

**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS
COMMITTEE**

**ON THE
SAFETY, REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT
(FAIR PROTECTION FOR FIREFIGHTERS) BILL 2011**

Submission by: MICK BUSST

1. My name is Mick Busst and I am a Leading Firefighter for the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in Victoria.
2. I have been a firefighter for 22 years and have worked my total service in Victoria. I am making this statement in support of this legislation as I believe it is very important for firefighters. I am making this statement while still undergoing treatment for bladder cancer. It is a difficult time for me and my family, but this is very important.
3. Firstly I would like to tell you a about my story.
4. In December 2010 I was diagnosed with bladder cancer. Within two weeks of initial symptoms I was in surgery having a complete cystectomy which is the removal of the bladder. My prostate and several lymph nodes were also removed due to the progression of the cancer. I have had three courses of chemotherapy followed by several weeks of radiation therapy . I am currently undergoing another three courses of chemotherapy. My prognosis is not favourable.
5. I was off work from the surgery until early May 2011. I was fortunate as I had sufficient sick leave to cover that period so my income was only minimally reduced
6. I returned to light duties in early May but I am still having to use my accrued sick leave to cover the hours I am unable to work. On medical advice I am only working two days each week. That means for every shift I cannot work two nights and need to use sick leave to cover that period.
7. As I am still undergoing treatment I do not have the energy or ability to work a full shift. My oncologist has advised that I return to work on light duties and I am only working days so that I am not placing too much stress on my body and do not become too fatigued.
8. I have not sort work cover for my illness for a number of reasons. The main reason is that I was advised by my medical team to alleviate as much stress as possible from my life. I actually discussed seeking work cover with my oncologist and was advised that it was not a good time for me to do that. Even without that advice I don't think I would have been capable of pursuing a case and still would not have the energy to do so.
9. I have no hesitation in stating that I believe that my cancer is primarily attributable from being exposed to toxins while firefighting.

10. The reality is that when we go to a fire we do not know what we are going into. That has always been the case and remains the case.
11. Our gear and equipment has improved over the years, but our gear does not eliminate all the risks of exposure.
12. For my case it is relevant that I have been a firefighter over periods where the uniforms and equipment is not the standard it is today.
13. But even with the vastly improved gear today it still can be the case that for two or three showers after a fire that soot is washing out of our skin. Our gear and the cabins of the trucks can smell of smoke and other chemicals after a fire. We will never be able to eliminate all risk of exposure.
14. I cannot think of anything else in my life style that would have indicated a risk for bladder cancer. I was fit and healthy, I exercised regularly and maintained a healthy lifestyle . I understand there are studies that link exposure to toxins, such as benzene, to bladder cancer. It is only through my work as a firefighter that I would have been subjected to these toxins

Mick Busst