



ACT on Fire:

A modern fire service for the ACT

These are the key issues for ACT Fire and Rescue firefighters in their next enterprise bargaining agreement.

Keep the pay rise, invest in safety

Firefighters have rejected a 10% pay rise, which would have been in addition to the CPI pay increases agreed with public servants, believing that the funds should instead be invested in community safety.

The firefighter shortage

The ACT has a shortage of firefighters. Current recruitment levels cannot keep up with retirements or increasing work demands due to a growing ACT population and more extreme weather events due to climate change.

Additional firefighters are needed for:

- **Urgent light rail response** - A crew of two firefighters instead of one to allow urgent driving duty response of POD trucks for light rail response and other emergency responses. This needs to occur within 6 months.
- **Properly crewing new aerial pumper** – Additional crew for the aerial pumper instead of relying on 100% crew from ComCen. The aerial pumper is required to supplement the Bronto, which is often broken down, for firefighting in tall buildings. The ComCen project has taken over eight years since inception, and is unlikely to be completed in the short term. Without hiring additional firefighters, the Government is unlikely to fulfil its election commitment to crew an aerial pumper.
- **Firefighters for new stations** - Crew for an additional pumper at City Fire Station (by 31 December 2021) and another crew for Molonglo Fire Station (by 31 December 2023).
- **Additional staff for much needed training** - Increase in training staff including for skills maintenance, future colleges and a training relief pumper.
- **Additional support staff** - Increase in all day work areas including fire safety, the Breathing Apparatus Section, Community Fire Unit support and Technical and Operational Support Services.
- **Firefighters for high fire danger days** - An increase in the relief factor from 0.5 to 0.8 to allow firefighters to take leave, crew bushfire trucks on days of very high fire danger, and to cover for absence during training and deployments interstate and overseas.



Excessive overtime and recall to duty

Recruitment has failed to keep pace with retirements, resignations and absences (workers compensation, long term leave) and it has become more difficult to fill shifts through recall to duty. This is a direct symptom of not recruiting enough firefighters, and not increasing the relief factor.

As a result, the firefighter overtime bill in 2015-16 was stated by the ESA to be \$4.1 million. For the 2017-18 financial year this increased to an estimated \$5.005 million, and for 2018-19 is tracking for \$6.040 million. This is based on over 117,000 overtime hours paid from 1 July 2017 to 26 June 2018, and over 101,000 hours from 1 July 2018 to 5 March 2019. The overtime bill rose by approximately 25% in 2 years, and a further 20% in one year.

Additionally, this shortage means that firefighters are being recalled to duty with as little as a 4-hour break in a 38-hour period.

This is an unsustainable work, health and safety issue which must be resolved through proper recruitment and staffing.

A Modern Training Regime

Under the current enterprise agreement, there are only three areas of skills maintenance mandated: driving a truck, wearing breathing apparatus, and advanced first aid. The UFU has proposed a new allowance structure and mandatory skills maintenance so that firefighter skills are kept up to date. The new allowance structure would provide for allowances to be paid to firefighters who deliver specialist training and would require 3 yearly assessments in critical areas like vertical rescue, trench rescue, urban search and rescue and HAZMAT.

Firefighter Wellbeing

Firefighters are the only occupation in the world who have won presumptive rights in workers' compensation. ACT firefighters who succumb to any of a list of 12 cancers are "presumed" to have developed cancer through their work. While this is important, prevention and cure is better than compensation. For this reason, the UFU has proposed a comprehensive wellbeing initiative, based on the success of a similar initiative for Edmonton firefighters. This would include early screening for cancers and other illnesses, and fitness trainers in each platoon. This will in turn assist in lowering workers compensation premiums.

Modern Fire Station Standards

We are seeking the inclusion of detailed fire station standards in the enterprise agreement, to ensure that funds spent on renovations and new fire stations result in facilities that are fit for purpose and ensure firefighter safety and wellbeing.

Appropriate Use of Image

Inaccurate reporting is known to add to post-traumatic stress, especially when it is implied that the first responder didn't adequately perform their role. A recent example in the ACT was media coverage resulting from a house fire in Bonner, where it was implied that firefighters did not initially find deceased persons in the house. The UFU is seeking a process to ensure that media coverage is accurate, and the use of firefighters' images occurs with consent.