers to be fairly difficult to attend, as they may require several days away from home and work and a great deal of travel time.

Recommendation: Volunteers would like to see more training courses offered at their individual fire stations. They say unless a course requires special equipment or resources, training instructors could travel to individual brigades. They point out that training instructors are paid, so their travel time would be less of a sacrifice and emphasise it could be helpful for an entire brigade to get the same information at the same time. If training does continue in its current form, many volunteers say they would like to receive more financial support from the NZFS.

■ *Training and rural volunteers*

Rural volunteers are hopeful new training requirements will help to standardise skills across the rural forces. However, they say, the extent of the new training requirements can seem intimidating and overwhelming.

2.4 Turnover and retention

Despite their overall satisfaction with the experience of being volunteer fire fighters, there is significant concern among volunteers about turnover in their brigades or rural forces. More than half of all volunteers from composite brigades surveyed said they are concerned about volunteer turnover, and 41% of rural volunteers surveyed said they are concerned about turnover in their force. Turnover was less of a worry to volunteers from all-volunteer urban brigades, but at least one-third of volunteers from these brigades was concerned about this issue.

■ *Recommendations to decrease turnover*

Volunteers said the increased pressure on individuals' time is the primary reason people stop being volunteer fire fighters. In particular, they blame conflicts between work and family responsibilities. They said volunteers also resign when volunteer responsibilities to the NZFS become too demanding. Volunteers also said they often lose volunteers because they move away.

Recommendations:

Volunteers made the following recommendations to ease turnover within the volunteer fire fighter ranks.

- Raise public awareness of volunteer fire fighters' existence and acknowledge their contribution to their communities and New Zealand.
- Ease conflicts between fire fighting responsibilities and work and family responsibilities.
 - Reach out to employers of volunteer fire fighters.
 - Reach out to families of volunteer fire fighters.
- Ease the burden of non-emergency work volunteers feel is taking more and more of their time.
 - Provide more administrative support for volunteer chiefs and senior officers.
 - Decrease need for volunteers to battle for funding and equipment.

- Provide financial incentives, like tax breaks, to offset the costs incurred by volunteering.
- Open lines of communication between national management and individual brigades or forces.
 - Have high-ranking officers visit local brigades.
 - Promote presence of former volunteers who are now national managers.

III. Background

3.1 Volunteer fire fighters, unique among volunteers

■ *Professional volunteers*

Focus groups with volunteers from non-fire service organisations showed that while they have much in common with the motivations of volunteer fire fighters, the professionalism and commitment required of volunteers for the fire service renders their experience fundamentally different.

Volunteer fire fighters face many of the same challenges and receive many of the same rewards as other volunteers, but the relative impact of these rewards and challenges seems to be intensified in the volunteer fire fighter's experience. Perhaps the nature of the job leads to this intensification, or perhaps it is the result of fire fighters' understanding that in many New Zealand communities they are the only emergency service personnel available. As one volunteer fire fighter noted,

If you didn't do it, who's going to? (Urban volunteer, male)

■ *Being a 'volunteer'*

Despite the fundamental differences in the requirements and experiences between volunteer fire fighters and volunteers from other areas, all of the volunteers interviewed in this study agreed the basic definition of being a volunteer is *giving up one's time without the benefit of financial reward*. All volunteers said they receive rewards beyond the financial realm that make the personal sacrifices worthwhile.

Someone who gives up their time to do something without rewards. (Urban volunteer, male)

Without financial rewards. I think you'd have to cover it by financial rewards. There's a lot of rewards from being a volunteer. (Urban volunteer, male)

Doing it for love and with no money. [Definitely the no money. (interjection.)] (Other volunteer, female)

Later sections will describe more specifically the challenges and rewards of volunteering as described by volunteer fire fighters, but it is important to note that the overall benefits and costs described by everyone in this study from a food bank volunteer, to a children's soccer coach, to a volunteer Fire Chief were similar. All the volunteers interviewed said the satisfaction of helping one's community, making a difference in others' lives and personal growth are benefits of being a volunteer. Similarly, all the volunteers interviewed agreed the costs of being a volunteer include a loss of personal time, taking on emotional burdens, and a lack of appreciation from others.

■ *Versus being a volunteer fire fighter*

Despite general similarities, volunteer fire fighters and other volunteers recognise the stark differences between their various responsibilities. The professionalism required of them, the dangers they face, the trust they place in other volunteers, the unpredictable time requirements, and the emotionally challenging incidents they attend all make being a fire fighter a unique voluntary role.

You're not really putting your life in danger with the guides and scouts. [You can also plan your meetings and events. (Interjection.)] It's structured. You can't structure when a fire's going to happen. (Rural volunteer, female)

[Fire fighting] is not [a volunteer job] that you do with what time you want to allow for it. If it rings, it's now. You can't do it next week. (Other volunteer, male)

Everything you do is completely spontaneous. You never know what you're going into from one thing to the next so everything's always interesting. It's exciting. There can be a lot of turn offs towards it. A lot of people ask how we can go to motor vehicle accidents and things like that. There's still a side of it that you get a lot out of and to a degree you still enjoy doing it because you're still helping someone else by doing it. (Urban volunteer, male)

You probably give a lot more time as a volunteer fire fighter. It could happen at any time. There's a lot of time spent training. So time-wise I think we give a lot more. (Rural volunteer, male)

All of the volunteers interviewed agreed that unlike most voluntary roles, New Zealand's volunteer fire fighters must accept the burdens and maintain the standards of the job as if they were professionals. Many of the volunteers from other areas, who were interviewed, said they could not make the commitment volunteer fire fighters make every day.

[Is there anything you would never consider volunteering for?] The Fire Service. I don't like fires. My husband's a police officer and that's far safer than being a fireman. I certainly couldn't be married to a fireman. They do a lot of work. [So the danger you're talking about] And the fitness levels. A massive commitment to doing that job. (Other volunteer, female)

[Are training requirements a deterrent to volunteering?] I think one of the reasons why I gave up St John's Ambulance was because of the training. You just about need a medical degree nowadays to be in the St John's Ambulance. If you did something and it was wrong now, having made a wrong diagnosis or something, the legal ramifications are just horrendous. That's one of the reasons why I gave up St John's Ambulance, because it was becoming too professional, too qualified. (Other volunteer, female)

3.2 Volunteer fire fighters' overall experience

OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF BEING A VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTER		
<i>How would you rate your overall experience being a volunteer fire fighter?</i>		
	Urban Volunteers (n=350) %	Rural Volunteers (n=150) %
Very good	64	45
Good	30	36
TOTAL VERY GOOD + GOOD	94	81
Satisfactory	6	17
Poor	-	1
Very poor	-	1
TOTAL POOR + VERY POOR	0	2
Unsure	-	-

While they may carry a heavier burden than other volunteers, a majority of volunteer fire fighters said being a volunteer fire fighter has been a good or very good experience. 64% of urban volunteers said the experience has been "very good." 81% of rural volunteers said the experience has been a good or very good experience, while rural volunteers were more likely to say the experience has been satisfactory (17%).

IV. Recruitment

4.1 Recruitment needs

VOLUNTEER VACANCIES				
[All respondents were asked:]				
<i>Does your brigade have any vacancies for volunteers?</i>				
	Urban Volunteer Brigades in urban fire districts (n=182) %	Other Urban Volunteer Brigades (n=105) %	Composite Brigades (n=63) %	Rural Volunteer Forces (n=150) %
Yes	58	66	68	77
No	38	30	30	18
Unsure	4	4	2	5
NUMBER OF VACANCIES				
[Respondents who were aware of vacancies in their brigades were asked:]				
<i>How many vacancies does your brigade have?</i>				
	Urban Volunteer Brigades in urban fire districts (n=106) %	Other Urban Volunteer Brigades (n=69) %	Composite Brigades (n=43) %	Rural Volunteer Forces (n=115) %
#				
1-3	69	58	42	33
4-6	16	27	42	36
7-9	4	5	2	6
10+	5	3	2	6
Unsure	6	7	12	19
Base: 67% of respondents who were aware that vacancies existed for volunteers (n=333)				

Recruitment needs vary by type of brigade or force and by region. More than half of all respondents said there are vacancies within their brigade or rural force. 77% of rural volunteers said there are vacancies in their force, with 48% reporting vacancies for 4 or more volunteers. Urban volunteers from composite brigades were more likely to say there are vacancies for volunteers in their brigade than were other urban volunteers. 68% of urban volunteers from composite brigades reported a vacancy exists. 46% of volunteers from composite brigades with vacancies said there are openings within their brigade for four or more volunteers. 35% of urban volunteers from urban brigades outside of urban fire districts with vacancies said their brigades have openings for four or more volunteers. And, 25% of volunteers from urban brigades with vacancies in urban fire districts reported openings for four or more volunteers.

4.2 Challenges to recruitment

Many volunteers said finding new recruits has not been a problem for their brigade, but others said it is increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers today. Volunteers said one of the biggest challenges to recruiting new volunteers is today's changing lifestyle. Volunteers from growth areas said volunteer brigades used to be able to rely on family histories and local networks to fill vacancies. Today, they said, young people are moving away and new residents, without strong community ties, are moving in. Others said it is hard to find people that have the time to volunteer.

There's family type stuff. Big family histories. Things are changing as the town is moving. In [our town] there's been a lot of influx from [the city] and people moving in. I think it's really changed as far as getting people to become involved. [Getting harder now?] Yes. People are busier and I guess it's not their hometown, and they don't feel obligated. (Urban volunteer, female)

The responsibility of people at the moment seems to be that people don't want to get tied up in a lot of things. (Urban volunteer, male)

4.3 Reaching out to potential recruits

■ *How many volunteers are there?*

Volunteers agreed the two most effective ways of recruiting new volunteers have been through personal contact between volunteers and potential recruits and through means that "tell the story" of volunteer fire fighters. Many volunteers do not think other New Zealanders know the role that volunteers play within the fire service, and they believe if awareness was raised more people would volunteer.

We need a recruitment drive seriously. [That's right through the whole country; it's not just in one little wee patch. (Interjection.)] They've put plenty of money into advertising the fire safety campaigns so maybe some money put into recruitment. [And making that awareness that you are volunteers?] Yes. People outside of the service have no idea of the ratio of volunteers to permanents. If people knew that and knew how much we do I guess to keep it going and how important it is that we keep the volunteers going and we can't do it without people. (Urban volunteer, female)

Even volunteers themselves are unaware of the extent of their role in New Zealand.

[Do you think the rest of New Zealand knows what you do as volunteers?] I don't really think they have a perspective on it, no. [Do you think it would help? There's 8000 NZFS volunteers in the country.] Are there more volunteers than paid? [1600 paid] Wow. (Urban volunteer, male)

4.4 Evaluation recruitment methods

RATING RECRUITMENT METHODS								
<i>Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means that you think it would be very effective and 5 means you do not think it would be effective at all, how effective do you think the following ways would be in recruiting new volunteer fire fighters? Remember you can use any number between 1 and 5.</i>								
	1 Very effective	2	1 + 2 TOTAL EFFECTIVE	3	4	5 Not effective at all	4 + 5 TOTAL NOT EFFECTIVE	Unsure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Personal contact								
Word of mouth	50	30	80	14	4	2	6	-
Telling the story								
TV documentaries	30	37	67	18	8	6	14	1
Articles in local community papers	28	35	63	26	7	4	11	-
Advertising								
On TV	27	26	53	23	11	12	23	1
In the newspaper	16	25	41	33	15	10	25	1
On the radio	15	21	36	35	15	13	28	1
Distributing fliers / pamphlets	11	22	33	32	18	16	34	1

Base: all respondents, n=500

■ *The importance of word of mouth recruiting*

Word-of-mouth is clearly the most practiced and most valued form of recruitment according to volunteer fire fighters. 80% of volunteers interviewed said “word-of-mouth” would be an effective way to recruit new volunteer fire fighters, and 50% of all volunteers said it would be very effective. Importantly, 84% of volunteer chiefs said word-of-mouth is an effective way of recruiting new volunteers.

Indeed, many of the volunteers interviewed said they first learned about the urban volunteer fire service or the rural volunteer bush force through a family member, friend or work colleague.

For a start I was actually dragged along by my father. In the end I probably would have joined up anyway because a lot of my friends were doing it. (Rural volunteer, male)

It was my boss. He'd just recently resigned but he thoroughly recommended it to me and I was just going through a state of complete boredom in my life and needed something so it was the perfect fit. (Urban volunteer, male)

Mine was through a workmate. He was a volunteer as well. [What did he say to you?] We basically live around the corner from each other and we had a huge scrub fire down the road from work. He rushed off and I thought, “that looks interesting.” (Rural volunteer, male)

Word-of-mouth is a valued form of recruitment because it offers current members control over the development of their brigade or force. Volunteer fire fighters said they approach individuals they feel would fit in well with the rest of the team. When they do approach potential recruits, volunteers said, they do not do so lightly. New recruits' performances reflect on those who recruited them. Fire fighters also want to be sure new volunteers are individuals they will be able to trust in life or death situations.

Normally how I can pick out a lot of people is – there's 24 other guys in our brigade, we're one short – ask around and there's always someone that knows that person that's applying and can give you a pretty good rundown. (Urban volunteer, male)

I put their name forward because it's my responsibility, I say that I think this guy's suitable, I'll put his name forward and then the whole brigade will vote on that guy, either vote him in or vote him out and that's it. After they vote him in which always seems to happen – I tell you what if my brigade votes a guy out, that's it, I've got to stand by what these people say. (Urban volunteer, male)

It's like any organisation. You've got to have a group of people who are going to get on and work together so you've got to try and make sure that the crew does do that because it's no use having one person pulling their weight here ... you don't want someone questioning his authority all the time. That doesn't make for a good environment so you've got to make sure that that sort of situation doesn't occur. [So when people are joining you're making sure that you feel as though they can fit into the team] Yes I think it's the way the questions are asked, you can build up an idea of a person's character and how they'd react in different situations. (Rural volunteer, male)

Volunteers from smaller communities said they often know who to encourage or discourage from joining a volunteer brigade because “everyone knows everyone else.”

[Was it difficult to become a volunteer?] It depends on the waiting list that brigades have. We've had waiting lists. In a lot of cases it wasn't what you knew, it was who you knew. Nowadays in some towns I know they've got to go out and try and encourage people to join. In our case we're pretty full. (Urban volunteer, male)

In a small community everyone knows everyone that puts their name forward anyway so really the community checks them out. The community knows who you are; they know everything about you, more than what you know yourself sometimes. (Rural volunteer, male)

There's two ways. The brigade's looking at the new applicant and the new applicant is looking at the brigade. We've had the odd person that's turned up saying they want to join and then the chief's said “no, being in a small community we know you and we don't want you”. (Urban volunteer, male)

RECOMMEND BECOMING A VOLUNTEER	
<i>Would you recommend becoming a volunteer fire fighter to your friends and family?</i>	
	%
Yes	96
No	3
Unsure	1
Base: all respondents, n=500	

Volunteers are positive about word-of-mouth recruitment, and 96% of volunteers said they would recommend becoming a volunteer fire fighter to their family and friends. Volunteers said they would warn friends and family of the commitment being a volunteer fire fighter requires, but they would highly recommend the experience to anyone seriously considering becoming a volunteer fire fighter.

I would say go ahead and do it, I enjoy it. It's hard work, it's thankless, it's unrewarding but you do get a lot out of it. I get a lot out of it, a lot of achievement. I enjoy working as part of a team. I'd definitely say go ahead and do it if someone asked me because you don't know until you try. (Rural volunteer, male)

I'd tell them all about it, that it's good value. Tell them to go and see the chief. [What would you tell them was good about it?] Everything that we've got on the list. Camaraderie, everything, friends, socially, the whole lot. (Urban volunteer, male)

[What would you say to a friend thinking about volunteering?] I'd let them know that it's very strenuous and that it does interrupt their day or their night. They have to be prepared to put 100% into it. (Rural volunteer, male)

Several volunteers noted that a downside to word-of-mouth recruitment is that networks can “dry-up” as people move and communities change.

[How do you get volunteers?] Most of ours is word of mouth although that dries up sometimes. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ **Publicising volunteer fire fighters to attract new members?**

Second to word-of-mouth, volunteers said they believe potential new recruits could be reached through better publicity of volunteer fire fighters. Newspaper articles, TV documentaries and even seeing volunteers on the job raise awareness of volunteer fire fighters' role in the community and current volunteers said they believe this would attract new volunteers. (Importantly, they also said this could be a way of decreasing volunteer turnover.)

Many volunteers said they first learned about being a volunteer fire fighter after seeing other volunteers at work or after seeing the devastation of a fire in their community.

Fires drag people in. If people see a big flame they want to join. (Rural volunteer, male)

I decided probably in the early 1980s. I was on a place where there was a fire out the back. The rural fire fighters came out and with them coming out I had that opportunity to join them. (Rural volunteer, male)

I used to be...at Hamner. I worked in the hospital up there and they had a fire up there one day and I thought I'd go and help the guys. The local chief said to me that I'd do and they'd take me. I've been in the brigade since. (Urban volunteer, male)

Most of the volunteers surveyed agreed some form of publicity could also be effective means of recruiting new volunteers.

Mine was an article in one of the local papers and I've had friends who are in the Fire Service and I was quite interested but just didn't really get around to doing anything. Then this article was in there so I applied for it. [Was the article looking for people to volunteer?] Yes. (Rural volunteer, male)

The survey results show that current volunteers believe publicity that tells the stories of volunteer fire fighters would be a more effective means of recruitment than advertising. TV documentaries (67% effective) and articles in local newspapers (63% effective) were both rated highly as potential means of recruitment by current volunteer fire fighters. Volunteers in the Northland and Auckland fire regions (81%, 76% respectively), 16-29 year olds (75%), and members of composite brigades (73%) were most likely to believe that TV documentaries could be an effective way of recruiting new volunteers. Similarly, 88% of Auckland fire region volunteers, 82% of female volunteers, 79% of composite brigade volunteers, and 70% of Maori volunteers said articles in local papers would be an effective way of recruiting new volunteers.

I mentioned this to our chief not long ago because we were talking about getting people in and I thought like a photo spread in the local paper, making it look exciting and showing the exciting thing we do. That would get people to come along. (Urban volunteer, female)

[Did it work?] *Yes. I suppose the big fires we've had this last season, we've been able to advertise indirectly to the media. (Rural volunteer, male)*

Volunteers were less convinced of the potential effectiveness of advertising on recruitment, but they were more likely to believe ads would be effective than ineffective.

■ **TV ads**

53% of volunteers said TV ads could be an effective means of recruiting new volunteers. 66% of female volunteers, 64% of Auckland region volunteers, and 62% of Northland region volunteers said they believe TV advertising would be an effective means of recruiting new volunteers.

■ **Newspaper ads**

41% of volunteers said newspaper ads could be effective for volunteer recruitment. 76% of Auckland region volunteers said newspaper ads could be effective, as did 72% of volunteers from composite brigades, 60% of female volunteers, 58% of station and training officers, and 54% of Maori volunteers. The qualitative research showed some brigades have had luck with newspaper ads.

We have just advertised in the newspaper. We've had five or six people at a time as a result. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ **Radio ads**

36% of volunteers said radio ads could be an effective means of recruiting new volunteers. Again Auckland region volunteers (56% effective) and volunteers from composite brigades (59% effective) were more likely to say they thought radio ads would be effective means of recruiting. 48% of 16-29 year old volunteers and 41% of Maori volunteers also said they believe radio ads could be effective. There was also some anecdotal evidence in the focus groups that radio ads have been successful in recruitment drives for some volunteer brigades or forces.

■ ***Fliers and pamphlets***

Of the potential recruitment means posed to volunteers, they considered distributing fliers and pamphlets the least effective. Only 33% of volunteers said they thought distributing pamphlets would be an effective way of recruiting new volunteers. Despite, their concerns that fliers would not be effective, several volunteers in the focus groups said that was how they first learned about becoming a volunteer fire fighter.

The Brigade put fliers out in our letter boxes and that's how I got to hear about it. (Urban volunteer, female)

■ ***Message testing***

In focus groups, volunteers were shown the text of a brochure currently used by the fire service to recruit new volunteers. (Because brochures were scarce, only the text of the brochure was shown to the focus group participants.)

Ordinary People. Extraordinary Job.

Are you interested in:
Joining a team of committed locals?
Learning new skills?
Receiving useful emergency training?
Putting something back into your community?

If you would like to know more about becoming a volunteer firefighter please contact:
Chief Joe Bloggs
Town Fire Brigade

***We welcome people of any age because there will be a role for you.
We need volunteers.***

The lack of the color and visuals in the actual brochure hindered focus group respondents' ability to assess this brochure, but overall most participants said they thought the message would be effective. Most volunteers in the focus groups found the headline, "Ordinary people. Extraordinary job," especially persuasive and realistic. They said they could "relate" to this headline

I really like that first one, ordinary people extraordinary jobs, because it is. There's nothing else like it. Anyone who reads that is going to read on. (Urban volunteer, male)

I wouldn't change it because it is a job. It is a job but you don't get paid for it. You're still working hard. (Urban volunteer, female)

[What stands out to you?] *Ordinary people, extraordinary job. There's nothing special about us, we're just ordinary people but it is an extraordinary job. It's not something you do every day. (Rural volunteer, male)*

Volunteers said they thought the message would be more effective if it was tailored more specifically to the fire service. Several volunteers said with a few minor adjustments the text could be from a message recruiting volunteers for any organisation. Again, the visuals of the actual brochure would most likely have met volunteers' concerns. However, it is worth noting what volunteers said they think would help make the given text more appealing to potential recruits.

It doesn't scream Fire Service. It just sounds like you want to go and work in the foodbank – it doesn't say anything about the professionalism. It doesn't really inject really what the Fire Service is. That's what draws people to it. (Urban volunteer, male)

Could it be another organisation other than the Fire Service? Could you take the volunteer fire fighter out of that and could it refer to anything else? Take the emergency training part of it and it could be anything. It could be the rugby club or the bowling club. (Urban volunteer, male)

Volunteers said the message should emphasise the excitement of being a volunteer fire fighter and the hard work it requires. Several volunteers said recruitment messages should highlight the *professionalism* volunteer fire fighters demonstrate.

I'd change the word "locals" to more the likes of "a team of committed professionals" or a word that means a group of people that when they're doing something they're doing it for a reason, they're doing it with purpose and they do it well so whatever a word is like that. (Urban volunteer, male)

What's missing really is any real focus on what the job is. [What would you put in there?] Dealing with dangerous situations and learning how to cope with them. (Rural volunteer, male)

Ordinary people, extraordinary buzz. You want flashing lights, flames. There's nothing there that says you'll be facing big flames. (Rural volunteer, male)

Volunteers also said they think it is important to emphasise that many communities rely on volunteer fire brigades solely to provide fire fighting services in the town and to provide other emergency service work.

What it doesn't say is that – we'll it doesn't apply obviously to all of us but for some it does – you know, your only local Fire Brigade is only volunteers and for most communities in New Zealand that is the case. (Urban volunteer, male)

The Fire Service today, that applies to Rural Fire as well in some cases, is a rescue service not just a fire service. That doesn't say too much about that. It says about becoming a fire fighter but it doesn't say anything about being a rescue service as well. (Rural volunteer, male)

Many volunteers were struck by the final phrase of the message encouraging "people of any age" to join. This line raised a lot of discussion in the groups about the veracity of this statement, as is described in 9.3.

4.5 Reasons for joining

Any future recruitment drives will benefit from understanding why current volunteer fire fighters initially joined the NZFS or the NRFA. Regardless of how they first learned about becoming volunteer fire fighters, current volunteers gave a host of reasons for why they ultimately signed-up to be fire fighters.

MAIN REASON FOR JOINING THE NEW ZEALAND FIRE SERVICE	
<i>Thinking back to when you first joined as a volunteer fire fighter with the New Zealand Fire Service (either urban or rural volunteer) what was your MAIN reason for joining?</i>	
	%
Wanting to support my community	72
My friends/work colleagues/family encouraged me to join	10
To help protect the land and local environment	5
To experience the excitement	3
To help with the shortage of fire fighters/increase the worker number	2
To meet new people	1
Already had previous experience at fire fighting and enjoyed it	1
Other	6
Base: all respondents, n=500	

■ *Community obligation*

While word-of-mouth may be the primary form of recruitment, the most important factor in deciding to become a volunteer fire fighter is the desire to help people and community, according to the survey. This sentiment was much stronger in the survey results than in the focus group results. 72% of volunteers said “wanting to support my community” was the main reason they became volunteers. A large majority of all volunteers said helping community was the primary reason they became volunteer fire fighters, but this was especially important to Maori volunteers (76% important), urban volunteers from brigades outside of urban fire districts (75% important), and Auckland region volunteers (82% important).

I think that as far as we are all concerned it is supporting the community. (Urban volunteer, male)

Maybe in some cases for me the volunteer is helping others, might like to help people and put yourself maybe second. (Urban volunteer, male)

Several volunteers said they became fire fighters because they realised there was no one else around to do the job.

[Which is the most important thing that's drawn you to be a volunteer?] Fighting the fire...It was basically that there weren't many around to fight the fire. [The fire is so destructive. (Interjection.)] (Rural volunteer, female)

If something's burning you want someone to put it out rather than just saying it's not my problem. [Owning it and doing something about it] (Rural volunteer, female)

It is worth noting that the sense of community obligation was not nearly as strong in the earlier focus groups. Indeed, this sentiment was rarely mentioned as a factor in joining the fire service in the focus groups. It is unclear if fire fighters were simply not comfortable discussing this feeling in the groups or if something else changed between the time of the groups and the survey to heighten this sense of community obligation among volunteer fire fighters.

■ ***Family and friends***

The next most-cited reason for becoming a volunteer fire fighter according to the survey results, was the encouragement of family, friends and work colleagues. 10% of volunteer fire fighters said this encouragement was the main reason they became fire fighters. Many of the younger volunteers interviewed said their parents were volunteers and that for them being a volunteer fire fighter has always been “a way of life.” Personal encouragement from family and acquaintances was the main reason 18% of 16-29 year old volunteers, 17% of Northland region volunteers and 16% of unmarried volunteers said they joined the fire service.

Because you're brought up with it, it's just like a way of life really. You see your father go and you want to know where he's going. (Urban volunteer, male)

If you knew someone that was in there already, they were the ones who drew you into it. They convinced you that it was something different, “oh yeah it's good, we go out and do this, that or the other”. You didn't know what the team was like until you were actually in it. (Rural volunteer, male)

If you come from a small town, that's just what you do. My parents always did it. (Urban volunteer, female)

■ ***Environmental obligation***

Rural volunteers, in particular, said they became fire fighters because they felt a sense of obligation to protect local land and the environment. 5% of all fire fighters said obligation to the environment was the main reason they became fire fighters. 9% of rural fire fighters said this was the main reason they became volunteer fire fighters.

I think just the level of destruction that I could see before the bush got going. It was so severe it really annoyed me. I felt that surely it was possible to do better than just level those hills so it can burn off like what was happening at the time. Fires usually go for three days, anything that burns. (Rural volunteer, male)

It was the environmental side of it. I like seeing green hills out of my kitchen window rather than a big scorched scar on the hillside. If you can do something to prevent that or lessen that – (Rural volunteer, male)

9% of all volunteers from the Arapawa and the Northland fire regions said that helping to protect the land and local environment was the main reason they became volunteer fire fighters.

■ **Excitement**

Many volunteers said that before becoming fire fighters they were attracted to the “excitement of it all.” Only 3% cited this as the main reason they first became fire fighters, but the importance of this aspect was pronounced in the focus groups. Volunteer fire fighters said the idea of fighting fires, riding on “the big red truck” and the “image of the fireman” appealed to them.

[Before you joined what was your impression of being a volunteer with the Fire Service? What drew you to it?] *Well I'd hear the siren going and I used to chase it. (Urban volunteer, male)*

I joined the fire brigade because I like the look of driving around in a big red truck, flashing the lights, going through lights and stuff. It's the adrenaline buzz for me. (Urban volunteer, male)

The excitement is probably what got you there to start with. (Urban volunteer, male)

A bit of the unknown to go along, the excitement. You didn't really know what you were getting into until you actually got there. It was something that hasn't got a high profile so until you actually go along you don't know. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ **Physical and different than paid jobs**

Other volunteers said they joined the fire service because it was an opportunity to do a “physical” job and experience something totally different than their paid desk jobs.

The physical side of it. If you don't do much physical stuff at work it's good to have some other outlet. (Rural volunteer, male)

[Joining] was something totally different, something off the wall. I was behind a desk all the time, given up any sport quite some time ago so it was something totally different from what I did every day. (Rural volunteer, male)

It's something that not everyone can do or gets the opportunity to do. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ **Social aspects**

It is very important to note that the social aspects of being a volunteer fire fighter had little to do with volunteers' reasons for becoming fire fighters. Several volunteers said they joined fire service when they moved into a new community to meet new people and to help them assimilate. Others said they joined to “strengthen” their links to the community and to be a part of an organisation that is respected by their neighbors and fellow residents.

I got talking to my boss about it. We just got into a conversation one day and he said “it's just an organisation that's in the community that bides well with everybody”. You get in there and you get brought up with the Fire Service. It's like a family thing. It was what I was looking for. It's a good-standing organisation in the community. If you say you're in the Fire Service people tend to look at you a little bit differently. (Urban volunteer, male)

Only 0.2% of volunteer fire fighters said the “socialising, bar and canteen” were the main reason they joined the fire service. This aspect of volunteering was barely mentioned in the focus groups.

4.6 Becoming a volunteer

Urban and rural volunteers agreed the process of becoming a volunteer fire fighter has become more complicated in recent years. Individuals, who have been volunteer fire fighters for years -- some for decades, said they simply showed up at the fire station and told the Chief they were interested in joining the brigade. Today, volunteers said, the process generally involves a formal interview with the Chief, a series of physical and police checks, a series of introductory training courses, and, ultimately, a vote among the rest of the brigade.

[What is the process?] *First off you've got to get a clearance from the police. Then you have to interview them so that you can find out if there's a potential risk there of him being an arsonist or anything like that. They're really loading it on to the chiefs now in the interviews before you accept the fellow. Then you've got to have a medical...But it's quite a process now to what it used to be. When I joined first off you were nominated by somebody and then you were in. Now it's really tightened up to what it used to be.* (Urban volunteer, male)

There was some indication that volunteers believe the stricter recruitment guidelines are necessary to maintain professionalism and accountability within the volunteer ranks. Paid fire fighters interviewed also emphasised the importance of maintaining high consistent standards in volunteer recruitment.

The recruitment of volunteers needs to be professional as well, like the paid fire fighters, it needs to be consistent throughout the volunteer brigades. (Ex- volunteer, male)

■ Information for new volunteers

The information available to volunteers when they first become fire fighters differs significantly by urban brigade and rural force. Some brigades have no written materials available, while others have packets of information. Several recent volunteers said they simply relied on other members of the brigade to answer their questions when they first joined.

[Was there anything written that you could read about?] *Not written about joining. About fighting fires there was. There was nothing to say that it's 24 hours a day.* [Nothing that said what was involved in becoming a volunteer] *Not really, we sort of knew that. We knew what involvement our partners had.* (Rural volunteer, female)

We have a new members' information pack. It's something that we've drawn up over the years of just things that happen in the brigade, that's all. Where we meet, how many times we meet, what meetings are, when the raffle at the pub is being run, what's really expected of you. [Roles and responsibilities] *Yes, that when you join you've got to attend these courses. Just basic things like that.* [How long have you had that?] *Ten or 12 years.* (Urban volunteer, male)

A lot of our stuff -- like you're involved in a training night. For example you'd ring up the chief and say you're interested in joining, the chief would say, "come down to the training night and see if that's what you like" and then you fill out the paperwork and such and if it is your calling he'll just tell you the dates and that. We don't have too much of an information pack. (Urban volunteer, male)

Several volunteers said it would be helpful to have some information available to new recruits so, “they know what’s expected of them.” Volunteers suggested this might decrease the turnover among new recruits, who join without a realistic sense of what will be expected of them. But, all volunteers also questioned the practicality of any nationally standardised information or recruitment requirements. They said the role of each fire service volunteer differs greatly by geographic area and the make-up of the rest of the brigade or force. Any standardised information that ignores this would be seen as unhelpful.

It would probably save a lot of people’s time. We’ve seen people come and go pretty quick. We’ve had a lot of those. They’ve suddenly hit a shell shock sort of thing and they’ve suddenly realised what they’ve got themselves into and they don’t want to do it. It’s probably better if the guy comes along to two or three trainings before he actually goes before the meeting and then he’s got an idea of what’s going on. (Urban volunteer, male)

[How important is it to get written information? Would it help?] *I think it would. It would help me anyhow purely because I’m in charge of our unit and it would help me if somebody wants to come in and I could say “this is what we do and how we operate and what we expect of you”. If you could hand them something written like that, the same information would be being passed on. [At the moment you don’t think that’s what’s happening] Not in our case, no. (Rural volunteer, male)*

The areas are different. You see, you take [our area]. A big percentage of our fires are crop or stubble. Going to north...from the west coast and you’re looking at scrub. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ **The interview**

Several recent volunteers said the interview and application process was intensive, and they found their interviewers were working hard to ensure that new recruits were serious about their commitment to becoming fire fighters.

I rung up the chief and it was probably one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. It was something I wanted to join. It wasn’t just like “here’s my membership fee, take me” and he’d have no choice about it. I had to convince this guy that I’m right for the brigade. It was like a formal interview. The chief had to make sure that what he was taking on was right and wasn’t going to be detrimental to the other guys in the brigade. [Was it an intimidating experience?] No but once I realised that ... you actually felt like you were starting to accomplish it already. It wasn’t intimidating but it was worth going for. You couldn’t just pay your money and belong to it. (Urban volunteer, male)

Because they’re trying to put you off. [Do they?] Yes. They have a lot of people who are keen to do it so if they can’t put you off, then you’re obviously keen. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ **Lose recruits early on**

Despite tough interviews, volunteers said it is not uncommon to lose a percentage of new recruits in the early stages of training and recruitment. They said new recruits often can not keep up with the intense physical nature of the job, they may not enjoy some of the administrative and maintenance tasks they are expected to fulfill, or they realise they cannot dedicate the time necessary to being a volunteer fire fighter. They said others may dropout when they realise they will have to attend non-fire incidents like MVAs.

In fact there's a considerable drop out near the end of it, in fact some of them during the recruitment. They just drop out, and we just have to assume that out of any given recruit group we take on, less than half of them become effective force members. [Why is that?] Suddenly realise what they've got into. [That there's actually hard work involved. (Interjection.)] The first time they have to carry the pump or something and they realise this isn't what they wanted. (Rural volunteer, male)

They think that all we do is chase fires, drink a lot of beer and have a hell of a good time. It's all the down time in training and all that. Some of them just wouldn't suit, wouldn't come up to that criteria and it's as simple as that. (Urban volunteer, male)

Basically when you first join up you don't expect it to be as hard as it is. Basically you get chucked into it and it's a bit harder than what you first thought. That's why we have so many dropouts early. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ **Basic training and attending incidents**

Urban volunteers said the training courses required of new recruits are "intense" and seem to do a good job of teaching new fire fighters important skills.

They work you pretty hard, they give you a good workout. I thought it was really good actually. Before I went on the course I probably knew next to nothing about it. It was a good experience. (Urban volunteer, male)

Then you've got to do your BA (breathing apparatus) training before you're even supposed to ride in the trucks. [How long does that take?] That's another four days. And bearing in mind in the Phase I course they have one day virtually set aside for first aid and all that sort of thing. You get a certificate from St John's or one of those to say that you're a qualified first aid person. So it's three days fire fighting and one day of first aid. (Urban volunteer, male)

[After the new guys have had their training, do they seem like they've had the training they needed?] For us it was good. (Urban volunteer, male)

Urban volunteers said each brigade has different guidelines about when to allow new recruits to go to an incident. Although new recruits are not allowed to get involved in an incident until they have completed introductory training courses, some volunteers said they think it is important to allow new recruits to go to incidents to observe. They said this helps keep new volunteers enthusiastic and gives them an opportunity to see what they have volunteered for first hand.

A lot of brigades differ. Down...here I don't think that you can go to the fires until you've done so many hours in a smoke chamber, done your basic and things like that whereas some of our brigades, the little ones believe that sometimes you get your most experience by getting on the truck and tagging along with someone else and helping out at calls. [You don't put them in the fires, you just give them those little chores. (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteer, male)

They've joined to go to the fires and if they can see the truck rolling out the door every time and they don't get a ride on it, they lose interest. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **The brigade vote**

After about three months, which include their introductory training courses, most brigades vote on the membership of new recruits. Volunteers said it is rare to vote someone out who has made it to this point, but they believe it is an important component of the recruitment process. As brigade members, they have an opportunity to raise any concerns they might have about a new team member, and for new recruits it can be a "vote of confidence." Volunteers said they maintain an element of selectivity in the recruitment process because it is an important way of maintaining the standards and public image of the brigade.

When it comes down to that and you're looking at someone, you're going to vote them into the brigade, you've got to look at them and say "am I going to put my life in his hands". Sometimes you'll have trouble making that decision. Other times you'll say you'll give him 12 months and he might be all right. Give him five years and he might be all right. All the time that I've been in the brigade I've never seen anyone after their three months not be made a member of the brigade. I've seen them be made a member and then after six months they've pulled out because they've found out themselves that they can't hack it or it's not for them or it's not what they thought it was or they get sick of running after the fire engine as it drives down the road. (Urban volunteer, male)

It's a good indication whether there's any dissatisfaction amongst the other members accepting that guy. You know when you look at the votes, if there's four or five say no, you've got to really look at that guy and think that he could be trouble, not fitting in with the other people. (Urban volunteer, male)

You have your three months and if they fall short of a criteria of not turning up to training regularly or things like that, then they'd probably be asked to wake up their ideas or hand their gear back. (Rural volunteer, male)

One ex-volunteer noted that the brigade vote can be intimidating, especially to new volunteers from small rural communities.

V. Rewards

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING									
<i>Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means that it is very important and 5 means it is not important at all, how important to you personally are the following factors in being a volunteer fire fighter? Remember you can use any number between 1 and 5.</i>									
	1 Very important %	2 %	1 + 2 Total Important %	3 Neutral %	4 %	5 %	4 + 5 Total Not Important %	Unsure %	
Helping people and the local community	80	18	98	1	-	1	2	-	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	74	21	95	5	-	-	-	-	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
The camaraderie and team spirit of being part of a volunteer brigade	71	25	96	3	-	1	1	-	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	49	35	84	13	3	-	3	-	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
A personal sense of achievement	59	32	91	7	1	1	2	-	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	43	36	79	14	7	-	7	-	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
The training and on-going learning opportunities	53	32	85	12	2	1	3	-	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	43	30	73	20	5	2	7	-	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
The development of life-skills	46	35	81	16	2	1	3	-	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	32	33	65	22	8	5	13	-	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
The excitement and adrenaline rush of taking part in fighting a fire or attending an incident	24	22	46	32	11	11	22	-	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	17	23	40	31	15	12	27	2	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
The social life, bar and canteen	20	27	47	31	11	10	21	1	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	10	16	26	27	23	21	44	3	Rural Volunteers (n=150)

5.1 Rewards and positive aspects of being a volunteer fire fighter

Overall, nearly every volunteer interviewed said they enjoy being a volunteer fire fighter. But, they said being a volunteer fire fighter has not necessarily been what they expected when they joined. They said they receive a host of unexpected rewards and challenges being fire fighters.

The focus groups showed that volunteer fire fighters value the sense of achievement, the camaraderie, the excitement, the opportunity to help the community, the life skills, and the social aspects of being a fire fighter. The survey confirmed these findings and revealed that helping people and community is the

most important aspect of being a fire fighter according to volunteers. The importance of helping people and the local community was much more pronounced in the survey than the focus groups.

■ *Giving to the community*

Nearly every volunteer interviewed, 97% of all volunteers, said helping people and the local community is an important factor of being a volunteer fire fighter. Volunteers said “helping others” and “doing something worthwhile” for their towns are rewarding facets of serving as fire fighters. Their experiences make them “feel a part of the community” they live in.

Probably the community – I'm not sure if community support is the word but community involvement. [Service] Yes service would be a better word or support. [They're your ... payback. (Interjection.)] No not necessarily payback. [Doing your bit?] Yes doing your bit for the community and in some cases more. (Rural volunteer, male)

Many volunteers said they feel the need “to give back,” while others said they have an obligation to protect property in their towns because there is no one else to do it.

People like giving something back. We've all had a lot out of it so it's our chance to give something back, our expertise. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ *Being part of a team*

Nearly as important as helping people and the community, volunteer fire fighters said, is the importance of the camaraderie they experience within their own brigades and rural forces. This camaraderie was not necessarily a benefit many volunteers expected when they joined. Camaraderie is especially valued by urban volunteers, 96% of whom said it is an important aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter to them personally. 84% of rural volunteers also said they value being part of a team. Volunteers said they appreciate the experience of “working as a unit” where everyone is “in it together.”

The camaraderie thing, too. Everyone is together. It's a bonding. You're a unit all working together. You'll find every time – I've been to a lot of different functions and I don't think I've ever been to a Fire Service one where it's ever ended up in a fight. Everybody's together. It never ever gets to that point. (Urban volunteer, male)

Belonging to something, you feel part of something bigger. [It's not just a little organisation sitting there by yourself. You're working with something like 7999 other ones. (Interjection.)] But even just working within your own brigade, feeling a part of that is quite cool. (Urban volunteer, female)

Volunteers said it is good to be a member of a group of well-trained individuals, who they each know they can trust to protect their own lives. And, they noted, the camaraderie extends beyond their individual brigades to a sense of belonging to a greater group of volunteer fire fighters nationwide, and even worldwide.

It is good to be working in an effective group of guys who all know what they're doing and get on and do the job properly. (Rural volunteer, male)

Working as a team. You have got an element of danger involved but you basically trust all your team members to pull you through it if they need to. (Rural volunteer, male)

It is good to be with those guys that you sometimes have to put your life in their hands. It's always in the back of your mind "do I really trust them?" and you just don't know whether you're going to have to call that bluff or whatever. You've got to know those people to make that call. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Achievement**

Volunteer fire fighters also said the sense of achievement they each feel when an incident is successfully resolved is an important aspect of being a fire fighter. Urban volunteers (91%) were more likely to say a personal sense of achievement is important to them than were rural volunteers (79%). Women (70%), 16-29 year olds (69%), Maori (65%), and volunteers from the Eastern (67%) and Southern (64%) fire district regions were most likely to say personal achievement is *very important* to them.

The volunteers said knowing they have "beaten" and "mastered" a fire leaves them each with "the personal reward of a job well done."

The sense of achievement almost goes with fighting the fire. If you're fighting a fire and you beat it, then you've achieved it. They go hand in hand, those two. (Rural volunteer, male)

It's self-rewarding. It's something you get personally out of it. A personal reward. It's satisfaction. [Knowing you're doing something for your community. (Interjection.)] It's just something, you've been there, done that and you go home and think "God I've done a great job there". You feel good in yourself. [Personal satisfaction of a job well done] (Urban volunteer, male)

I get a huge sense of achievement out of it. You can turn up to a fire and the whole hillside's ablaze and you look at it and think "oh my goodness". It feels so good, we have a chopper there, meet up with the other crew and it's out. You've beaten it, achieved it, mastered it. (Rural volunteer, male)

Volunteers' sense of achievement stretches beyond simply successful extinguishments. To these volunteers each success is proof that time, hard work, and training have paid off. As one volunteer noted, being able to put his skills to work in an unpredictable and dangerous situation makes him "realise something within myself."

Some people can sum it up in a matter of years, some people can sum it up in one moment. I had a job on and it just happened to be one particular call and everything went right and you could sum it up in that one moment, that everything I'd trained for right from the moment I joined right up to that point was all worth it. Nothing else, whether it was good or bad before then, that was a pinnacle good. I saved someone's life and that was great. Some people would say from the moment I've joined right through to this point everything about it's been great. That's the same for me as well. It's just different things at different times. (Urban volunteer, male)

It's all your training come together and three weeks later you can still talk about that same incident then. Although we had a debrief we can still talk about it three weeks later whether it's good or bad. We talk about how we've done it, what we've done, should we have done it different. (Urban volunteer, male)

Volunteers said the positive sense of achievement is enhanced when they can see the results of what they have done. This is particularly true when they have saved a life, but volunteers said protecting a hillside or saving a home is also rewarding.

The personal satisfaction. It just feels good to help someone out of a wrecked car, that sort of thing. You feel like you've done something worth doing. (Urban volunteer, male)

You can look at the hills and you can see the native bush coming out of the gullies and the gorse is going. That's a real good thing. We save the taxpayers heaps of money because we're all volunteers. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ **Training and on-going learning opportunities**

While not as important to all volunteers, 85% of urban volunteers and 73% of rural volunteers said the ongoing learning and training that is a part of being a fire fighter is important to them. 16 to 29 year olds (73%), women (68%), Maori (63%) and volunteers from the Southern fire region (62%) were most likely to say that ongoing learning and training is *very important* to them.

The continuing development of skills and training is one reason some individuals keep volunteering year after year.

[What keeps you there?] *Ongoing learning, training. (Urban volunteer, male)*

■ **Life skills**

The volunteers said one benefit of becoming fire fighters has been the life skills they have developed both through training and through the personal growth that being a member of a disciplined organisation has required of them. In addition to the emergency skills they acquire, some volunteers said they have developed self-confidence and mental acuity.

It gives you a lot of skills for life too I think in the sense of a lot of training that doesn't go on even within training but just life skills when you get with this group of people. Your years and years of knowledge and experiences and that, none of these people have problems telling you about it, saying "I've been there, done that, or try this, try that" and there's always different opinions all around. You've got lots of different opinions and different ways of doing things so when you go – it helps you grow up, especially when you're young. (Urban volunteer, male)

Overall, 81% of urban volunteers and 65% of rural volunteers said the development of life skills is an important aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter. The development of life skills is especially important to Maori volunteers, with 92% saying it is an important aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter to them personally.

■ **Excitement, adrenaline, the unknown**

Even those who have volunteered for decades as fire fighters agreed the excitement and adrenaline rushes, that may have led them to join in the first place, are still a positive aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter. The importance of the “excitement and adrenaline rush of taking part in fighting a fire or attending an incident” was much more pronounced in the focus groups than in the survey results. 46% of urban volunteers and 40% of rural volunteers said this is an important aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter. Still, it is worth noting that only 23% of the volunteers interviewed said this aspect of fire fighting is *not* important to them personally. Sixteen to 29 year olds (64%) and Maori (59%) volunteers were much more likely to say excitement is an important aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter.

The adrenaline rush is quite high. You could buzz right from the moment your pager goes off or when you get the phone call right until a couple of hours after you get home, even longer. (Rural volunteer, male)

[What about adrenaline?] *That's there. You hear the siren go. I actually reckon getting there's half the fun. Actually getting to the fire. (Rural volunteer, female)*

My father had been in it for a few years before me. I'd always wanted to be a fireman. Just the adrenaline rush when the alarm goes, going out and doing a community thing. Your adrenaline is up and you know your heart's beating. (Rural volunteer, male)

There would be a sense of excitement too, I suppose, in the fact that you can beat nature and try and suppress the fire as quick as possible with minimum damage. (Rural volunteer, male)

The adrenaline rush they describe comes in part from the unpredictable nature of each incident. They said they get a “buzz out of” not knowing what they will face or how they will solve it.

It's very unpredictable as to what's going to happen when you get to the fire. Sometimes you'll sit on the side of the road with nothing to do. Other times you'll be very heavily involved and arrive home totally exhausted. (Rural volunteer, male)

I think it's the excitement and the adrenaline rush. You hear the siren, you get a definite adrenaline rush because you're anticipating something that could be a major catastrophe to a cat up a tree and you don't know what's in between so you've got to be on your toes already to respond to any of those things. I think that's a definite side of it but there's more to it than just that. (Urban volunteer, male)

I just like being involved in helping people when they need it. There's always something new, never the same thing twice. Every call is different. [Doesn't get boring?] No. (Urban volunteer, male)

The volunteers who participated in this research agreed that being a fire fighter is a welcome change from many of their own paid jobs and offers experiences that most individuals do not ever know.

There's very little in the world nowadays that you can get into that just has that – it's not so much repetition, you just don't go to meetings or you just don't do the same thing all the time so it's – [Spontaneous?] Yes. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ Social

While they are not at the top of the list, the social aspects of being a fire fighter are valuable to many of the volunteers. Only 41% of all volunteers said “the social life, bar and canteen” is an important aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter to them personally. The social aspects of volunteering were least important to rural fire fighters (44% not important), who do not have their own canteens or bars, and to women (39% not important). The social side of volunteering was important to urban volunteers from brigades located within NZFS designated urban fire districts (50% important).

The focus groups showed that those individuals who most value the social aspects of volunteering believe it is an important means of developing ties to their communities. Only one or two individuals said the brigade canteen was an important aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter.

There's also a social commitment, too, belonging to the group. It's like belonging to a service club in some ways. Socially it's very good. You meet a lot of people. (Rural volunteer, male)

Yes definitely a social thing, especially if you're moving into a small town it's a great way of getting to know people. (Urban volunteer, female)

[Anything else that motivates you to be a volunteer?] *The uniform. The booze.* [The socialising] *Subsidised alcohol. It's cheaper than the bars.* (Urban volunteer, male)

Volunteers said participation in competitions is an important part of brigade life. Competitions are seen as a good way to build team spirit, improve skills, and network with other volunteer fire fighters. For some brigades, the social events that involve family members are an additional benefit of volunteering. These family oriented social events, volunteers explained, are also important for minimising the strain the volunteer fire fighter's schedule can put on family life (see below). Many volunteers noted that they enjoy the competitions sponsored by the UFBA.

It also creates quite a good family atmosphere too. You belong to a good unit. It's not just the male or the female that's involved with it. The whole family are part of it. We bring the whole family together in that sort of situation. It is family involvement. [Fathers took you along as youngsters] *I think it helps as far as the youngster getting interest in it.* [When you talk about family involvement do you mean when you have social things the whole families are involved?] *Yes.* (Rural volunteer, male)

VI. Challenges

CHALLENGES IN BEING A VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTER

How difficult are the following aspects of being a volunteer fire fighter for you personally? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means it is very difficult and 5 means it is not difficult at all.

	1 Very difficult	2	1 + 2 Total Difficult	3 Neutral	4	5 Not Difficult At All	4 + 5 Total Not Difficult At All	Unsure	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Balancing fire fighting responsibilities with work responsibilities	15	21	36	25	16	23	39	-	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	15	21	36	27	17	20	37	-	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
Balancing fire fighting responsibilities with family responsibilities	10	22	32	32	17	19	36	-	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	10	15	25	24	20	30	50	1	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
Being taken for granted by the community	8	16	24	24	19	32	51	1	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	8	21	29	21	15	30	45	5	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
Attending motor vehicle accidents	6	14	20	20	23	34	57	3	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	11	9	20	16	18	24	42	22	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
Dealing with difficult emotional situations	5	14	19	32	22	25	47	2	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	7	11	18	27	21	26	47	8	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
Being overburdened with work by the New Zealand Fire Service	9	13	22	25	23	34	57	3	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	5	5	10	17	25	40	65	8	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
Undertaking non-emergency tasks such as traffic control & roof fixing	5	10	15	23	20	40	60	2	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	2	6	8	16	19	40	59	17	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
Being wet, cold, dirty & tired	4	7	11	24	22	42	64	1	Urban Volunteers (n=350)
	4	11	15	19	27	38	65	1	Rural Volunteers (n=150)

6.1 Challenges to being a volunteer fire fighter

Volunteer fire fighters face many challenges, all of which contribute to retention issues. The most obvious challenges are the inherently difficult physical attributes of the job. The volunteers interviewed acknowledged it is difficult after a full day's work at a paid job to go out on calls that leave them wet, cold, and tired. The challenges most often described by volunteers tended to stem from evolving lifestyle and work pattern trends. Most of the volunteers interviewed hold full time jobs in addition to their responsibilities to the Fire Service, and the conditions they face after a full day of work can be challenging.

The lack of sleep combined with being wet, cold, tired and dirty, covered in mud but you still have to make all the gear up, you've still got a couple of hours' work ahead of you even if the fire's out. (Rural Volunteer, male)

Still, 64% of volunteer fire fighters said "being, wet, cold, dirty and tired" is not a difficult aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter. Rather, the greatest threat to the retention of volunteer fire fighters is the changing nature of people's lifestyles and work. Individuals face more demands on their time at home and on the job. This is particularly problematic because volunteers also believe the NZFS is unnecessarily demanding more of their time.

■ **A changing work environment and today's busy life-styles**

Time constraints and changing work patterns and lifestyles are among the greatest deterrents to today's volunteer fire fighters. Volunteers said they are working longer hours and weekends and that more and more of their employment opportunities are outside of the community in which they live.

Shift work is a big thing nowadays. The plants just go 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Never had that 10-15 years ago. (Urban volunteer, male)

I think nowadays there's becoming more and more work commitments. That's killing a lot of it. People are working seven days a week now, weekends and so forth, there's very little free time and if they use their free time going to a fire all night and they're forced to go to work the next morning and trying to cope with working without having had any sleep. (Rural volunteer, male)

It goes down to again what you can and what you're willing to put into it. What thing that governs you is you may work out of town and still live in the fire district. That happens a lot nowadays. [Our town] can be considered a transient area where we have quite a lot of huge industry but a lot of people choose to live in [smaller neighboring towns] or vice versa where they're living in [one town] but commute somewhere else. That happens a lot, so our day mannings can be quite light and night mannings aren't so bad. That has a lot of effect. (Urban volunteer, male)

Fire fighters' freedom and flexibility to be on call as a volunteer 24 hours a day is made more difficult because many families now require both parents to work and their time at home seems to be busier than ever.

A lot of wives are working and the guys look after the kids. [They rely on their husbands to be home at night to look after the kids if they're on the night job. If he's going to take off to fires he just can't go. (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteer, male)

As pressures at home and work build, volunteers said something “has to give,” and often that is volunteering with the fire service. Indeed, 34.6% of all volunteers said they believe “work responsibilities and commitments” is the main reason people stop volunteering with the fire service (see more below)

[Other reasons that people leave] *I think they thought they had freer time but with this extra coming they haven't got the freer time. [I think people haven't got as much time as they used to have. (Interjection.)]* (Urban volunteer, male)

People's lifestyles over the years have changed. We're getting more busier at work, our social life is more busy, our home life is more busy. Unfortunately something has to give and a lot of people will not give up their home life or their social life and they'll start pulling out of other commitments like the fire service. (Urban volunteer, male)

This was also true for some of the ex-volunteers interviewed.

There needs to be flexibility in volunteer brigades, the Chiefs and Officers need to understand the pressures on the volunteers, its always the fire brigade comes first, for some volunteers the fire brigade has become their life. (Ex- volunteer, male)

You have to be committed 365 days a year, there is a cost to your family, your employer and your life. (Ex-volunteer, male)

I left as I made a change in direction and decided to focus more on my family. (Ex-volunteer, male)

■ Time pressures strike most experienced volunteers the hardest

TIME SPENT AS A VOLUNTEER	
<i>Thinking about the total amount of time you spend on your responsibilities as a volunteer fire fighter, would you say you spend too much time, just the right amount of time, or not enough time?</i>	
	%
Too much time	18
Just the right amount	62
Not enough time	19
Unsure	1
Base: all respondents, n-500	

As the table shows 18% of volunteers said they are spending too much time on their responsibilities as volunteer fire fighters. Importantly, it is the most senior volunteers that are feeling the time pinch. While 30% of fire fighters, who have been volunteering for over 20 years, said they are spending too much time on their volunteer responsibilities, only 9% of fire fighters with five or less years experience feel this way. 39% of volunteer chiefs, 31% of deputy chiefs and third officers, and 25% of training officers and station officers said they are spending too much time on fire fighting responsibilities. There is also some difference between fire service region, as Auckland region (32%) and Western region (29%) volunteers said they are spending too much time on volunteer responsibilities.

Looking at what the chief does and the paperwork and what's expected of him as far as balance, money management, what he's got to get what he's given and what it's going to be used for. Probably looking at what the chief does now with the paperwork and what's expected of them as volunteers giving up their time is probably getting – [No-one would be a chief these days] No they probably wouldn't want to be a chief. On a Monday night he seems to spend most of his time stuck in the office doing paperwork. [He's got to write up everything about every call. (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Balancing volunteerism and work**

Volunteer fire fighters said balancing fire fighting responsibilities with work responsibilities is the most difficult aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter today. More than one-third of rural and urban volunteers (36%) said it is difficult for them to maintain this balance. Volunteer Chiefs (42%) and station officers and training officers (41%) were the most likely to say that they find balancing work and volunteering to be difficult. Women (48% not difficult) and volunteers from the Eastern fire region (54%) were the most likely to say it is not difficult for them to balance work and fire fighting responsibilities.

Even without the new challenges facing workers who volunteer for the fire service, there are inherent conflicts between being employed full-time and also serving as a volunteer on call 24 hours a day. Sometimes, volunteers said, they simply cannot respond to a fire call because their jobs pay the bills, and it is "tough luck fire service."

Sometimes you can't get away from work. I suppose your job has to come first in that respect because the fire brigade aren't going to pay you a living. That's the way it is for some people. (Urban Volunteer, male)

How it can interfere with your work. [How do you deal with that?] You've just got to deal with it at the time depending on what the situation is. There have been times when I've known there's a bad fire on and I just can't go. (Rural Volunteer, male)

Full-time employed (36% difficult) and self-employed volunteers (39% difficult) find it equally difficult to balance volunteer responsibilities and fire fighting responsibilities. Employed volunteers said their role as fire fighters can make it difficult to find and keep employment.

Who wants to employ somebody who's going to be on call 24 hours a day, who gets a call at six o'clock in the morning and he's late for work by two hours? (Rural volunteer, female)

It's changed so much like when you get your government departments and there are rules that volunteers are allowed to go. These days bosses just say "no you're not going". They're paying us to do a job. (Rural volunteer, male)

Self-employed volunteers face their own challenges. While they have more flexibility in responding to an incident during work hours, they pointed out they still have to make the work up on their own time. And, sometimes it is just not possible to leave a work site.

Being self-employed doesn't make it much easier. It just means that you've got to take responsibility for it yourself. [You don't have to ask someone, that's the difference. (Interjection.)] (Rural volunteer, male)

The negative is that when I have to leave my farm, work stops. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ *The value of cultivating employers*

Employed volunteer fire fighters said the impact of work on their capabilities is greatly determined by the relative understanding of their employers. Volunteer chiefs said they are aware that the companies some of their volunteers work for are sacrificing their own resources, and they work to accommodate employers as much as possible.

I'm very lucky because my boss is very understanding and he lives in [in an area where] he's seen a lot of the work that we've done. So I'm quite lucky, he's quite sympathetic. (Rural volunteer, male)

[How are employers about letting you go?] Most employers are pretty flexible about it as long as it doesn't bite into too much of their year. Say we take a 12-month period and guys are away for 40 hours out of 12 months just as a figure, one employer might think he can put up with that and another employer will think there's no way he can go to calls any more, or he can only go to real urgent ones. He's not going to the chimney fires and the cats up trees and things. "If it's real urgent, ring us and you can go." It depends on the employers and I'd say most of them are pretty good. [You're always going to get the odd ones. (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteer, male)

Our biggest thing is to make sure that the guys in the bigger factories – we've got about four or five people work for one firm, that they get back to the job as quick as we can release them from the call. If we're just cleaning up, we send them back. [That's something you keep in mind] Oh yes you've got to all the time because you can't really abuse privileges that the firms are giving them... You've got to work on it all the time now. Firms can't afford to have people away too long. (Urban volunteer, male)

There is room for the NZFS to improve its relationship with volunteers' employers. Only 40% of urban volunteers believe the New Zealand Fire Service acknowledges the support volunteers receive from their employers. 42% of volunteer chiefs do not think the NZFS acknowledges the support employers give volunteers. 50% of volunteers from the Western fire region, 42% of urban volunteers from urban fire districts, and 41% of volunteers who have been volunteering more than 20 years also said they do not think the NZFS acknowledges the support employers give to volunteer fire fighters.

■ *Family strain*

30% of volunteers said balancing family responsibilities and firefighting responsibilities is difficult. Men were more likely to find this difficult than women (31% versus 25% difficult). Not surprisingly volunteers with children under 18 years of age living at home were most likely to find balancing family responsibilities difficult (36% difficult), and as noted above 48% of those volunteers who said they are spending too much time on fire fighting responsibilities said balancing these responsibilities with family is difficult.

Volunteers said being a fire fighter is also difficult for their families, particularly if they have young children at home, who they feel they are "letting down" by missing special occasions like birthday parties or holiday dinners.

You can get family pressure. You're constantly away or have three calls during the week and there's a working bee at the weekend or you're away for competitions or training for competitions. It's things you enjoy doing but you tend to do what the family's got planned. You're ready to go out for a three-course meal and you're just sitting down and tucking in and

the siren goes up. [They're not getting any enjoyment out of that. (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteer, male)

I've got to rush to the truck and spend the first five minutes sorting out the children, where they're going. (Rural volunteer, female)

Its hard on your family they take second place, I run out on the family possibly once every three or four weeks, its more noticeable in a small community, everyone has to go. (Ex-volunteer, male)

Volunteers said an understanding partner makes the strain easier. And, they agreed, that efforts to make their partners feel more involved with the brigade and to make them more aware of their responsibility to the community are beneficial. Volunteers said most partners understand, which makes the strain easier. Social activities can help to get families involved, but, as noted above, today's busy lifestyle can make this more difficult as well.

You definitely need an understanding partner, especially if you've got young children because it can interfere quite a lot with your free time. (Rural volunteer, male)

Really the occasion combines something ... the brigade and the family comes along to watch or a barbecue, a mid-year function for fire fighters and partners. It's becoming less and less. People are working weekends and things also. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ ***The importance of cultivating family***

Despite the importance of an understanding family to volunteers 28% do not agree that the NZFS acknowledges the support volunteer fire fighters receive from their families. Less than half (42%) of all volunteer fire fighters agree the NZFS acknowledges the support of volunteers' families. Importantly, 38% of volunteer chiefs do not feel family support is acknowledged. Nor do 47% of volunteers who believe the NZFS is on the "wrong track." This is especially pronounced among volunteers from the Western fire region (43%) who also do not agree that the NZFS acknowledges family support, 26% strongly disagree.

■ ***Low public awareness***

We did a leaflet drop, me and one of the guys last year looking for volunteers. One lady we happened to meet in the street and said what we were doing and she said, "Oh, isn't it paid staff?" The public don't have a - This lady basically told me "Good Luck". (Urban Volunteer, male)

While the volunteer fire fighters interviewed said they do not volunteer to gain public accolades, they also said it can be difficult to deal with a public that does not know they are volunteers. A quarter of all volunteers (25%) agreed "being taken for granted by the community" is a difficult aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter. Importantly, more than half of all volunteer chiefs (54%) said they find this lack of acknowledgement from the community to be difficult.

You've just said something there that's not right. 'Everybody knows there's a volunteer brigade in your community.' No that's wrong. If you canvassed all the people in [town] I can guarantee you now that 60% will say that they are paid firemen. (Urban volunteer, male)

On insurance premiums there's a fire levy and people think they pay our wages with that. That fire levy they think I get paid. [Some of that fire levy does come back through our national body. (Interjection.)] They thought it was wages in my pocket. [For the council and to our equipment. (Interjection.)] (Rural volunteer, female)

They think that you're there on the station 24 hours a day, seven days a week. (Urban volunteer, male)

[Do you think there should be more recognition from the community or the Fire Service?] They probably don't even know that we exist. They think we're the Fire Service which we're not. [Does it matter to you? Would you like to see more recognition?] Not recognition as such but probably knowing that they understand there is a difference. (Rural volunteer, male)

The volunteers said this problem is particularly troubling when the people they are assisting do not recognise that volunteers are giving up their own time and work to help them.

We have had situations and I guess some of the others have too – we've actually been to a fire where a guy's hayshed was on fire. We arrived at his place at probably half past one in the morning and we were there until probably half past four, five o'clock and he had to go and milk his cows. We all put his fire out, went home, had breakfast and went to work. (Rural volunteer, male)

I think the thing is that they don't realise how much time. You're taking time away from what you're doing and when you're putting someone's trees out in Methven because the wind was blowing in that direction and last year's hay was up there, and they're out ploughing the paddock while the rest of the firemen could have been home doing their own...I think there's got to be more promotion on volunteers, on what they give. (Rural volunteer, female)

Low public awareness is compounded by volunteer fire fighters' desire to maintain a positive and professional public image. Volunteers are keenly aware of the important public role they play in their communities.

There's that pressure from the community to perform so it's performance of doing the right job every time. You may not have done one job for over a year, you may not have done that particular type of call so when you do get it everyone's watching you and expecting you to do the job as well as a professional would do it. Professionalism is expected of you. (Urban volunteer, male)

The identification of an arsonist from among the ranks of volunteer fire fighters worries the individuals interviewed for this research. They do not want all volunteers to be stereotyped as arsonists because of one or two incidents.

The community or New Zealanders looking into the volunteer, there's this automatic "all they want to do is go and light fires and put them out" because there's an increasing emphasis going on...As soon as it starts happening there's the media that jumps on it. You can see it all over the papers and on TV. They say "what do you do?", "I'm a volunteer", "a bloody arsonist". It starts getting real negative publicity with it. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ *Tedious work*

Volunteers in this study agreed being a fire fighter can take up quite a bit of their personal time, and they said that even as their social lives and the demands of work are growing, so are the demands put on them as volunteers.

For rural volunteers the burden on their time varies most significantly by season and environmental conditions, but urban volunteers said the number of incidents they have in any given week differs greatly and often just seems “to go in waves.”

You have a run on them. You'll have a real quiet patch and all you do is just go to practice meetings and that's it. That's one night a week. (Urban volunteer, male)

During summer we're out a lot more than what we are during the winter. It also varies from year to year depending on how dry it is. We could go out two or three times a week just for burning off which probably lasts for six to seven weeks. Other than that it can slow right down and you might not have a call for a month or so. But we still have training twice a month. (Rural volunteer, male)

Training-wise it stays the same but we have a break over Christmas time but then of course it's dependent on fires. You could probably go to two fires over a whole season and it involves four hours or you could go to a dozen fires that involves hundreds of hours. (Rural volunteer, male)

In addition to the time spent at incidents, volunteers said there is always other work to be done. Several individuals said they did not expect the “tedious” work that would come with being a fire fighter.

[Before you join the main motivation is the truck, then afterwards you find out more about the other stuff] Yes and just the sheer time commitment that you didn't realise. (Urban volunteer, female)

Also brigades won't function without having to do things around the station so you'll spend weekend times down there as well doing non-emergency stuff. Trucks need checking. There's regular testing, regular checks have to go on all the time. Working bees. Again it's how much you're willing to put into it and I'll guarantee you'll get the same ones every time. It becomes part of your life and you just do it. (Urban volunteer, male)

When the excitement and adrenaline that brought many individuals to the fire service is replaced by uninteresting chores, people said they can start to lose interest in being a volunteer.

Boredom. Not enough fires or too many fires or it's not what they expected. Obviously for some people it's just physically beyond them, even mentally. There's a challenge in getting up in the morning, getting up in the middle of the night and try not to turn over and go back to sleep. It is a mental drain. (Rural volunteer, male)

Not enough fires. We've had guys who have joined and then there's only two or three fires in a season and they say “is that all there is” and they don't come back. (Rural volunteer, male)

I think people are there for the calls rather than all the other stuff. [What else is exciting? (Interjection.)] That's it. The calls are what you're doing it for. You enjoy doing it. There's the adrenaline and all of what we've written down there and it's becoming more of the other stuff. (Urban volunteer, male)

As noted later in this report, volunteers' displeasure with this type of work is increasing, as they feel the NZFS demands more and more of their time.

■ *Dealing with tragedy*

Volunteers agreed the incidents they work on are often emotionally difficult. 19% of volunteers said dealing with emotional situations is a difficult aspect of volunteering. The volunteers from smaller communities said the emotional strain can be particularly hard, as they often have to deal with incidents involving people they know.

Volunteers agreed when an incident does not go well, the time a volunteer spends second-guessing his or her decisions can be painful.

It makes you deal with stuff that you'd probably never have to deal with in ordinary life. (Urban volunteer, female)

[Are there other emotional downsides to being a volunteer?] It's not so much at the car, it's more later. You think "what have I done?". (Urban volunteer, male)

Some people find it's just a bit more than they can easily cope with. On a few occasions the situation has been genuinely frightening. Some people can cope with that better than others. (Rural volunteer, male)

But, the volunteers interviewed seemed to agree there are plenty of resources available for them to utilise if they are working through the effects of a difficult incident, and they appreciate the freedom the fire service gives them to do this in their own way.

It all depends how that's handled generally within the brigade. I think nowadays you're given a lot more opportunity to sort that out any way you want to. As soon as you're back at the station you get a chance to do it, just talk about it over a beer or anything you like. Every person around this table will handle it differently. No-one likes to be forced into doing it a different way than what they're used to... We just go down to the pub and have a beer and just talk about it, that's the done deal for him. Everybody's given an opportunity to sort it out one way or another. It never used to be like that. (Urban volunteer, male)

At one time you'd just come back, pack your gear up and go. Now there's quite a lot of emphasis being put on when you get back to make sure that all the workers are all – nobody's getting any feelings – you make sure of that. We had one where three or four of our young guys went home and they couldn't go to work the next day. They knew the guy and his wife and it was a new experience for us but now I'm always aware of it. If everybody sits around and talks, it's the best therapy of any. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ *Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVAs)*

Nearly 20% of all volunteers said attending MVAs is a difficult aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter. Several rural volunteers noted they would never volunteer with urban brigades because they would be required to attend MVAs.

[Other negatives] *Going to fatal car accidents. [People you know is a real downer. (Interjection.)] [Or young people or children. (Interjection.)]* (Urban volunteer, male)

If it's a messy one it's in your head, that can impact on your family too. Public holidays are very difficult with the MVAs." (Ex-volunteer, male)

[Is every incident different or do you find yourself mostly at house fires or car accidents?] *It's being shown right throughout the region that motor vehicle accidents are outweighing structure fires by about five to one. I can't ever see any way that they'll turn that trend around. It's going from minor motor vehicle accidents to major ones the same as you go from minor fires to major ones. It's a big increase. Every year you look at a brigade's AGM report and you'll just see those MVAs going up and up and up.* (Urban volunteer, male)

[Being a rural volunteer] appealed due to the fact that you don't have to go to every call all the time and plus I don't go to car crashes and all the gory stuff. I just go and do the fires. (Rural volunteers, male)

VII. Relationships Within the NZFS

7.1 General impression of the New Zealand Fire Service

Volunteer fire fighters said the New Zealand Fire Service provides a good service with the funds available to it. 90% of urban volunteers and 87% of rural volunteers agreed the NZFS deserves good marks for its services. The rural volunteers, who have little involvement with NZFS itself, were more likely to be uncertain of how to rate the organisation's performance.

NZFS PERFORMANCE RATING		
<i>Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement?</i>		
<i>The New Zealand Fire Service provides a good service with the funds available to it.</i>		
	Urban Volunteers (n=350)	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
	%	%
Strongly agree	44	47
Somewhat agree	46	40
TOTAL AGREE	90	87
Somewhat disagree	6	5
Strongly disagree	3	2
TOTAL DISAGREE	9	7
Unsure	1	6

Volunteers also said the fire service is heading in the right direction. 82% of urban volunteers and 60% of rural volunteers said the NZFS is heading in the right direction. Again, because rural volunteers have little direct contact with the New Zealand Fire Service they more likely to be uncertain of how to rate the organisation (24% unsure).

RIGHT TRACK / WRONG TRACK		
<i>Generally speaking are things in the New Zealand Fire Service heading in the right direction or are they off on the wrong track?</i>		
	Urban Volunteers (n=350)	Rural Volunteers (n=150)
	%	%
Right direction	82	60
Wrong track	10	16
Unsure	8	24

7.2 Urban volunteers and the NZFS

Despite their positive feelings about the fire service overall, volunteers have many concerns about the day-to-day workings and management of the NZFS. Urban volunteers said they feel their fire service responsibilities are increasing, they feel little connection to the NZFS itself, and Volunteer chiefs and other brigade leaders are especially concerned about increasing demands on their time.

■ Changing expectations, increased time burdens

URBAN VOLUNTEERS								
CHALLENGES IN BEING A VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTER								
<i>How difficult are the following aspects of being a volunteer fire fighter for you personally? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means it is very difficult and 5 means it is not difficult at all.</i>								
	1 Very Difficult	2	Total difficult	3	4	5 Not difficult at all	Total not difficult	Unsure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Being overburdened with work by the New Zealand Fire Service	9	13	22	25	23	28	51	2
Undertaking non-emergency tasks such as traffic control & roof fixing	5	10	15	23	20	40	60	2

Base: Urban Volunteers, n=350

Volunteers are under increased pressure at home, at work, and by the NZFS. This is a serious concern among urban volunteers, who resent some of the new requirements put on them. Nearly a quarter of all urban volunteers, 22%, said they find being overburdened with work by the NZFS to be difficult. And, some volunteers said requests for their services at “non-emergency” activities seem to be on the rise. 15% of urban volunteers said they find “non-emergency” activities to be a difficult aspect of being a volunteer fire fighter. These requests include things like “traffic duty” at incidents when paid fire fighters are available and being called to do tasks like “tying a tarpaulin” down on someone’s roof.

The non-emergency nature of their fire fighting responsibilities seems to be increasing, according to urban volunteers, who said more and more administrative and regulatory burdens are placed on them.

That is why I'm resigning. Not that I've got anything like the amount of work that these guys are doing. I've found that there's more time expected of you than I'm able to give. More time to do whatever, duties or whatever. (Urban volunteer, male)

I've always said to myself that the day it stops becoming fun is the day I think about leaving. (Urban volunteer, male)

Volunteers said the burden on their chiefs’ has increased, requiring chiefs to delegate more and more responsibilities to the rest of the brigade.

The chiefs’ workload from what I can see has increased over the last few years, too. (Urban volunteer, male)

[Addressing Chief in group] *What about your expectation that administrative duties are getting increasingly more? The Fire Service themselves are expecting you to – you've got to have financials, your budgets and everything done. There's so much more involved with being a chief nowadays.* (Urban volunteer, male)

There was a feeling amongst urban volunteers that overzealous health and safety requirements and a desire by the NZFS to take advantage of free labour are behind the increasing workload.

[How come? Why is it increasing?] *I think the Fire Service is loading more on to the volunteers to try and get them to do as much as they can for nothing now.* (Urban volunteer, male)

You take that coffee cup for instance. That coffee cup has got to be checked either once a day to make sure that handle's not going to fall off it or once a week to make sure it's not going to leak, or once a month or once every three months or once every six months or once every 12 months. Every time that that tea cup is checked and made sure that whatever it's designed to do it's going to do, it's got to be written down. [Is this new?] It's just getting more and more all the time. [It's a paper war. (Interjection.)] Surely you can look at that cup and say "it doesn't leak and the handle's not going to fall off it, why do I have to write it down so that someone else can read it". It doesn't leak and the handle's not going to fall off it. (Urban volunteer, male)

OSH has got everybody running scared. If something goes wrong on the job, they're the first ones to jump. Everything's got to be certified now, certified or written up in your book to say when it was last tested because if it doesn't perform the minute you want it someone's got to be accountable. [Are you getting more support to get those things done?] They send it out to me to make sure it's done and all I can do is push it out. [They're not giving you more support to get that work done] Not really. [They gave you a computer but it doesn't work. (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Inadequate support**

Urban volunteers said although the work expected from them seems to be increasing, they are not receiving adequate support from the NZFS to manage that work. Only 16% of urban volunteers said the NZFS is doing an excellent job of providing administrative support to volunteer fire brigades, and 18% of urban volunteers said the organisation is doing a poor job.

Urban Volunteers								
NZFS SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS								
On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means the New Zealand Fire Service is doing an excellent job and 5 means the New Zealand Fire Service is doing a poor job - how good a job do you think the NZFS is doing on the following?								
	1 Excellent job %	2 %	1 + 2 TOTAL GOOD JOB %	3 NEUTRAL %	4 %	5 Poor job %	4 + 5 TOTAL POOR JOB %	Unsure %
Providing administrative support to volunteer fire fighter brigades	16	37	53	25	13	5	18	4

Base: Urban Volunteers, n=350

Chiefs (28% poor job) and deputy chiefs and third officers (29% poor job) were most likely to say the NZFS does a poor job in providing administrative support to volunteer brigades. Volunteers from the Auckland (33% poor job) and Northland (28% poor job) fire regions also were more likely to give the NZFS poor ratings on this issue. Importantly, 42% of volunteers who said they spend “too much time” on their fire service responsibilities also said the NZFS does not give enough administrative support to volunteer brigades.

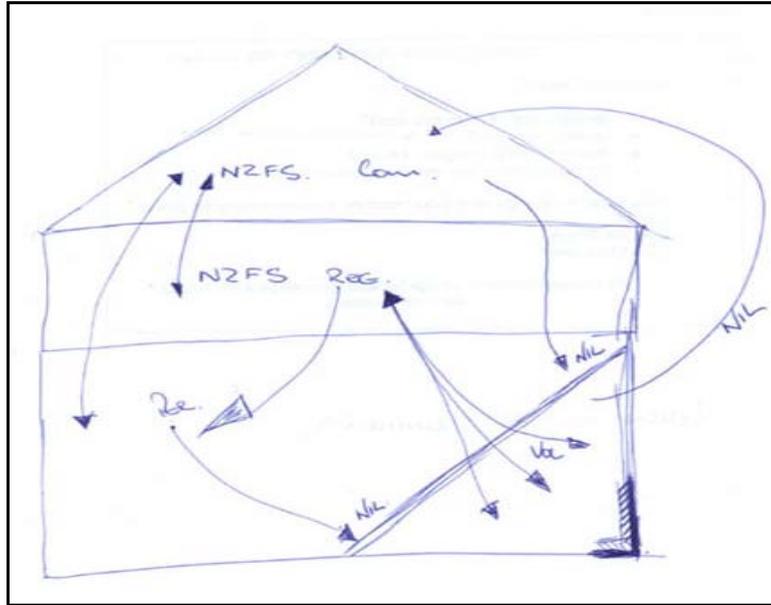
■ NZFS management seen as out of touch with volunteers

I feel that's where [urban volunteers are] placed, in the bottom corner taking up a limited amount of space and all the communication is through the region, which is probably right, but if we've got a problem we have no direct communication with the Fire Service Commission. The permanent and paid staffs seem to be because they're being paid to do what they do. We have very little – it's just the place that we are I suppose – very little to do with paid staff. That's where I see us. The only connections that we have are with region. (Urban volunteer, male)

[Do you feel like the Fire Service gives its volunteers the support that it should?] *No. There is a general lack of recognition in the public but especially by the Fire Service. They've been doing a lot more to recognise what we do. This is National Year of the Volunteer and they have been pretty damn quiet really, the Fire Service. I've heard a few small ads and they are giving us medals ... But as far as the public is concerned a lot of them still don't know that we exist. (Urban Volunteer, male)*

Urban volunteers said they feel little connection with the national leadership of the NZFS. When describing the NZFS organisation in focus groups, they used words like “bureaucrats” and “politics.” Their impression is of a top-heavy organisation that is out-of-touch with its volunteer brigades.

Urban volunteer's depiction of relationships within NZFS



This urban volunteer said volunteers have no interaction with the NZFS Commission and he believes volunteers are relegated to a tiny bottom corner in importance.

The Fire Service are right at the top. They think they're God. Got a bit of a halo here and then it's just progressed out from that. (Urban volunteer, male)

[Had much to do with the organisation?] *Not personally, no.* [Do you feel part of the organisation?] *No not personally.* (Urban volunteer, female)

There's a perception. The suits in Wellington wouldn't have a clue. (Urban volunteer, male)

Urban Volunteers								
STATEMENT TESTING								
OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF NZFS								
<i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree</i>								
	1 Strongly Agree	2	1+2 TOTAL AGREE	3 NEUTRAL	4	5 Strongly Disagree	4+5 TOTAL DISAGREE	Unsure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The New Zealand Fire Service has the appropriate amount of managers at the national level who have been volunteer fire fighters themselves	7	18	25	25	15	10	25	25
Volunteer fire fighters are respected by New Zealand Fire Service management	23	36	59	27	10	3	13	1
The direction of the New Zealand Fire Service is set by the government of the day	18	27	45	32	10	6	16	7

Base: Urban Volunteers, n=350

Both volunteer and paid fire fighters believe that fire fighters are under-represented at the national level of the NZFS. They agreed there seems to be few upper level managers with the personal experience or understanding of the needs and culture of fire fighters. Only one quarter of urban volunteers agreed that NZFS has the appropriate amount of managers at the national level who have been volunteer fire fighters themselves – only 7% strongly agreed. An equal number of urban volunteers, 25%, said they do not agree that there are an adequate number of managers at the national level of NZFS who have been volunteer fire fighters themselves. Volunteers from the Auckland (32% disagree) and Western (45% disagree) regions, station and training officers (41% disagree) and volunteers with more than 20 years of service (32% disagree) were most likely to say the NZFS does not have enough national-level managers who have been volunteer fire fighters themselves.

Several volunteer and paid fire fighters interviewed said they were hopeful that the addition of Executive Chief Michael Hall would bring improvements to the NZFS because of his personal experience as a fire fighter. They said they expect he will take a more hands-on role than other managers and will make an effort to get out in the field to meet and talk to other fire fighters.

This new man's supposed to have a hands-on thing, isn't it? The new Commissioner. That's what I understand. They reckon he was going to get out into the field and meet everybody. Whether that will come to life – (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Inconsistent leadership**

Another factor contributing to urban volunteers' detachment from NZFS is their impression that there is little consistency at the national managerial level of the NZFS. And, some volunteers emphasised that every change in management seems to mean more work for them.

It always keeps getting top heavy. They empty it out and now what are they doing? They're creating all these jobs and you only have to look at them coming on in the Gazette all the time, looking for more people. Those people get in an office, they do a job that they have applied for. When they've got all that running smoothly they've got to look for another job to justify their job. Shuffle some more paper around. We have a change in direction, a new man comes in there and obviously there'll be a call for five different changes and you might get two guys come in with completely different ideas and the third guy comes in and he's right back to the first guy's ideas and so everything shuffles back. It's just a big circle going around and around. At the end of the argument, I think they could drop off half the staff, give everybody less work and they wouldn't be creating all these jobs and make it easier on everybody. (Urban volunteer, male)

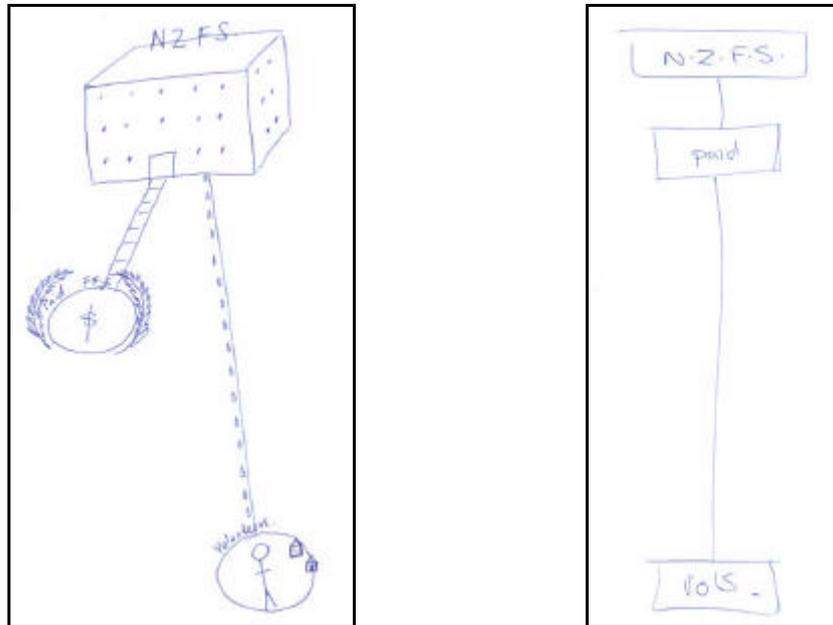
Nearly half, 45%, of all urban volunteers agreed that the direction of the NZFS is set by the government of the day. Only 16% of urban volunteers disagreed with this statement.

The urban volunteers interviewed were more positive about the support they receive from the regional level.

[How much support does the Fire Service give volunteers?] *The Fire Service up here is split into regions. We get excellent service from our...region and they are bloody good. You want it, you ask for it. If it's within the powers of the guys in the region they will do it. I think we get really good support from region. Anywhere higher than that, nothing. [What should you be getting?] If a problem has arisen and the only way is to take it to the UFBA and the UFBA take it to the Fire Service there is usually a battle. It is usually something major. The Fire Service*

are in a position of just saying no and that's it. No negotiations over it. That's where we stop. We have these channels. If I have a problem we go to our chief, the chief goes to region and the man at region is meant to go to the Fire Service but between the region and the Fire Service, that's where the problem is. (Urban volunteer, male)

Urban volunteers' depiction of relationships within NZFS



These urban volunteers said they are at the bottom of the NZFS hierarchy. They believe paid fire fighters are the NZFS' priority in communications and resources. Note the far right picture shows resources "dripping" down to volunteers in contrast with the paid fire fighters who are perceived to be both closer to NZFS and to have better two-way access and communication.

■ *Second cousins to paid staff*

Within the hierarchy of the NZFS, volunteers said they are seen as the "second cousins" of the paid fire fighters both in the recognition and in the support they receive from national management. When focus group participants were asked to draw the relationship between urban volunteers, rural volunteers, the NZFS organisation, and paid fire fighters, they inevitably depicted the volunteers at the bottom of the hierarchy.

As the above table shows, nearly 60% of urban volunteers agreed NZFS management respects volunteer fire fighters. But, only 23% of urban volunteers strongly agreed with this statement and 40% of urban volunteers either disagreed or had only a neutral opinion of this statement. Urban volunteers from the Northland (22% disagree), Arapawa (20% disagree) and Auckland (18% disagree) were most likely to say they do not think NZFS management respects volunteer fire fighters.

I feel like the volunteers are giving to the New Zealand Fire Service and the New Zealand Fire Service are too busy giving to the paid. (Urban volunteer, male)

A thank you now and again wouldn't go amiss. (Rural volunteer, male)

[Drawings] You've got old Mr Hall at the top and he's away from everybody else and then you've got the hot shots in town which is the hierarchy in town. They seem to be just a wee bit further removed from him. Then the paid fire fighters are a wee bit further removed from him and the volunteer fire fighters are far removed. That's the way it progresses down the line and these guys here don't want to get into bed with these guys and these guys here don't really want to get into bed with these guys. (Urban volunteer, male)

Mine was pretty much the same. I guess just emphasising the difference between the three ... There's a hell of a lot more of us down the bottom of the page than what there is up here. Yet we seem to get the least resources or money or anything. (Urban volunteer, female)

■ Too much politics

Volunteers said the politics of the NZFS often make the volunteer experience unpleasant. Many urban volunteers were clearly weary of the contractual disputes between the NZFS and permanent fire fighters. Although these disputes did not directly involve them, urban and rural volunteers said they are tired of being asked to choose sides and of the strain the problems have put on their relationship with paid fire fighters.

It's the in-fighting and politics on a huge scale. [Major. (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteer, female)

It's politics. That's what it is, it's nothing else. They say they haven't got any money but there's plenty of money in the kitty. (Urban volunteer, male)

Some of us just want to fight fires. We don't care about the politics of it all. (Urban volunteer, male)

What are they arguing about this time? I say that with honesty because this is what, 10 years or more, continuous bitching and bickering between the Fire Commission and the permanents. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ Battling for funding and equipment

Urban Volunteers								
NZFS SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS								
<i>On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means the New Zealand Fire Service is doing an excellent job and 5 means the New Zealand Fire Service is doing a poor job - how good a job do you think the NZFS is doing on the following?</i>								
	1 Excellent Job %	2 %	1 + 2 TOTAL POSITIVE %	3 NEUTRAL %	4 %	5 Poor Job %	4 + 5 TOTAL NEGATIVE %	Unsure %
Providing equipment to volunteer fire fighter brigades	17	30	47	28	18	6	24	1

Base: Urban Volunteers, n=350

Volunteers said organisational politics are particularly trying when they find themselves battling for equipment and funding. They do not believe this should be required of volunteers. Less than half of all urban volunteers said the NZFS does a good job of providing equipment to volunteer fire fighter brigades. Nearly one quarter, 24%, said the NZFS does a poor job. Urban volunteers' perceptions tend to vary greatly by fire region. Volunteers from the Northland (45% poor job), Auckland (36% poor job), Bay of Plenty/Waipara (30% poor job), Western (26% poor job), and Arapawa (26% poor job) regions were more likely to say NZFS does a poor job providing volunteer brigades with equipment. Volunteers from the Eastern (63% good job), Southern (68% good job) and the Transalpine (51% good job) regions were more likely to say the NZFS does a good job providing volunteer brigades with equipment.

Many volunteers said they believe the struggle for resources is caused by the combination of low public awareness and limited recognition from national leadership of the value of volunteer fire fighters. They believe the NZFS gives better resources to its permanent brigades, while volunteers are forced to wait for "hand-me-downs."

If [paid fire fighters] want it they're going to get it. If the volunteers want it we've got to wait for it. Anything the permanent guys want, they get. The volunteers want anything, we've got to wait for the handout. (Urban volunteers, male)

It all gets back to the mighty dollar. I know our region has got \$11.3 million to run it a year, \$8.2 or \$8.3 goes to the permanent staff. That doesn't leave a lot of money to pay for trucks and whatever they want, hoses and that sort of stuff so therefore their hands are tied and somebody who really has a problem or wants a whole lot of hoses or something like that instead of if you want 10 new hoses, you're lucky if you get three. Our core business is fire fighting and why have everybody running around in nice suits if you've got no hoses. That's always been my argument. I'd prefer everybody to walk around in a pair of old jeans. (Urban volunteer, male)

Out of the funding throughout New Zealand I believe the figures are something like 80% of the funding goes towards the paid fire fighters, 20% of funding towards volunteers. That's probably why we're not getting so much equipment because 80% of that funding is getting gobbled up. [By 20% of the workers. (Interjection.)] What percentage of callouts would they go to? [In the likes of the big cities their numbers would be hugely greater but that's not to say that they are actual incidents whereas every incident we go to is an incident. (Interjection.)] (Rural volunteer, male)¹

■ **Brigade Morale**

It is worth noting several urban volunteers interviewed were concerned with the politics within their own brigade. The volunteers agreed that problems often reflect the leadership styles of the chief and other officers. They emphasised the importance of a chief who has good people skills and not just fire fighting experience in maintaining morale.

¹ It is worth noting that several people interviewed used an 80% vs. 20% ratio to discuss everything from funding issues, to work load. This 80%:20% was used by both volunteers and paid staff to justify their particular argument.

It's not only the chiefs. [It goes right down through everybody, it's not just one person. (Interjection.)] No, it's the officers and the chiefs. It's not just the chiefs. They might get to that position because they've been in the brigade that long and they're good fire fighters and whatever and they get there but that doesn't mean they automatically have leadership skills or people management skills. (Urban volunteer, female)

[Ideal chief] Someone who can delegate stuff, delegation. That's our biggest problem, our chief cannot do that. (Urban volunteer, male)

It's appreciating the different skills that people bring to the brigade, appreciating the differences. (Urban volunteer, female)

While this is a concern for some volunteers, only a small 2.4% said they believe this is the main reason people stop volunteering with the fire service.

7.3 Urban volunteers and paid fire fighters

Urban volunteers and paid fire fighters have mixed impressions of each other. Contact between paid and volunteer fire fighters varies greatly in frequency and quality by geographic location. The relationship between urban volunteers and paid fire fighters is particularly delicate in large urban areas, where they have the most contact.

■ Contact

As would be expected, urban volunteers from composite brigades and brigades within NZFS designated urban fire districts have the most contact with paid fire fighters. 89% of urban volunteers from composite brigades said they come in contact with paid fire fighters at least once a week. 28% of urban volunteers from urban fire districts said they come in contact with paid fire fighters at least once a week and 37% said they come in contact with paid fire fighters at least once a month. Volunteers from the Auckland fire region have the most contact with paid fire fighters, with 64% reporting they come in contact with paid fire fighters at least once a week. Volunteers from the Transalpine region reported the least amount of contact with paid fire fighters, with 43% of Transalpine volunteers saying they only come in contact with paid fire fighters once or twice a year and 21% saying they never have contact with paid fire fighters.

CONTACT BETWEEN VOLUNTEER AND PAID FIRE FIGHTERS	
[Those who said that they come in to contact with paid fire fighters were asked:]	
<i>Thinking about the contact you have with paid fire fighters, where would you say you have the MOST contact with paid fire fighters?</i>	
	%
At incidents	33.6
At the fire station	28.1
At training courses	27.6
At social gatherings (e.g. bar, canteen)	7.2
Over the phone	0.9
With support officers	0.7
At meetings	0.4
Through administration/fire service business	0.4
At funerals	0.2
Through employment as a mechanic	0.2
Unsure	0.4
Multiple response	
Base: 91% of all respondents (urban and rural) who said that they come in to contact with paid fire fighters, (n=456)	

34% of volunteers said they most often come in contact with paid fire fighters at incidents. While nearly equal numbers of volunteers said they most often come in contact with paid fire fighters at the fire station (28.1%) or on training courses (27.6%).

■ *Impressions of each other*

For the most part, any negative impressions urban volunteers have of paid fire fighters seem to stem from their belief that paid fire fighters look down on volunteers and treat them with little respect. Urban volunteers said the paid fire fighters do not understand a volunteer's motivation for becoming a fire fighter.

The permanents are paid to get on a truck, do it and go home. We do it because we want to. They're not paid to get on with us, nor can you force someone to. If we go to a job if I work with you I may not necessarily like you, I may hate you but I'd still work with you because that's a professional thing you have to do. When you go home you just forget all about it. (Urban volunteer, male)

It angers volunteers when paid fire fighters do not treat them with respect because they believe volunteers are an integral part of the NZFS.

I can personally tell you from experience at the moment that having a husband who's a volunteer who is going through recruit training to become a paid member at the moment is getting absolutely bollocked by professional fire fighters and instructors because he's a volunteer. It's very difficult. He is being absolutely bollocked. He's being called stupid names. It's disgusting. At the end of the day his instructor who's teaching him has got the same amount of years experience as I have and he think he's absolutely God's gift and he's treating the volunteers on his course like absolute crap. I find that really offensive when you consider the amount of volunteers there are in New Zealand. (Urban volunteer, female)

I've got the permanents up here thinking they know more than us. The volunteers are down here thinking they do the same job but they don't get paid and the New Zealand Fire Service would fall apart if it wasn't for the volunteers. (Urban volunteers, female)

In interviews, paid fire fighters' impressions of volunteers varied dramatically. Permanent staff tended to be most disparaging toward the volunteers they believe are there only for the social aspects of volunteering and for the excitement of riding on a fire truck and responding to calls.

Like I said you get a group of people that tend to like being dressed up in uniform, racing off in fire engines with the sirens screaming and all that sort of stuff. It is a certain type of people. (Paid Fire Fighter, SFF)

There's a good social element attached to being a volunteer. They do have a good social network. In some ways they are like an extension of Boy Scouts and Boy's Brigade. For that I don't like that side of it. [Why?] I just think it's people who are essentially adults who haven't quite grown up out of it. Going back to it – people that are doing it for the good of the community – great. (Paid fire fighter, SO)

Other paid fire fighters had a more positive impression of volunteers, they said they believe volunteers work hard and are there because they want to help their communities and “just love the job.”

I think [volunteers] are troopers. They do what we do for nothing. [Are they doing what you do?] They're not doing exactly what we do but they are doing the basic - saving life and property. There's a lot of other stuff we do like compliance, building inspection work. (Paid Fire Fighter, FF)

“They are very keen to get on with it. Likeable people...the majority of them just want to get in and do the same job that the paid fire fighters are doing and be recognised exactly the same.” (Paid Fire Fighter, Chief)

■ **Lack of respect for volunteers' skills**

The urban volunteers find it particularly troubling when paid fire fighters do not respect their skills. They said paid fire fighters sometimes act superior towards them and underestimate their skill levels. It is worth noting that in focus groups many volunteers told stories of volunteers being mistreated at training sessions by paid fire fighters. 20% of volunteers surveyed said they agree that training instructors do not treat volunteers with respect.

We had a guy join the permanent staff from our brigade. When he went to training down in Wellington, the training people down there told him that as far as he was concerned, that the volunteers were boys trying to do a man's job, more of a menace than what we were good. That's how they were training them. He was lucky because he had been a volunteer but all those other people on that course all believed that. They get that thought in their mind that the volunteers are a bunch of guys who are a menace to them and they're better than us. (Urban volunteer, male)

Most of the paid fire fighters interviewed applauded volunteers' effort, but agreed they do not have a lot of confidence in the volunteers' skills. Mostly, they said, they question volunteers' skill levels because they don't believe much can be learned from only one night of training per week.

With permanent staff we tend to have a lot more confidence in their abilities so I don't have to worry quite so much. I know that if they do muck it up at least they've been trained. I don't have a problem with getting them to do jobs. With volunteers I have to be a bit more careful. ... [Their effort is high?] High effort. [But their abilities are not where they could be?] How much can you train a person one night a week and they can only make 1 or 2 training nights out of that. (Paid fire fighter, SO)

■ **Recognition of paid fire fighters' skills**

Both rural and urban volunteers said they appreciate that paid fire fighters may have specialised training and equipment that can be useful in certain incidents.

If there was a major incident they would come down and take over. [How do you feel then?] [If it's a major incident we need them. (Interjection.)] We've had one occasion where they came and sent a unit down but it wasn't required. I think we were quite happy about that. (Rural volunteer, male)

[What is your impression of paid fire fighters?] They've got their place like we can't go into high rise buildings and things like that and be called out every minute of the day we might as well say so they've got their place but they don't need to throw the dirt at us because we're all there to do the same job in a smaller place. (Urban volunteer, male)

Volunteers agreed paid fire fighters should be encouraged to take over situations that require special skills, but, they said, paid fire fighters must do so according to protocol and in a respectful manner.

If the chief wants to, he can hand the thing over to the guy who comes along who is a paid fellow if he feels there's a need to do that. It's not a problem. [Have you ever done that?] Yes. We had a chemical spill many years ago and they came out. I gave them control because they knew what they were doing and they had all the equipment...[But it should be that the chief has the ability to hand over, not that the paid person comes in and takes over] they don't do that. They come and see the person in charge first and say, "do you want some advice or can I give you a hand?" (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Small towns versus the big city**

The relationship between urban volunteers and paid fire fighters is clearly influenced by geographic location. Urban volunteers from smaller communities rarely interact with paid fire fighters as noted above. Urban volunteers from small towns tended to have fewer personal experiences involving paid fire fighters, but even these volunteers were well aware of anecdotes regarding paid/volunteer relationships in urban areas. Urban volunteers from larger/urban communities were much more likely to have had a negative interaction with paid fire fighters. Everyone interviewed in this research agreed the relationship between paid and volunteer fire fighters is most at odds in large urban areas.

[In other areas where they have more contact with paid fire fighters there's a lot of tension. Is that something that you have to deal with here?] No. We're not a threat to their way of living. (Urban volunteer, male)

[What do you think about paid fire fighters?] Very little time for them. There's a toleration level on both sides and it's just because we are regarded as a menace to the society or on the road when we're on there by the perms. We're lucky, we don't come up against it. All we ever get all around us is just other volunteers. We may every now and then get through to [an area

with paid fire fighters] or something like that but they realise there's more of us than them so there's more of a toleration level by them. But you get into some of the other regions, there's hatred and that's bloody unfair. They've got no right, just because it's their job they've got no right to think that because we're volunteers we're some sort of lower life form or something. We're not doing them out of a job. (Urban volunteer, male)

The paid fire fighters interviewed agreed their relationship with volunteer fire fighters is more strained in large urban areas. The interviews showed some paid staff members in city-based brigades do not think volunteer brigades in urban areas are necessary. They see these brigades as leftover from the days when there were fewer paid fire fighters and the now urban areas were less populated. These permanent staff members were particularly dubious of the necessity of volunteer brigades at composite stations in urban areas. Paid fire fighters said volunteers' presence at urban-based composite stations often is "just doubling up on services." Because they have the equipment and resources to operate without volunteers during the day, paid fire fighters said, volunteers at many urban-based composite brigades would not be missed if they were disbanded immediately. Several individuals suggested these volunteers would be more useful in under-serviced areas of their districts.

Within the urban environment I don't feel strongly yeah or nay as far as volunteers go. They are there. They do their thing. They don't annoy me but if they didn't appear next week I wouldn't miss them...[Why do they do it?] ... I don't know. I guess for the same reason people collect toy cars and models. (Paid Fire Fighter, SFF)

In some cases there shouldn't be volunteers at some places. Because all we're doing is really allowing the people to stay there to double up on the services that we supply...in a low call rate, low incident area, it's really just a hangover from the old day when they were all independent fire brigades that they've managed to stay there. (Paid Fire Fighter, Chief)

Not only did these interviews show that many permanent staff think volunteers in large urban areas are unnecessary, but they also have almost no understanding of what motivates a volunteer in an urban area to join the fire service. They said they think being a volunteer in an area with paid fire fighters would be "a thankless job." It is their impression that volunteer brigades in these areas do not respond to many calls, and that when they do respond to incidents it is often as "cleanup" for paid fire fighters. Given this impression, paid fire fighters said the only compelling reason to volunteer with the fire service in a large city or town would be to join a social club and to ride on the fire truck.

[It's an unfortunate fact that the types of people that – I won't say all of them - but a vast majority, or a fair majority of the people that you get applying to be volunteers in an urban area are – I won't say they are a sandwich short of a picnic – but I think you get my drift. I think I can back that up reasonably well with the fact that the last 11 people to be convicted of arson in this country have all been volunteer firefighters. (Paid Fire Fighter, SFF)

"We had [a volunteer crew], where their actual value was questionable because 1) they didn't want to be integrated with the paid crews. They were very rarely available. And, they couldn't maintain a good crew. They didn't have a good base. They really only some of them were quite oddball in that I think they just wanted a blue shirt and to roll around in a fire engine and didn't really want to do anything other than that. It was almost a club." (Paid Fire Fighter, Chief)

It is important to note that in at least one area, paid fire fighters said the nearby volunteer brigade should be disbanded because it is *too* busy. They said the nearby volunteer brigade receives as many call-outs as they do, and they do not believe volunteers can or should be asked to carry that burden. In these circumstances, some paid fire fighters thought the jurisdiction should be converted into a permanent paid brigade.

Notably, all of the paid staff interviewed said they hold volunteer fire fighters from rural areas and small towns, where no paid brigade exists, in the highest regard. They said urban volunteers in these areas do a tremendous job. Several permanent staff said they think volunteer brigades are also useful in “fringe” communities, areas on the border of small towns and the city.

I have no problems with volunteers. I tend to be more supportive of the volunteer cause in districts where there are no permanents...I don't approve of volunteers [in town where there are paid fire fighters] but out of town where there are no permanent staff volunteers are fantastic. In fact all the volunteers do a good job and they do it for nothing. (Paid fire fighter, SO)

■ **Description of conflict**

Urban volunteers described multiple incidents in which paid fire fighters and urban volunteer fire fighters have clashed. These include stories of composite stations with dividing lines down the middle, stories of paid fire fighters refusing to take orders from volunteer chiefs, and stories of training sessions led by resentful and insulting paid fire fighters. It is worth noting that many of the stories related in the focus groups were second-hand. Many volunteers have heard stories about clashes but have not experienced these clashes personally.

It's not like some stations – I don't know how true it is, they've actually got a station up north which is half permanent, half volunteer and they've got an actual line down the middle of the station. I have heard stories that they've actually had punch-ups over the line, over volunteers and permanents crossing these lines. (Urban volunteer, male)

Several of the paid fire fighters interviewed dismissed stories of conflicts between paid and volunteer fire fighters as rumor. Others said the relationship with volunteer fire fighters was more acrimonious several years ago because of the contractual disputes between the NZFS management and paid fire fighters. At that time, they said, there was “a lot of turf grabbing.” Both sides were protective of their equipment in composite brigades, hiding materials from each other, sabotaging equipment and putting “a block wall” down some engine rooms between the fire engines. On incidents, both paid and volunteer fire fighters would resist taking any orders from officers in the opposing brigade. Today, these interviews showed, this acrimony has largely subsided, but paid fire fighters said you can still notice resentment among some paid staff if you know what you are looking for – a comment under a colleague’s breath or jokes casually tossed around the fire station.

It's just comments and things you hear around the place. [Is there anything that can be done about that sort of feeling?] It comes back to the last thing – most of it seems to be directed at chiefs. There's not a lot of aggression between fireman to fireman. (Paid Fire Fighter, FF)

There used to be continued fighting between the volunteers and the paid people a few years ago. Turf grabbing...The volunteers would say that's our fire engine and you don't get on ours and we don't get on yours. They wouldn't train together. They wouldn't even let each other watch each other's TV set. There was a quite of lot of lack of acknowledgement of rank. (Paid Fire Fighter, Chief)

There were also instances of jurisdictional issues. These included occasions where paid fire fighters, going to support an incident in a volunteer district, would be subordinate to the volunteer Chief Fire Officer.

The paid staff are not necessarily there to take over, but may have some good ideas and experience on how the incident should be managed. There can be some tension when the paid officer questions the Chief's decisions. (Paid Fire Fighter, FF)

Both volunteer and paid fire fighters said they are hopeful that these conflicts will have no long-term impact on the relationship between paid and volunteer firefighters. Several paid fire fighters said the contractual disputes had nothing to do with volunteer fire fighters, and they believe volunteers fulfilled a promise to avoid taking sides in the dispute. Paid staff did say that they believe the NZFS tried to use volunteer fire fighters against them during negotiations, by suggesting paid staff could be replaced with volunteers. While this seems to have made permanent staff more resentful of national management, most of those interviewed said they do not hold this against volunteers.

When I was in [a different town] we had the same situation – a volunteer brigade was very close. But that was at a time when employers were trying to reduce numbers of paid firemen and change a lot of other things and the volunteers were seen as the ones who were going to come in to our areas and take our jobs and trucks. There was a lot of anti back in those days but I don't think that is the case now. It's not from myself personally. There probably is still a bit of that feeling around. [Do you think that is a valid feeling?] It's a valid feeling but I've worked in a job before where you've got volunteer people wanting to do the same job for nothing and you've got to make yourself sure that you are better at the job. Make yourself indispensable. Make sure that you are always doing more and achieving more and better at what you do. (Paid Fire Fighter, FF)

The volunteer and paid fire fighters interviewed stressed that paid fire fighters and volunteers do work well together at incidents. There was some indication that conflicts at incidents may more often be directed at the volunteer chief on hand.

You have got a number of different groups of firefighters – you actually see the different groups of firefighters standing in their little clusters - but in terms of if they had to go into a building together or whatever then that's fine – they are doing a job and they have to do it. If they are cutting someone out of a car or whatever, they get on with the job and do it. (Urban Volunteer, male)

■ ***The influence of individuals***

Urban volunteers said that not all of their relationships with paid fire fighters have been negative. Rather, it seems to depend upon the particular personalities involved. They are hopeful some issues will be resolved as the new contract with permanent staff takes hold, but several volunteers said they expect it will take time and the retirement of certain paid staff to really improve their relationship.

A few years ago we went to a thing out at [a permanent staff station] We turned up on a Friday night and went into the station and we were welcomed with open arms. We went in there on the Sunday night thinking it would be the same crew but it was a different crew and it was like "who the hell are you, get the hell out of here". (Urban volunteer, all male)

[Drawing] *I've done the complete opposite to everyone else. I've got the two firemen shaking hands in co-operation because my personal dealings with the permanents over the years, there's been nothing but professionalism between us. I have never known any animosity between the two of us. We're all working under the same flag, getting the job done. It doesn't matter if he paid \$35,000 a year and I don't, that doesn't worry me.* (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Improving the relationship through forced contact**

Many of the volunteers and paid fire fighters interviewed agreed that the best way to improve relationships between paid and volunteer fire fighters is to require them to get to know each other and develop a level of respect for each other. Those fire fighters interviewed suggested that requiring joint training sessions between volunteers and paid fire fighters would improve their relationship, lead to better interactions at incidents and ultimately raise the level of respect the two groups have for each other.

If I say to the paid fire fighters, it's no use grizzling about them if you don't think they're good enough. You train them up to the standard that you want them to be, and then if they do things wrong you can growl at them and get it right...so get together and train. And, that's exactly what they do now. And they respect each others ranks the way things work together. (Paid Fire Fighter, Chief)

[Do you think that would be helpful, if there was training together?] *Yes. It will come eventually... It is a little bit hard to relate to unless you know the person you can't relate to them.* (Urban volunteer, male)

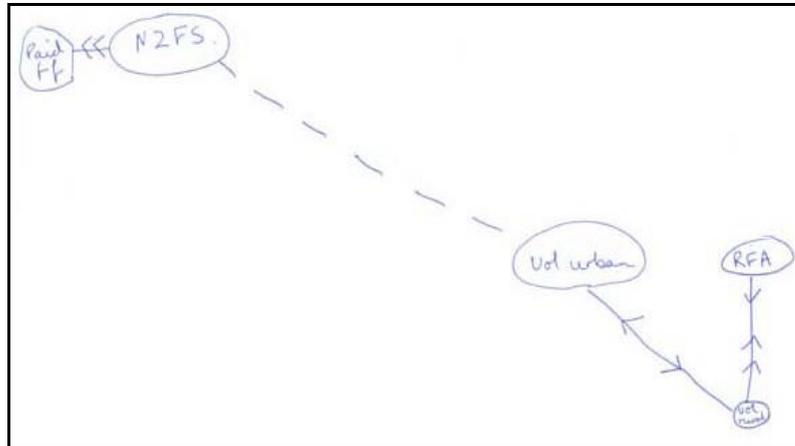
Those fire fighters in favor of this idea stressed that any joint training must be done on an even playing field and with respect expected from both sides.

If we don't treat them any different they won't feel any different. It ups their training standard because they've got a bit of competition they don't want to let their one side down. The volunteers want to be as good as the paid. And so the paid people don't want to embarrass themselves in front of the volunteers. So, they maintain high standards all the way around. Training is the key issue and getting over that key issue of feeling threatened by the volunteers is the other one. If they're doing their job properly, they shouldn't feel threatened. Therefore, they shouldn't take offense to anything that's asked of volunteers. (Paid Fire Fighter, Chief)

[Having more exercises together] *As long as it's done on a level playing ground, yes. I think we'd be prepared to play ball with them but as long as they didn't come the heavy hand – I think their attitude maybe needs to change a little bit towards volunteers instead of saying "I'm right up here, I'm the paid fire fighter, you're just a volunteer, you're down there", I think if they came along and played the game more evenly I think there's a lot we could all learn but I don't think that would ever happen. You'd have to change the attitude of guys who've been there – I think the average age in New Plymouth is 40 or 50 is the average age. That's getting up there and those guys have been there a long time. They won't change their attitude.* (Urban volunteer, male)

7.4 Rural volunteers and the NZFS

A Rural Volunteer's Depiction of Communication within the Fire Service



This rural volunteer, like others, believes rural volunteer fire fighters communicate with NRFA and urban volunteers but have see no communication between rural volunteers and the rest of the NZFS.

■ No connection to NZFS

Rural volunteers said they feel absolutely no connection to the NZFS except when they come across NZFS fire fighters on an incident. They too feel they are at the bottom of the hierarchy, coming after paid fire fighters and urban volunteers in attention from the NZFS Commission.

[Where do you feel in the hierarchy?] *Number three. As far as funding goes we're number three. But as far as what we get out of it we're probably ranked as high as anyone, what we put into it.* (Rural volunteer, male)

Rural volunteers were particularly concerned that funding and equipment isn't available at the levels it should be. They said management doesn't seem to understand that they are asking for new equipment because they need it, not for fun.

Because I think it could be a lot better. There could be a lot more equipment available for fire fighters generally. Safety equipment, more modern gear, better tanker. I suppose a bit more appreciation for the people that provide those things of what actually goes on most of the time. [What sort of appreciation?] Better equipment and that sort of thing and when we ask for something, it's not just because we want to spend their gear. It's that we need the gear or it would be nice to have better gear. [Do you feel that the equipment you use at the moment is not as up to standard as it could be?] I feel that it's generated by the community and it could be better. The fact that we're putting our time forward there should be a bit more support, perhaps politically, for what we're doing out there. (Rural volunteer, female)

The Fire Service volunteers get a budget to run their station and also they have a social budget. None of the rural volunteer groups have a social budget. That all comes out of your fundraising. You raise funds by whatever means possible. [It's just another thing that everyone's asked to give to. (Interjection.)] (Rural volunteer, male)

It's frustrating sometimes when things do go wrong, the water supply fails, that sort of thing. Up in front of the fire and you've run out of hose. It's cracked back down the line or sometimes the mains doesn't have enough water. That can be really frustrating. (Rural volunteer, male)

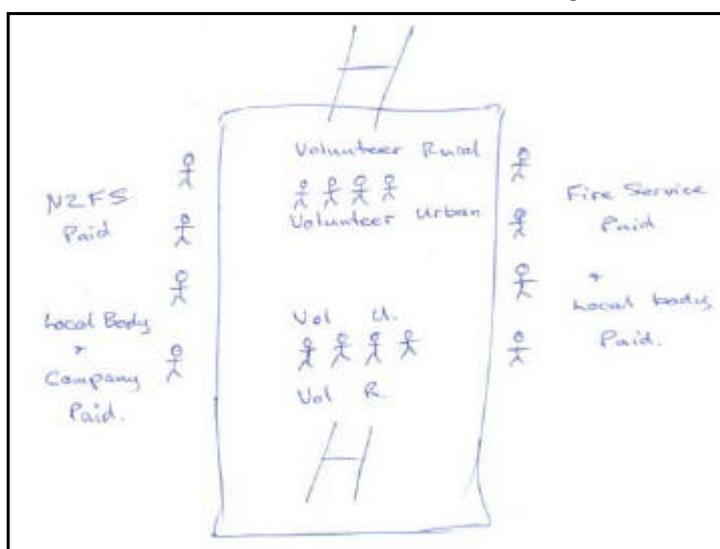
Rural volunteers would like to see the NZFS introduce some flexibility into the one-hour rule, the rule that requires urban fire fighters wait one hour before contacting a rural force. They said they are frustrated by procedures that prevent them from getting to a brush fire early enough to be effective.

One of the frustrations we didn't mention was not being called out to a fire until it was wildly out of control. (Rural volunteer, male)

[Do you feel you get support from the Fire Service?] I think we could probably get better. [What could be better?] Getting called out a lot earlier than we do. I don't know if it's the same all around but in [this] area the Fire Service have got the first hour and then after that they're legally obligated to call out the bush force but they've got to realise that it's going to probably take 20 to 40 minutes to get the bush force there. If they did that, if they know it's a good fire, instead of waiting around for the first hour get us out a lot earlier so we're there when that first hour is up. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ Rural and urban volunteers

A Rural Volunteer's Depiction of Communication with Other Fire Fighters



This volunteer, like others, said rural volunteers work well with urban volunteers. He said it often seems like the volunteers do all the work while the paid staff sit on the sidelines.

Both rural and urban volunteers said they respect each other's relative skill sets and feel they have a lot in common when they work on incidents together. Rural volunteers said while it sometimes seems like paid fire fighters treat each incident like it is just another job, urban volunteers, like rural volunteers, come to the scene to learn and get things done as quickly as possible.

We've had a very good relationship with the New Zealand Fire Service volunteers so I can speak very highly of them. I look at them as being our allies, not our enemies. [Are you talking about the urban volunteers, having a good relationship with them?] A very good relationship. I have had situations where I've been on courses where there's been some of the permanents there and they haven't got the same commitment. It's just another day for them whereas we're there to learn, we're there to do things and get on with it. That might not reflect the majority of them, it might be a minority group, I don't know, but because that's what I've seen on them, that's my judgment. (Rural volunteer, male)

Permanents will change shifts regardless of what's happening so you're up the hill pumping water through their pump and they'll pack up and go home whereas [the urban volunteer] brigade, they'll call us out while they're on the road if they see it's a big fire before they even get there. [The paid fire fighters?] No the volunteers. (Rural volunteer, male)

Working with the volunteer fire service, they want to get home and into bed as well because they've got jobs in the morning as well so we all go up the hill together and we all come back down together. Permanents have gone. [They just pack up and leave. (Interjection.)] (Rural volunteer, male)

Many of the rural volunteers interviewed said they would never volunteer to be urban volunteers because of the non-firefighting work involved.

They're trained for a different thing than us. (Urban volunteer, male)

It's a different breed of people. You've got to be a special person to go to car accidents and pull people out like the ambulance people and that sort of thing. While sometimes I've thought it would be nice to join them, at least I know every time I go to a fire nine times out of 10 it will be up a hill. Whereas the brigade get called out, they're usually sitting in the station waiting for the next ... [Waiting around time and the victims] Yes. Houses with people in them, that sort of thing. That doesn't interest me. False alarms, too. (Rural volunteer, male)

I personally wouldn't join an urban brigade because I don't like cutting people out of cars and they have to put up with that sort of thing. Stumbling through burning buildings with breathing apparatus and things on like that is not really what I like doing. (Rural volunteer, male)

Most of the urban volunteers interviewed said they have little interaction with rural volunteers.

The way the thing's set up, you don't actually work with (rural volunteers). They come in after the first hour. If we feel that they can handle it, we will walk away and leave it to them or they can ask us to stay. But that's after the first hour. Really we don't get to work with them a lot. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Rural volunteers and paid rural fire fighters**

Rural volunteers have a much more positive impression of paid rural fire fighters they have worked with over the years. They said they see paid rural fire fighters as being hard working and needing all the help they can get.

They were hard-working guys. They worked for DoC because they liked the bush... The paid rural get DoC's, the council's and so forth. We've had pretty good working relationships with them right through. They're only a small group now but they need all the help they can get sometimes. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ **Rural volunteers and paid NZFS fire fighters**

Like urban volunteers, rural volunteers said many paid fire fighters seem to have negative impressions of volunteers and their skills. They, too, do not believe paid fire fighters understand volunteers' motivations.

If they only opened their eyes up, they would see that the volunteers are absolutely dedicated to what they're doing. I think there's a bit of jealousy in some ways. (Rural volunteer, male)

[The paid] actually said that they would sit down the road and watch and see who they were and if they were volunteers then they would just turn around and go back to the station. (Rural volunteer, female)

Only through my experiences and it hasn't been since I've been a volunteer, it's just been with friends that were in the paid Fire Service and even what I've seen, there was a clear distinction between volunteers and paid. "You guys aren't as good as us and we know how to do the job better." That was the attitude. (Rural volunteer, female)

If there was somebody here doing your job but wasn't getting your paid for it and was doing exactly the same job, why are they going to pay you X dollars when somebody will do it for nothing? [That's how the paid people feel] Yes. Just a person sitting next to them and they're doing it for nothing. (Rural volunteer, female)

Despite a preponderance of negative anecdotes, several rural volunteers said they have seen some improvements recently in their relationships with permanent staff.

We're all professionals in our own right. It took us a long time to build up a good rapport with [the] paid guys. They wouldn't call us out to the fires basically until it was too late, way up the hill and they headed home to change shifts. (Rural volunteers, male)

I think it's possibly an acceptance of what we do. We're only there to put out bush fires. We're not there to take their jobs away from them. All we're interested in is going to put out the trees that are burning up on the hill which is a lot easier for us to do than them to do with the gear we've got and the gear they've got. I think the [paid] guys ...are starting to realise that now. It's just a case of getting out and educating a lot more. (Rural volunteer, male)

Some of this improvement seems to be a clarification of responsibilities and protocols.

The whole legal situation is quite different now, over the last couple of years. If we have an incident now, a bush fire, the person in charge when we get there is our own patrol. He's actually in charge over the paid fire fighters and tells them what they have to do. Of course they don't like that but they have to live with it because that's the way the rules are. (Rural volunteer, male)

7.5 Operational issues

While this research was not intended to identify operational problems experienced by volunteers, several emerged in the course of the research and are identified below.

■ *Call-centre*

Volunteers said the creation of a centralised calling centre outside of their region has caused jurisdictional problems and delayed response times.

[The call centre's in Wellington now. How does that work?] It doesn't. They've made a few errors. I think they've done it with the police as well, made a few errors. They just get confused because they don't know the areas and they get confused with roads and send people to the wrong places. (Urban volunteer, male)

Volunteers said the information they get from the call centre is often confusing and overly complicated. This is particularly true in small communities where street numbers and a family name are often all that is needed to locate an incident.

It's getting the information out of the customer to the communications centre and back to us in the correct communication and just the right amount of it. The amount of information that's coming out on the pagers is too much. They give you a cross reference and everything, the streets and you start reading through it in a hurry and you don't know where you're going. We want house fire or structure fire, 26 High Street, ____ We know where those street numbers start and finish. We don't need to cross reference all the sections either side of it, I don't feel we do. I just think that adds confusion. (Urban volunteer, male)

There's a lot of confusion with those cross references too. We've had instances where the cross references are ... one side of town and the address that we're going to is way over the other side. (Urban volunteer, male)

You could put the people's name on to the call. Nearly all of us in our area would just about know where everybody lives. If you've got six guys on the truck somebody would know that person. Instead of that they give you a rapid number which is overrun with grass, you're driving down the road trying to find it, it's dark or something and you flash past it. These rapid numbers, they might be good things but the old dairy numbers were twice as visible and you could always see them. If they gave us a name. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ *Jurisdictional issues*

Both rural and urban volunteers and paid fire fighters said there are sometimes jurisdictional problems at incidents. This seems to occur between all types of fire fighters (urban versus rural, paid versus volunteer, urban versus urban) and to have more to do with the personalities involved than the relative status of the brigade or rural force. Most of these differences seem to stem from the relationships of the various chiefs or senior officers at an incident.

What happens sometimes is actually out in ____ or ____, they're very protective of their patches and they don't like other people coming into their patch. [Is this urban volunteers?] Urban volunteers, yes... They tend to become protective of their patch but none of them feel like they want to threaten you. (Rural volunteer, male)

They don't say "we're paid, therefore we take charge". If they're called by our lot, they've still got to take the orders from the chief. [Is that good? Do you like that?] Definitely. That's how it should be. They're in our patch. They should be doing what we tell them and vice versa, if we're in their patch, we do what they tell us. (Urban volunteer, male)

I was at a fire...one time – I think you were out there too – one of the big wigs from [the city] came and tried to tell us what to do. We weren't first there. [Another] urban was first there but what he tried to tell me was to forget about the fire going around the outside of the paddock, put the stack of oats out. That was my last thing I had to worry about. Surely with a gale wind that was going to blow ashes further out, we had to contain the fire first before starting to put out what's in the middle of it. I thought if that's the Fire Service I don't want to know them but I do believe that the council working with the Fire Service has broken that barrier down and we seem to be working more as a team but there is the them and us. (Rural volunteer, male)

■ Public education

Volunteers' opinions of the NZFS emphasis on public education and safety were mixed. 75% of urban volunteers said they agree "fire prevention and education are key roles for volunteer fire fighters." But, the focus groups showed that there is some resistance to doing this work. Rural volunteers said they are not expected to do any work in this area.

Urban Volunteers								
STATEMENT TESTING								
OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF NZFS								
<i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree.</i>								
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	1 + 2 TOTAL AGREE %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	4 + 5 TOTAL DISAGREE %	Unsure %
Fire prevention & education are key roles for volunteer fire fighters	48	27	75	14	8	3	11	-

Base: Urban Volunteers, n=350

Some volunteers said they don't mind being asked to do work around public education and fire prevention.

*[Does it make a difference if you're being asked to do more in the education programmes?]
It's optional. Only those who want to do it do. Some of us enjoy doing it. (Urban volunteers, female)*

While volunteers said public education and prevention measures are necessary, some also said this activity is not why they joined the fire service. The emphasis on public education and prevention also contributes to volunteers' feeling that they are being asked to do more than they should be.

I feel cheated at times, not by the Fire Service but I think they're getting a lot of stuff free anyway and now they're wanting us to go and do a job for free. I'm not expecting money from it but they're starting to push it on a little bit. This is a goal of the Fire Service, to prevent fire, to prevent loss of life and injury but we're doing ourselves out of a job. What we're doing is a little contradictory to why we enjoy it. (Urban volunteer, male)

The young ones may see – we go back to the perception of what the Fire Service does. Jumping in a big red truck to go and put a fire out. It's not so much nowadays. They're wanting us to go now to more of the schools, going into the community and teaching, more education and therefore we're not getting the fires and therefore the interest is dying because the siren's not going. People are becoming more fire-wise, more smoke detectors going off, getting it before it happens. Therefore where they may have been getting 15 calls before, they may only be getting five. Interest dies down. You're still checking your coffee cup five times a week, you're still expected to do all the paperwork but what are you going to? Not a heck of a lot. (Urban volunteer, male)

While they agreed these measures are necessary, urban volunteers in the focus groups agreed NZFS cannot expect all volunteers to participate in public education and fire prevention measures. Some volunteers said these tasks would be better delegated to retired volunteer fire fighters and to those whose schedules are more flexible during the day.

There's probably a lot of people out there who are retired who would be only too willing to go and do that sort of thing through the schools instead of bagging on the guys that are – (Urban volunteer, male)

We're the same because we've got guys who work shiftwork so it's quite convenient for them. [Are volunteers quite happy to do some of that prevention stuff?] At the end if you went and talked to the retired people that are around, I'm sure that heaps of people would put their hands up to have a go at doing it. Ex-members probably more than anything else. Three or four have said to me about it. We've probably got six on shiftwork so these guys can do the thing without involving the people who work. That's probably where we get around our schools programme. (Urban volunteer, male)

It is a time thing and weekends, which is when you have got the spare time you know you have got sport and things like that. We have other commitments and we have a life to live. [So is that something that you don't think should be a part of you Volunteers?] To a limit it's okay. [I think that we could be encouraged to do it but not expected to do it. (Interjection)] (Urban volunteer, male)

Other volunteers said public education and prevention measures should be the responsibility of permanent fire fighters.

[Is the emphasis on prevention good or bad?] It probably is a good thing but I believe the permanents should be doing it. They're getting paid to do it. We don't. A few years ago pressure was put on us that we should be going around putting in smoke alarms and selling extinguishers and all that sort of thing. I didn't join the brigade to do that. I did it, I helped one of the guys out who wanted a hand, one guy was doing it a lot and wanted a hand so I helped him out. I thought about it after a while – if I wanted to knock on people's doors in the weekend I would have joined the Mormons, not the Fire Service. I didn't join up for that so I thought I'm not doing it any more. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ *Too much information*

Volunteers said they often feel that they are being inundated with information from the NZFS and the UFBA. They said much of this information is duplicative, and it is hard to determine on which materials they should focus. Several volunteers said they enjoy information about other brigades' activities and experiences, competition results, and new training information.

Nowadays from joining right through there seems to be more information out than ever. There's too much information coming through because you can't decide what's what. You'll have a Fire Service magazine that comes out, you'll have a regional magazine that serves your region, you have written stuff that comes out. (Urban volunteer, male)

I normally look at it, depending on your interest. [What are you interested in?] Someone may have a real hot fire appliance. I'm into the competitions so anything that comes out about competitions I'll read or some legislation with everyone arguing their bits and pieces so they target what you're into. (Urban volunteer, male)

[Are you getting all the information, as Volunteers that you want from the Fire Service?] You get a lot of information but not the right answers. There are certain things that you might want from your Brigade whether it is in your appliance or equipment and things drag on before you get them or they assess it before you need them. (Urban volunteer, male)

VIII. Training Issues

Urban Volunteers STATEMENT TESTING IMPRESSIONS OF TRAINING PROGRAMS								
<i>Now thinking about the Fire Service national training courses available to volunteer fire fighters, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree.</i>								
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	1+2 TOTAL AGREE %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	4+5 TOTAL DISAGREE %	Unsure %
The training courses provided are professional & of a high standard	52	36	88	8	2	1	3	1
The course material covers information & skills I need to be a volunteer fire fighter	48	34	82	12	3	1	4	2
I can attend all the national courses I feel I need to	31	21	52	23	14	9	23	2
I get enough financial support from the New Zealand Fire Service to attend national training courses	24	21	45	26	12	11	23	6
The training courses offered are not locally based and are difficult to get to	14	23	37	22	19	21	40	1
The content of the courses often overlaps with other courses offered	7	26	33	32	18	10	28	7
Training instructors do not treat volunteer fire fighters with respect	8	13	21	13	19	46	65	1

Base: Urban Volunteers, n=350

Overall, urban volunteers give NZFS training courses high marks. 88% of urban volunteers agreed that the “training courses provided are professional and of a high standard,” and 52% of urban volunteers strongly agreed with this statement. 82% of urban volunteers agreed “the course material covers information & skills I need to be a volunteer fire fighter.”

■ Difficulties keeping up with training

Despite high praise for the training courses, many urban volunteers said they have difficulty attending all the courses they would like to. Training courses beyond the introductory ones offered seem to “go in waves,” according to urban volunteers. They said there sometimes are long periods without any training courses offered, only to have numerous courses offered at one time. Urban volunteers said it is difficult to keep up with new information and training once one becomes a volunteer.

You'd get a big wop of training and then there'd be a big gap, and then you'd get another big wop. (Urban volunteer, male)

The training is just not there. You take some of the ones who've been there a while and you've still got to keep up with what's going on because there's not that retraining going on. The new ones go away and that's pretty intense and seems to take a lot of time. (Urban volunteer, male)

When they cancelled a training, the reason they cancelled it is because Joe Bloggs who is supposed to take it is not getting paid. There's too much training being cancelled because the Commission won't pay for it. (Urban volunteer, male)

Only half of the urban volunteers surveyed, 52%, agreed, "I can attend all the national courses I feel I need to." Nearly one-quarter of urban volunteers disagreed with this statement. Volunteers who have been with the fire service for 6-10 years (31% disagree) and 11-20 years (30% disagree) were most likely to say they cannot attend all the national courses they feel the need to. 34% of volunteers from Northland said they cannot attend all the training they want to, while volunteers from the Auckland region were most likely to say they can (61% agree).

Urban volunteers, who have worked with more than one brigade, said they have noticed that training is given more importance in some brigades than others.

I've noticed a big difference between the two brigades I've been in, in the way training is encouraged. It was quite a big thing in [my old town] and I haven't actually been on a single training course since I've been in [here]. It doesn't seem to get ... at all. [I haven't been on a training course in a year and a half at least. (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteer)

Because courses are held on weekends and at out-of-town locations, urban volunteers said it is often difficult to find the time or resources to get away. 37% of urban volunteers agreed the "training courses offered are not locally based and are difficult to get to." 42% of Maori volunteers and an equal percentage of Northland and Transalpine region volunteers (42% each) agreed that training courses can be difficult to attend because of travel times and distance.

Several volunteers said they think more training courses should be held on the brigade's training night and that the trainers should come to them whenever possible.

For the members it's there but people aren't taking it up because they haven't got the time. Four-day courses. Most guys can't afford the time. A lot of them are Saturday workers and they've had to cancel more courses than ever before now. The only way they're really going to get over it is to come to the brigades on training nights and do it. Let them do the traveling. They're paid. We're doing it all for nothing. They can come down and do it for us at nights on our training nights, make them do the traveling. (Urban volunteer, male)

One paid chief who has worked with volunteer and paid fire fighters agreed training courses can be too inconvenient for volunteers.

"Volunteers have to train on weekends. Specialised courses are at the training center, where they also have to travel. So you might get 20 people coming from 15 different locations to that course, some as far as maybe 50-60Ks away, and they're all traveling in there to meet one instructor. The method of doing that training is not economical. It requires volunteers who are volunteering their time to spend a lot of their time traveling. It would be preferable and I think beneficial in a lot of ways that an instructor worked out a rotation, and they went to brigades on their training night or did it on a Saturday, so when they revalidate their First Aid certificates for example, they all have one instructor and do the whole brigade together. They all get the same story at the same time and all the training is revalidated on the same basis if it needs to be... may have to travel for specialised training." (Paid Fire Fighter, Chief)

Urban volunteers also said it can be financially difficult to attend training courses. Many urban volunteers said the NZFS could do more to make it financially easier to attend training courses. Only 45% of urban volunteers said they agree, "I get enough financial support from the NZFS to attend national training courses." Volunteer chiefs (37% disagree) and deputy chiefs and third officers (38%) were most likely to say they do not get enough financial support from the NZFS to attend training sessions. Volunteers from the Northland (51%) and Eastern (38%) fire regions also were more likely to say they do not receive enough financial support for training.

■ **Repetitive materials**

Several urban volunteers said the inconvenience of attending training courses is particularly annoying because the course materials often seem to be the repeat of earlier courses. 33% of urban volunteers agreed, "the content of the courses often overlaps with other courses offered," while only 28% of urban volunteers disagreed with this statement.

The way they're doing their training has got to change. The old days of taking a basic course – I suppose not so much a basic course, it's a skilled course – a lot of those things can be done by video and a lecturer or something on a training night as opposed to running around for four Sundays or something in a row. You need the practical side of it, sure, but a lot of the courses you seem to go to are just a repeat of something else, they just call them something different. There's only one way to run out a hose, there's only one way to ship a standpipe, there's only one correct way to operate a pump. These things are all basic. Come to motor vehicle accidents, I suppose they're a little bit different but still when it comes down to it they're still all the same. It's just the degree of damage – (Urban volunteer, male)

As the days have gone past we've gone to a lot of courses but every one is the same. You get there and you've got one or two permanents up the front who don't want to be there because they've already done their shift for the week and they're maybe getting good overtime rates but really their attitude sucks. They may not like volunteers, there's a lot of things that come into it. They try training you like a permanent, they speak to you like a permanent and then you get the ones that are really great who make you want to go back again but again I haven't got the time to do it. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Paid staff as instructors**

As noted earlier, several of the focus group participants told stories of volunteers' mistreatment at the hands of paid training staff instructors. They also said the attitudes of the paid fire fighters giving the training courses must be positive to make the courses worthwhile.

I can personally tell you from experience at the moment that having a husband who's a volunteer who is going through recruit training to become a paid member at the moment is getting absolutely bollocked by professional fire fighters and instructors because he's a volunteer. It's very difficult. He is being absolutely bollocked. He's being called stupid names. It's disgusting. At the end of the day his instructor who's teaching him has got the same amount of years experience as I have and he think he's absolutely God's gift and he's treating the volunteers on his course like absolute crap. (Urban volunteer, female)

Snob. That's the first thing I thought about it. I noticed that when we went on the BA basic in... The only people in that paid place that would talk to you were the people of the same

colour. If you weren't the same colour they just looked at your yellow and said "carry on". They wouldn't say "how are you going?" This and that. (Urban volunteer, male)

21% of urban volunteers agreed with the statement, "Training instructors do not treat volunteer fire fighters with respect." 30% of volunteer chiefs, 30% of Auckland region volunteers, 28% of Northland region volunteers, 27% of Bay of Plenty/Waikato region volunteers, and 26% of Transalpine region volunteers also agreed with the statement.

■ **Rural volunteers and new training standards**

Rural volunteers said training requirements have changed with new NZQA standards. As individual rural forces, they said, their training requirements differ greatly and have not always been as structured as they think is necessary.

It's all different. Different courses. Ours is totally different from [neighboring city] to [neighboring city] from what I believe. Ours has probably got more formal structure to it now. Ours is based on a lot of experience over a lot of years and a lot of training notes have been written by the older members. It's been a good process and there's no physical test or anything. (Rural volunteer, male)

When I joined we had an eight-week block and that was separate to the fire fighters who were already in the course but now we don't really have any structured training programme as such which I'm pretty disappointed about. New recruits are just chucked in with the other guys. At the moment the older guys feel that they're having to do stuff over and over again. I think the new recruits feel a bit awkward as well so we've had a bit of a change in the top at the moment so hopefully there'll be changes. (Rural volunteer, male)

They do think the new NZQA standards will address some problems, but they have mixed feeling about the training the NZQA standards require them to meet.

I think with the unit standards programs that are coming out, that covers it. [What is that?] The NZQA so there's four unit standards that a fire fighter needs. It gives the guy some sort of direction and that helps. The major one was the personal safety and things like that and there's operating pumps and wet and dry fire fighting. Before that there was the 100 series and that had books on all the different tasks. (Rural volunteer, male)

Some rural volunteers said the size of the course book and the number of hours the new training requires can feel intimidating. While they have a year to complete the program, the time spent on new training must be done over weekends, in the evenings, and on sites away from home and work, making the process more difficult.

Once you get into it, it's not bad, quite fun. [Just the thought of it in a way] Yes. When you're just at the beginning of it and you look at it. You get a book about this big. [Like going back to school again] Yes exactly, that's the worst of it. (Rural volunteer, male)

[A year] seems a long time but it's not. It's not a long time considering that has got to be done in your evenings or a Saturday or Sunday. (Rural volunteer, male)

My husband is doing the training at the moment. He went first. He only has one day a week that he's actually at home so that eats into his time for himself. (Rural volunteer, female)

Some rural volunteers also complained that the new courses are repetitive of information they already know and do not accurately represent the tough physical nature of incidents.

I'm very pro-training but others of our members say they volunteer their time, they've fought fires for 20 years, they're born and bred here and it's "now they want us to go to training and we give enough time anyway" so for those guys training being compulsory, they've been fighting fires for 20 years but having to formalise their experience, they're bitching at that. It's a downside for them, it's a negative. They surrender their time and they've got all of that experience and they just don't want to do any training. (Rural volunteer, female)

You know if there's a strong northwester and it's as hot as hell, you know there's going to be a fire but what they're doing is putting it on a piece of paper and telling you why there's going to be a fire. What you do by the seat of the pants doesn't matter. It's all formalised on this piece of paper now. (Rural volunteer, male)

They also said the new training requirements may make it more difficult for rural volunteer forces to recruit new volunteers who will be put-off by the amount of training time required of them.

That could stop a lot of people volunteering too is the amount of training. I think it would stop them if they found out they were going to have to do all this training to be a volunteer. That would be a drawback for some people. You give your time to go and fight the fires and do all that and now you've got to double it. You're giving more. (Rural volunteer, female)

It's getting harder with the extra training and stuff, as in the New Zealand qualifications. [Harder to get people to stay?] It's just when they get in. [Hard for them when they first join up when they realise they've got to do all this training to become a volunteer?] Yes. [Are you doing training at the moment?] Yes. I've found it hard. (Rural volunteer, male)

Rural volunteers said training courses do not always give a good representation of how physically challenging incidents are.

The training side of it I've found surprisingly easy. It gets tough when you actually go out to a fire. It's all right doing it at training because you're going through flat ground, there's no bush or scrub but when you actually get involved in a fire it's totally different. [Working up the side of a steep hill in the middle of the night is difficult. (Interjection.)] (Rural volunteer, male)

I've dragged and been dragged up the hills many a time. You've got to help each other out. I've maintained for some time and it hasn't happened in anything in the NZQA is there's no physical fitness standard. Everything's on your own bat to keep yourself fit. Now I'm in an office all day. I did karate for a while but I've got to get myself fit before the fire season. If I'm not fit I'm letting someone else down. That's the same with everybody else. We have people who are very unfit and there should be a minimum standard. [How would you determine that?] That's the million dollar question. (Rural volunteer, male)

Despite their concerns about their new training requirements, rural volunteers did express some interest in receiving basic structural and MVA training. They said they are sometimes the first volunteers at an incident in rural areas, and they believe they could act to stabilise those situations until expert NZFS personnel arrive.

IX. Minority Groups

9.1 Women as volunteer fire fighters

STATEMENT TESTING								
OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF NZFS								
<i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree.</i>								
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	1+2 TOTAL AGREE %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	4+5 TOTAL DISAGREE %	Unsure %
There should be more female volunteer fire fighters	31	26	57	30	5	4	9	4

Base: all respondents, n=500

57% volunteers said they agree that ‘there should be more female volunteer fire fighters.’ 57% of Maori and current female volunteers strongly agreed with this statement. 56% of men agreed there should be more female volunteer fire fighters, 29% strongly agreed.

■ **Women may not know they are ‘allowed’ to volunteer**

Several of the female volunteers interviewed said they do not think most women know they can be volunteer fire fighters. These volunteers said they believe more women would volunteer if they knew they were allowed to become volunteer fire fighters.

[Do you think women know that they can be volunteers?] *Not enough. I think that it would be a really good thing for the brigade to actually focus a bit more on encouraging women to join. We need volunteers just in general in our brigade, we’re really really short, but overall nationally it would be really good to see them push for women. I don’t think they do know that it’s okay and that women can do it and it’s not really a big deal.* (Urban volunteer, female)

I think there’d be more women volunteering if they knew they were allowed to, if they knew that they could. You don’t even think about it. A fireman is a male-dominated world. If you went around a community and said that all the women could be volunteers if they wanted to – because we honestly didn’t even think. I read an article in the Fire Magazine about a unit in the North Island that was manned by women during the day and I thought “oh cool, I can do that when my younger one goes to school” but you don’t hear about it, it’s not promoted. If you went to a community and said that all the women could be volunteers if they wanted to, you might be surprised. (Rural volunteer, female)

Other male volunteers also said they would like to see more women as volunteers. One man, who said that his brigade had been losing volunteers to work during the day, said recruiting stay-at-home Moms had filled in the gaps.

■ *Evaluating women as volunteers*

Despite their openness to more female volunteer fire fighters, the volunteers interviewed agreed being a volunteer fire fighter can be difficult for women. Several male volunteers said the women they have worked with as fire fighters work hard and give it their all. They said they welcome women volunteers, as long as they can hold their own on an incident. As one man noted, "Not every woman wants to be a fire fighter and those that do usually turn out to be pretty bloody good."

[Do you have any women volunteers?] *We've got two. The two we've got seem to be quite keen to get in there and do it. They don't hold back.* (Rural volunteer, male)

I think they struggle, they have their good days and bad days like anyone, but when you go into it they've got to realise what's involved like anybody. We've had guys keel over way before the girls. (Rural volunteer, male)

[Would it make a difference for some of the guys if more women joined?] *You'll always get some people who think that women shouldn't be doing that. If they do the job just as well as anyone, then I don't have any problem with it.* (Rural volunteer, male)

Several volunteers said it is sometimes difficult to be a female fire fighter. Although it seems to vary greatly by brigade or rural force, volunteers said women do encounter discrimination, macho attitudes, and an "old boys' club" that can make it difficult for them to be effective.

I just find the old boys' club a bit much sometimes. [Not willing to accept change. (Interjection.)] And it is still run as a bit of a patriarchy. I've noticed it more at official functions when you've got the UFBA and all sorts of other people there... It's just the attitudes, the old boys' attitudes when all the old boys get out their medals. [Might change as more women come through] That's right, that's the sort of thing that makes me stay. (Urban volunteer, female)

We've had women come in and join but they've been treated badly. There's not a lot of young women without young children around. [Not treated very well] That's what I've heard. Just one or two ladies I've talked to have said they've gone along to help out and they're just ignored. (Rural volunteer, male)

We've just had a new (female) recruit. It was interesting because one of the other crew bosses doesn't think it's the place for women because of the strenuous work. I think women have got every right to be there. If they can't hold their own it's up to them to get down but they should be given every opportunity. (Rural volunteer, male)

While none of the male volunteers in the focus groups said that they do not think women should be fire fighters, there were signs that women are not on an equal playing field with all of their colleagues. Several men noted that women could serve as call center coordinators or in some other support role, while others suggested women have too many commitments to work, family and their husbands to be able to make the commitment required of a fire service volunteer.

[How do you feel about women as volunteers?] *They have a commitment, families, kids, married, other half are members in the brigade at the same time. [But you couldn't see it in your brigade] We had it. [Didn't work very well]* (Rural volunteer, male)

■ Experience improves with numbers

Several volunteers noted that being a female volunteer fire fighter seems to be easier when there are several other women in the brigade. Volunteers agreed women need to know they are welcome and that they do not have to be Superwoman to join.

Two other women members in the brigade have helped. [The more women in the brigade the better. (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteers, male)

I've tried to encourage other females to join because I'd really like to see that and I've just said anyone can do it. I've tried to get my sister to join. I think it's maybe because people think it's a really hard thing to do. You get out of it what you put into it. The training's here, you can do it, it's really cool, give it a go. (Urban volunteer, female)

■ Female volunteers' impressions of NZFS support

STATEMENT TESTING								
FEMALE FIRE FIGHTERS' EXPERIENCE								
[Female respondents were asked:]								
<i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree.</i>								
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	1 + 2 TOTAL AGREE %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	4 + 5 TOTAL DISAGREE %	Unsure %
The New Zealand Fire Service provides support to those who are female to become volunteer fire fighters	23	41	64	23	4	4	8	5
The New Zealand Fire Service is understanding of the needs of females in volunteer fire brigades	23	36	59	25	7	7	14	2

Base: female respondents; 9% of all respondents, n=44

The majority of female volunteers surveyed gave the NZFS good ratings for its support of female volunteers, with 64% of female volunteers saying the NZFS provides support to those who are female to become volunteer fire fighters. 14% of female volunteers said they disagree that the NZFS understands of the needs of females in volunteer brigades.

9.2 Maori as volunteer fire fighters

The Maori volunteer fire fighters interviewed were much more likely to say that giving back to their community was an important facet of being a volunteer. They said they believe they should act as role models in their communities, and they are proud of the community recognition they receive. Maori volunteer fire fighters also said the camaraderie they experience is extremely important to them, and several Maori volunteers suggested emphasising this team spirit could be a positive way to attract more Maori recruits to the volunteer fire service. They also were more likely than other volunteers to say that being a volunteer fire fighter has increased their confidence in their personal abilities and strengths.

I think the reason a high majority of young Maori people join gangs is for the camaraderie. Perhaps they could use that as an angle to attract the young ones to join the fire service because there is camaraderie there. I've seen him in the street and within five minutes we're talking about all sorts. It does go deeper than just going to a fire call. In the back of your mind most of the guys know the kids or the wives. The wives know the wives. Hopefully if a brigade is working good and there is teamwork there and there's encouragement there from the ones who've been in it longer, it filters down. (Urban volunteer, Maori)

STATEMENT TESTING								
MAORI FIRE FIGHTERS' EXPERIENCE								
[Maori respondents were asked:]								
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree.								
	1 Strongly agree	2	TOTAL AGREE 1+2	3	4	5 Strongly disagree	TOTAL DISAGREE 4+5	Unsure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The New Zealand Fire Service is understanding of the needs of Maori in volunteer fire brigades	24	27	51	29	7	2	9	11
The New Zealand Fire Service provides support to those who are Maori to become volunteer fire fighters	24	22	46	29	7	5	12	13

Base: Maori respondents; 9% of all respondents, n=45

Just over half of Maori volunteer fire fighters said the NZFS is understanding of the needs of Maori in volunteer fire brigades. Only 9% of Maori volunteers surveyed disagreed with this statement.

Maori volunteers did not say they have experienced a lot of discrimination in the fire service, although several Maori volunteers did describe individual incidents. They noted that when a unit is called to an incident they respond as a team of equals and they are all in it together regardless of race or gender.

Who cares whether you're Asian, Maori, Pakeha, Islander, male or female? You rely on the ability of that person that's backing you or you're backing him. When you're at the front of the hose, you're the ears and eyes. If an order comes through you go out together, you're one unit, you stay as one unit, you don't leave your man. (Urban volunteer, Maori)

Only 46% of Maori volunteers said they agree that the NZFS provides support to those who are Maori to become volunteer fire fighters, and 12% disagreed with this statement, indicating NZFS could do more to encourage Maori to become volunteer fire fighters. Still, the Maori volunteers interviewed said there do seem to be more Maori volunteers today than in the past.

When I joined I was the only Maori one in there. That was 1980. When you look back to the photographs, 10 years prior to that, there were no other Maoris there and yet we had a big Maori population in [town]. (Urban volunteer, Maori)

■ **Maori cautious of making race an issue in recruitment**

One Maori volunteer noted that if the NZFS does try to recruit more Maori volunteers it will have to be careful not to create an issue of race that is not already there.

Your main aim is you want to try and get more Maori people into the fire service. You've got to be very careful that it doesn't become a race issue. (Urban volunteers, Maori)

■ **Maori report discomfort with MVAs**

Maori volunteers said one deterrent to more Maori volunteering is a discomfort with incidents like MVAs. They said this could be one reason more Maori do not volunteer with the fire service.

Some Maori people just look at it and think "oh no, I don't want to go to a car crash, don't want to go there". [Just the type of voluntary work it is] Yes, I think that's a big part of it. (Urban volunteer, Maori)

■ **Openness to ethnic minority volunteers**

The survey showed that 47% of volunteers agree there should be more volunteer fire fighters from ethnic minority groups. Notably, 18% of volunteers disagreed with this statement. 56% of Maori volunteers strongly agreed there should be more ethnic minority volunteers. 57% of women, 52% of volunteers with less than five years of service, 55% of volunteer station and training officers, and 54% of 16-29 year old volunteers also agreed with the statement. Volunteers from the Arapawa region (26% disagree) were least likely to agree that there should be more volunteers from ethnic minority groups.

STATEMENT TESTING								
OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF NZFS								
<i>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree.</i>								
	1 Strongly agree %	2 %	TOTAL AGREE 1+2 %	3 %	4 %	5 Strongly disagree %	TOTAL DISAGREE 4+5 %	Unsure %
There should be more volunteer fire fighters from ethnic minority groups	24	23	47	26	7	11	18	9

Base: all respondents, n=500

9.3 Age

As noted earlier, during the course of the focus groups, volunteers read the text of a NZFS recruitment brochure. One of the lines in the brochure said, "We welcome people of any age. There will be a role for you." Interestingly, this line stirred quite a bit of debate in the groups regarding the age limits of fire service volunteers. Volunteers were equally bothered by recruits that are "too young" and "lack discipline" and by the idea of "60 year olds with walking sticks." Some volunteers could imagine older volunteers working as the brigade secretary or in some other support capacity.

[Any negatives?] I'd just like to comment on the "people of any age". If you get a 60 year old come along do you still welcome him? Why emphasise it on a piece of paper like that? [You can go the other way, 16 year olds. (Interjection.)] Are you mature enough to become a volunteer fire fighter? (Urban volunteer, male)

I'd like to go back a step about the 60 year old with the walking stick. I know of a brigade where they've got a 60 year old with a walking stick but his primary role is answering the radio and being the secretary. We sometimes have trouble getting a secretary and so a 60 year old might be an ideal secretary because he might have the spare time. (Urban volunteer, male)

That sort of says turning up with their walking sticks. I don't think that that's really right because you're expected to be reasonably fit and able. It's not quite like that. (Urban volunteer, male)

Most people take themselves out when they realise they just can't cope with the physical labour of it. [We had to change our constitution to change – I thought it was over 65 or something. (Interjection.)] We did have a compulsory exit which we've now changed it to be fit and able, able to do the job rather than an age specification. (Urban volunteer, male)

X. Turnover and Retention

Despite their overall satisfaction with the experience of being a volunteer fire fighter, there is significant concern among volunteers about turnover in their brigades. More than half of all volunteers from composite brigades surveyed said they are concerned about volunteer turnover, and 41% of rural volunteers surveyed said they are concerned about turnover in their force. Turnover was less of a worry to volunteers from all-volunteer urban brigades, but at least one-third of volunteers from these brigades was concerned about this issue.

CONCERN ABOUT VOLUNTEER TURNOVER				
<i>How concerned are you about the level of volunteer turnover in your brigade?</i>				
	Urban Volunteer Brigades in urban fire districts (n=182)	Other Urban Volunteer Brigades (n=105)	Composite Brigades (n=63)	Rural Volunteer Forces (n=150)
	%	%	%	%
Very concerned	13	16	19	11
Fairly concerned	20	21	32	30
TOTAL CONCERNED	33	37	51	41
Not that concerned	34	38	24	34
Not concerned at all	33	24	25	24
TOTAL NOT CONCERNED	67	62	49	58
Unsure	-	-	-	-

Notably 60% of volunteer chiefs said they are concerned about volunteer turnover. Volunteers from the Northland (49% concerned), Transalpine (48% concerned), and Auckland (47%) fire regions were more worried about volunteer turnover in their brigades or forces than were volunteers from other fire regions.

10.1 Retention

In an open-ended question, the volunteers surveyed confirmed focus group findings and identified the main reasons people stop being volunteer fire fighters are the conflicts between fire fighting responsibilities and work or family responsibilities.

REASONS FOR TURNOVER	
<i>What do you think is the MAIN reason people stop being volunteer fire fighters?</i>	
	%
Work responsibilities and commitments	34.6
Family responsibilities are more important	14.0
Moved out of the area	11.8
Being overburdened with work from the New Zealand Fire Service	6.2
Retirement	5.8
Being taken for granted by the community	3.2
Changed jobs	3.2
The job is too time consuming	2.8
Not wanting to deal with the emotional situations that are part of the job	2.4
Unfavourable interpersonal relationships within and between brigades	2.4
Boredom / infrequent call outs / frequent false alarms	2.4
No financial support (i.e. self-employed people lose money on call outs)	1.6
Unsure	1.4
Too much time spent training	1.2
Lack of commitment to the job	1.2
Fire service has no respect for volunteers/communication is poor	1.0
Overburdened with administration /rules and regulations	1.0
The tough physical conditions such as being wet, cold, dirty, and tired.	0.8
Poor relations between paid staff and volunteers	0.8
Poor resources and equipment	0.8
Inadequate management	0.6
Not wanting to attend Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVAs)	0.2
Young cadets are not integrated into the working environment	0.2
Personal injury/sickness	0.2
Being a volunteer doesn't live up to expectations	0.2
Base: All respondents (n=500).	

■ Work

Volunteers across all brigade types and locations said conflicts between work and fire fighting responsibilities are the greatest cause of turnover. 35% of all volunteers said conflicts with work are the main reason people stop being volunteer fire fighters. Conflicts with work were the number one reasons given for turnover from rural and urban volunteers, but urban volunteers (37%) were more likely than rural volunteers (30%) to associate work conflicts with turnover.

- ***Volunteers Who Say Work Conflicts Lead to Turnover***

Work responsibilities and commitments are the MAIN reason people stop being volunteer fire fighters:

- 46% station and training officers.
- 43% of volunteers from the Western fire region.
- 43% of volunteers who said they are spending too much time on fire fighting responsibilities.
- 42% of volunteers from urban brigades within urban fire districts.
- 40% of volunteers from the Northland fire region.
- 40% of volunteers with 11-20 and 20+ years service.
- 38% of volunteers from composite brigades.
- 38% of volunteers from Arapawa fire region.
- 38% deputy chiefs and third officers.

■ ***Family***

14% of all volunteers said they believe the main reason people stop being a fire fighter is that “family responsibilities are more important.” Fire fighters (17%), 16-29 year olds (17%), volunteers from the Bay of Plenty/Waikato fire region (17%), and volunteers from the Western fire region (19%) were more likely than other volunteers to say this is the main reason people stop being fire fighters.

■ ***Moved away***

12% of volunteers said they believe the main reason people stop being volunteer fire fighters is because they move away from the area. Volunteers from urban brigades outside of urban fire districts (14%) and from rural forces (13%) were more likely to say this is the main reason people stop being volunteer fire fighters than were volunteers from other types of brigades. Volunteers from the Northland (15%), Auckland (15%), and Bay of Plenty/Waikato (15%) fire regions were also more likely to cite “moved out of the area” as the main reason people stop being volunteer fire fighters.

■ ***Too much work from NZFS***

6% of volunteers said being overburdened with work from the NZFS is the main reason people stop being volunteer fire fighters. Deputy chiefs and third officers (9.6%) and chiefs (9.3%) were more likely than other volunteers to say this is the main reason people stop being volunteer fire fighters. Volunteers from composite brigades (9.5%) and from the Eastern (10.4%) and Bay of Plenty/Waikato (8%) fire regions were also more likely to cite too much work as a reason for leaving the fire service.

10.2 Improving retention

Volunteers in the focus groups were asked to write a brief note to the NZFS Commission outlining at least one thing that would improve things for volunteer fire fighters. Most of their suggestions addressed the issues already raised in this report:

- Raising awareness of volunteer fire fighters and acknowledging their contribution to their communities and New Zealand.
- Easing the conflict between fire fighting responsibilities and work and family responsibilities.
- Easing the non-emergency burden volunteers feel is taking more and more of their time.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REDUCING VOLUNTEER TURNOVER	
[Those who said that they were 'Very concerned' or 'Fairly concerned' about the level of volunteer turnover in their brigade were asked:]	
<i>What suggestions do you have for reducing volunteer turnover?</i>	
	%
Provide financial incentives/assistance	12.0
Improve public relations (e.g. support, awareness and recognition)	8.3
Form partnerships with peoples fulltime employers	7.8
Make the job more attractive to younger people	6.3
Provide more of a team environment / increase social activities	6.3
Provide more interesting / varied training	6.3
Make training more accessible / frequent	5.7
More support from the fire service/improved communication	5.2
Provide a probation period for new recruits to test commitment	5.2
Provide more work / increase the practical side	4.7
Increase awareness of peoples commitments / call on them less frequently	4.7
Increase funding to the service	3.6
Improve working conditions between paid staff and volunteers	3.6
Improve the economic situation in the area (i.e. create jobs)	3.6
Improve equipment and facilities	3.1
Reduce training demands	2.6
Make volunteers paid staff	2.1
Provide better management	2.1
Reduce administration demands	1.6
Increase involvement with other emergency services	1.0
Less of a lag between joining the force and attending call outs	0.5
Unsure / Refused	22.9
Multiple response	
Base: respondents who said that they were 'Very concerned' or 'Fairly concerned' about the level of volunteer turnover in their brigade; 38% of all respondents, n=192	

■ **Financial incentives**

Several volunteers in the focus groups suggested that volunteer fire fighters should receive some sort of financial incentive, like a tax break, to offset the costs of volunteering. 12% of volunteers surveyed said this would be one way to reduce volunteer turnover.

[What could the fire service do to meet some of these needs?] *I think maybe a tax break might help.* (Urban volunteer, male)

One thing that would make people stay there is dollars and cents. Guarantee it. We had three or four people ring up when we were trying to recruit guys and they wanted to know how much they were going to get paid and as soon as we told them nothing that was the end of it. People think that you get paid for what you do. [People don't want to do nothing for nothing these days. (Interjection.)] Society's changed. (Urban volunteer, male)

[One thing to improve things for the volunteers] *A tax break. Monetary. We give up our time. [I think you're getting away from the word 'volunteer'. (Interjection.)] But then to me it's a form of recognition.* (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Community awareness and recognition from NZFS**

Volunteers said a small amount of recognition from the NZFS for their contribution would improve things for all volunteers. As noted earlier, volunteers believe that they are treated as the "second cousins" to paid fire fighters. Most volunteers said they just want to be "treated the same" as other fire fighters, and they said it would be helpful to be acknowledged through some recognition and support for their service. Over 8% of volunteers concerned about turnover said improving public relations by showing more awareness and recognition of volunteers would reduce turnover. Volunteers stressed they are not seeking grandiose gestures of acknowledgement, but rather simple measures.

More recognition of what volunteers do and more support for what we are doing. (Urban volunteer)

[Who should be recognising you?] *I think our local authority are recognising us in respect that they're paying for ... the equipment but they're not recognising the individuals. I'm not wanting to be paid but to have a social fund or a volunteers night or something that can be put on every so often, that's just some small recognition.* (Rural volunteers, male)

Recognition. [Didn't you get your International Year of the Volunteer? (Interjection.)] Yes got that in September. [That's the first medal in how long for just being a volunteer? (Interjection.)] (Urban volunteer, male)

I didn't join to get a medal. I joined the organisation for what was written up there before and if you got something out of it, all well and good but you didn't join to be given a medal or a big handout or anything like that. (Urban volunteer, male)

Volunteers also said things would improve for volunteers if their communities were more aware of their role.

Raise community awareness. If people knew how much of the load was carried by volunteers – I mean New Zealand would be into the ground if it wasn't for volunteers. (Urban volunteer, female)

If communities knew that if they don't support the brigade, then they're not going to have one.
(Urban volunteer, female)

■ ***Improve managements' hands on understanding of volunteers***

As noted later in this report, volunteers believe that NZFS management is out-of-touch with volunteer fire fighters. Volunteers feel they are being overburdened with administrative and other work and that management does not recognise that the demand on their time is growing. Altogether, nearly 14% of volunteers concerned about turnover in their brigades said they thought addressing these issues would decrease volunteer turnover. More support from NZFS (5.2%), increased awareness of the competing demands on volunteers' time (4.7%), better management from NZFS (2.1%) and reducing administrative demands on volunteers (1.6%) were all mentioned as ways to decrease volunteer turnover.

Volunteers suggested that improving NZFS managements' understanding of the day-to-day operations of volunteers would improve things for the volunteers.

It seems that the Fire Service Commission have got one volunteer, one man represents all of the volunteers, all 8000 and something. One voice on the Fire Service Commission. It's basically just not enough. The volunteers need more say. Like I said our biggest stumbling block is between our region and the Commission and that's where it needs to be sorted out I think. (Urban volunteer, male)

I'd say to the big guy sitting up there in the office chair, get down here and have a look at what we have to do. Most of them probably wouldn't really know. [Corporate head office people who create the policies] (Rural volunteer, male)

Perhaps more volunteers on the commission level as representatives in the UFBA, actually on the commission. In that way we perhaps might get some more of the real issues getting back to the Fire Service in a real way. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ ***Acknowledge families and employers***

Volunteers had a few suggestions for ways the NZFS Commission could help to ease the conflicts volunteers have between their fire fighting responsibilities and work and family. Nearly 8% of volunteers concerned about turnover said they believe better communication with full-time employers would decrease volunteer turnover. The survey and focus groups showed volunteers believe these conflicts are the most difficult aspects of volunteering and the most common reasons people stop volunteering.

Volunteers said if the NZFS simply acknowledged the support volunteers receive from their families and employers it could improve those relationships.

[One nearby town] do. They actually have an employers' night. Once a year they have it. They invite the employers of the volunteers along for a social evening. It's a little thank you. [Is that the urban volunteers that do that?] Yes. (Rural volunteers, male)

Now what we try to do is have more family things for the families, involve the families so that the womenfolk are more involved in the brigade than they used to be. Once it was a male thing and everybody did it. Now we've got women in our brigade and we try and involve the family. We've got a car rally coming up in two or three weeks and that's a family affair. They bring their kids. If they know what's really going on and are getting something out of it, they accept it more readily than what they used to. (Urban volunteer, male)

[Some recognition of the other partner could be quite good, like a gift voucher once a year] Yes. A social occasion of some sort goes a long way. (Rural volunteer, male)

If you had a discussion group with most of the wives and partners, I think you'd find that they're just as involved as we are because they're out there...The volunteer fireman needs a good partner. (Rural volunteer, male)

Most of the ex-volunteers interviewed said they stopped volunteering because of conflicts with work. Some said their employers would not let them leave to go on incidents, others said they changed jobs and their new employers were not supportive of their volunteering or their schedules were no longer flexible.

Sometimes work can suffer too. [How did your work feel?] They weren't very happy with me actually. I was working for [company name]. [They didn't like it when you just took off?] No. ... I said, "if the alarm goes off can I go straight to the station" and they said "no, you have to take the ute home and get your car". I said, "what about if I'm stuck at home and the ute is behind my car at 2 o'clock in the morning – can I take the ute" and they said, "no. You have to use your own car". (Ex-Volunteer, male)

■ **More resources and better equipment**

Volunteers in several regions also said volunteer brigades need more resources and better equipment. They said this is one way the NZFS could acknowledge the work they do. And, they argued, they should not have to fight for it.

A bit more recognition maybe. [From them to you?] Yes. [What sort of recognition?] Respect. [How can they show that?] With the gear they give us too. It's just little things but little things tend to add up and make big things and that makes the difference in the little small community. (Urban volunteer, male)

That was going to be my thing too. I'd like to see resources allocated to volunteers, better resources. (Urban volunteer, female)

Probably equipment would be the top of the heap. If you haven't got equipment, you haven't got people and that just sums it up. [You need members as well. (Interjection.)] It's a way of probably attracting people. (Urban volunteer, male)

■ **Improve training**

SUGGESTIONS FOR REDUCING VOLUNTEER TURNOVER	
[Those who said that they were 'Very concerned' or 'Fairly concerned' about the level of volunteer turnover in their brigade were asked:]	
<i>What suggestions do you have for reducing volunteer turnover?</i>	
	%
Provide more interesting / varied training	6.3
Make training more accessible / frequent	5.7
Reduce training demands	2.6
Multiple response	
Base: respondents who said that they were 'Very concerned' or 'Fairly concerned' about the level of volunteer turnover in their brigade; 38% of all respondents, n=192	

Altogether, nearly 15% of volunteers concerned about volunteer turnover said improving some aspect of training would decrease volunteer turnover.

I feel like they could people on courses more. [Did you put your name down for courses that you couldn't go on?] Yes. I don't know if was the Fire Brigade itself or the volunteers that were running it that said, 'well you can't go and you can go'. I think if a person volunteers to go to learn they should be put in that situation – especially volunteers. (Ex-Volunteer, male)

[Need to have more training] Need to have more training with the transport of highly inflammable goods, that they do slow down or bypass the centre of Foxton and Levin. (Urban volunteer, male)

I think improved training methods. (Urban volunteer, male)

**NOTES TO NZFS COMMISSION:
IMPROVING THINGS FOR VOLUNTEERS**
(Examples from rural and urban volunteers)

Urban Volunteers

Write a brief note to the Fire Service Commission telling them one thing that would improve things for New Zealand's volunteer fire fighters.

1	<p><i>Management training/personnel – HR issues</i></p> <p><i>Single part of reference for administration/management (A "How to..." manual or "Where do I found out how to...")</i></p> <p><i>Computer link that's faster than 56K</i></p>
2	<p><i>Keep politics out of issues and tell things as they are.</i></p>
3	<p><i>Ban alcohol from stations.</i></p> <p><i>Need to instill more cultural sensitivity.</i></p>
4	<p><i>The volunteer fire service needs to be treated as an equal to other sections of the service, not as add ons.</i></p>
5	<p><i>To see more help from paid staff (i.e. VSO) to help volunteers.</i></p> <p><i>To remove added stress from volleys</i></p> <p><i>Funding</i></p> <p><i>Admin.</i></p>
6	<p><i>More recognition (to help recruiting if nothing else)</i></p> <p><i>More emphasis on training paid staff re-volunteers. Nothing happening at the moment.</i></p> <p><i>To listen to what volunteers are saying – to take volunteers more seriously – less spin doctoring.</i></p>
7	<p><i>More/better recognition of volunteers that serve in <u>their</u> communities.</i></p> <p><i>Grants and payments!</i></p> <p><i>Less paperwork.</i></p> <p><i>Newer technology in fire fighting equipment.</i></p> <p><i>More training courses/mainly for new volunteers. Different courses</i></p>
8	<p><i>Consider ways of encouraging teamwork between paid and volunteer staff.</i></p> <p><i>Get government to fix funding issues.</i></p>
9	<p><i>More recognition of what volunteers do and more support for what we are doing. Closing the gaps in terms of the way paid fire fighters and volunteers perceive each other.</i></p> <p><i>Improve funding.</i></p>
10	<p><i>Less on to the volunteers.</i></p>
11	<p><i>Treat us with a degree of professionalism.</i></p> <p><i>Don't take our time for granted.</i></p>
12	<p><i>Have more volunteers on the commission so that their voice can be heard. We're here to do the same job as permanents, so we should be treated the same.</i></p>
13	<p><i>More money put into volunteer brigades.</i></p> <p><i>Less book work for volunteers.</i></p> <p><i>Bring more training on to volunteer stations on training night.</i></p>
14	<p><i>I think volunteers should have some small financial reward to compensate them for their time.</i></p>

Rural Volunteers

Write a brief note to the Fire Service Commission telling them one thing that would improve things for New Zealand's volunteer fire fighters.

1	<p><i>To improve our operation of an effective rural fighting force there needs to be less arguments of financing. Supply the money/equipment required.</i></p> <p><i>Ongoing recognition of service provided.</i></p> <p><i>More pressure on government to provide (legally) time off from work to attend fires.</i></p> <p><i>The organising of support services (i.e. food/drink) at fires should be done via Council or Fire Control) rather than by fire fighters.</i></p>
2	<p><i>From my perspective –</i></p> <p><i>The levels of communication between services appear well organised and the integration between the services works well. I would like to see some structures training for new recruits and some hand-outs for learning in our own time, i.e.: equipment identification, vehicle kit and where it's stored, structures of command, how rural forces fit in with urban and the call out procedures. Equipment levels are well maintained.</i></p>
3	<p><i>Better recognition (by councils) for the job that rural volunteers do for the community and their employers do by allowing staff time away from work – maybe a letter thanking them (the employers).</i></p> <p><i>Otherwise I'm happy with the personal rewards I get.</i></p>
4	<p><i>We need a more reliable source of funds so that purchasing equipment and space is less of a performance. Also some funding for social events.</i></p> <p><i>Improved interaction with neighboring forces and brigades.</i></p> <p><i>Encourage early call-outs to fires so that efforts can be more effective.</i></p>
5	<p><i>Things that would improve the working relationship</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1) Better communication between members and committee and then between committee and council</i> <i>2) Fire Service and Bush Force</i> <i>3) Better training within the Force</i> <i>4) Better command structure at fires</i>
6	<p><i>More funding for equipment and gear</i></p>