

**Presentation to the Senate Standing Committee on
Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee**

**Inquiry into the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment
(Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011**

On July 2011 the Australian Senate referred the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011 to the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for inquiry and report.

A submission by Ken G. Block

Fire Chief, City of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Background information and support documentation for evidence to be provided to the Australian Standing Senate Commission on the legislation concerning Firefighting and occupational cancers: *“Fair Protection for Firefighters” Bill 2011.*

Ken G. Block, Fire Chief for the City of Edmonton Fire Rescue Services, will provide evidence to any inquiries from the Australian Standing Senate Commission regarding the above legislation on Friday, September 2nd, 2011 in Perth, Western Australia.

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City of Edmonton

Mayor: **Stephen Mandel**

Fire Chief: **Ken G. Block**

Area: **701.5 square kilometers (270.6 square miles)**

Population (2009): **782,439**



The City of Edmonton is the capital city of the Province of Alberta. Edmonton's economy continues to be one of the top performers in the Canadian economy. Alberta's capital region enjoys a stable business environment and compelling long-term opportunities for growth. With more than \$70 billion worth of investments in major projects expected in the region in the next decade, Edmonton is a place where businesses can prosper during the current economic storm.

Strategically located between the world's second-largest oil reserves and the world's largest energy market, Edmonton plays a vital role in the development of the Athabasca oil sands. Greater Edmonton supports the energy industry as a centre for upgrading and refining petrochemicals, pipelines, manufacturing, transportation, and logistics. Edmonton is at the crossroads of international trade routes linking Asia Pacific with eastern North America and Mexico with Alaska.

The city is also one of Canada's leading centres for technology development. It is the home of the National Institute for Nanotechnology and cutting-edge companies engaged in microsystems and nanotechnology research and commercialization.

Edmonton and its surrounding communities enjoy the privilege of sharing one of the longest stretches of River Valley Parkland in an urban area in North America at 7,400 hectares, located along the North Saskatchewan River. There are 22 major parks and over 150 kilometers of trails to enjoy walks, bike rides, picnics, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

Edmonton Fire Rescue Services

2010 Services: Response to 33,528 fire suppression, medical, rescue and hazardous materials events:

- 1,407 Structural Fire Events.
- 1,904 Non-Structural Fire Events.
- 21,297 Medical Events.
- 7,867 Rescue Events.
- 1,053 Hazardous Materials Events.



Edmonton Fire Rescue Services delivers these services with 27 fire stations and over 950 firefighters. Support services include dispatch and emergency response communications, fire prevention and fire investigations.

Province of Alberta

- The total population of Alberta is approximately 3.74 million as of January 2011. More than half of this population is distributed between the two major metropolitan cities: Edmonton and Calgary.
- Alberta is located in western Canada, next to westernmost British Columbia, the coastal province on the Pacific. Alberta's border to the west, with B.C., is mostly formed by the Rocky Mountains. To the north, Alberta borders the Northwest Territories, to the east the province of Saskatchewan, and to the south the American state of Montana.
- Alberta is the fourth largest province in Canada. It is similar in size to Texas, three times the size of Great Britain or equal to the combined areas of France, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands.
- The province has a diversity of natural terrain—parklands, grasslands, primordial badlands, vast tracts of wildlands, boreal forests and plains, ancient glaciers, thousands of lakes and rivers, and mountain ranges that run the length of North and South America.
- More than 12 per cent of Alberta's total land area is protected in 500 provincial parks, five national parks, and three national wildlife areas. Five of Canada's 13 UNESCO World Heritage Sites are in Alberta, including Jasper National Park, 370 km from Edmonton.
- Alberta is home to a pair of the world's most magnificent skiing areas, in Banff and Jasper National Parks in the Rocky Mountains. Much of northern Alberta is boreal forests, which offer great cross-country skiing and wildlife viewing.
- Canada's economic driver, Alberta has consistently led in annual rates of growth and job creation. While natural resources, particularly petroleum products, were long the base of Alberta's economic success, the province's economy today is diverse and sophisticated.
- Alberta is the world's second-largest exporter of natural gas.
- One in 15 Alberta jobs is directly related to energy.



Alberta's Presumptive Cancer legislation

- Alberta regulation 102/2003 of the Workers' Compensation Act, '*Firefighters' primary site cancer regulation*' sets out the rules where firefighters can receive compensation for presumptive cancers. The Regulation was first made in 2003. Alberta was the second province in Canada, after Manitoba, to make amendments to existing legislation concerning presumptive cancers for firefighters.
- Alberta, along with Manitoba, has the most comprehensive list of presumptive cancers for firefighters in all of Canada. In 2011, Alberta added four new cancers to the list of presumptive cancers, bringing the total to fourteen. Also in 2011, Alberta extended coverage to include volunteer/casual/part-time firefighters in addition to full-time firefighters.
- The impetus to creating presumptive cancer coverage for Alberta's firefighters was to protect firefighters who regularly expose themselves to hazardous environments while protecting the public.
- Alberta's list of presumptive cancers coverage for firefighters:

Primary Site Cancers

Added in 2003 (applies to claims with dates of accident on or after 1/04/1979)

- Leukemia
- Brain cancer
- Bladder cancer
- Ureter cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Colorectal cancer
- Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma

Added in 2005 (applies to claims with dates of accident on or after 1/12/1980)

- Lung cancer in non-smokers

Added in 2010 (applies to claims with dates of accident on or after 1/05/1985)

- Testicular cancer
- Esophageal cancer

Added in 2011 (applies to claims with dates of accident on or after 1/05/1986)

- Prostate cancer
- Skin cancer
- Breast cancer
- Multiple Myeloma cancer

Canadian Presumptive Cancer legislation

- Of 13 jurisdictions in Canada, 10 provide Workers Compensation Board presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters; 8 of these jurisdictions also provide presumptive cancer coverage for volunteer firefighters.

Cost Impacts

- In Alberta, there are approximately 13,500 firefighters; 3,500 are full-time firefighters and 10,000 are volunteer/casual/part-time firefighters. Please note the definition of volunteer firefighter in Alberta is different to that of Australia as a volunteer in Alberta receives remuneration for services to the community.
- The total number of occupational cancers for firefighters for the Province of Alberta is detailed in the following table. As can be seen for the period between 2006 and 2010 there has been 19 occupational cancer claims for the entire of the Province of Alberta. Please note from 2006 there were 10 occupational cancers covered by presumptive legislation which increased to 14 by 2011.

Alberta Workers Compensation Board occupational cancer claims

2006	3 cancer claims
2007	5 cancer claims
2008	8 cancer claims
2009	2 cancer claims
2010	1 cancer claims

- Edmonton and Calgary are the two major cities in Alberta and both experienced major population growth during the years between 2006 and 2010. The fire services in each city also experienced growth in staffing, which can impact the cost of WCB claims. Staffing in Calgary grew by 19% (1,155 employees in 2006 to 1,369 employees in 2010), while staffing in Edmonton grew by 15% (960 employees in 2006 to 1,120 employees in 2011).
- Wages have also increased over this time period (2006-2010).

Incidental and Intangible Cost Impacts

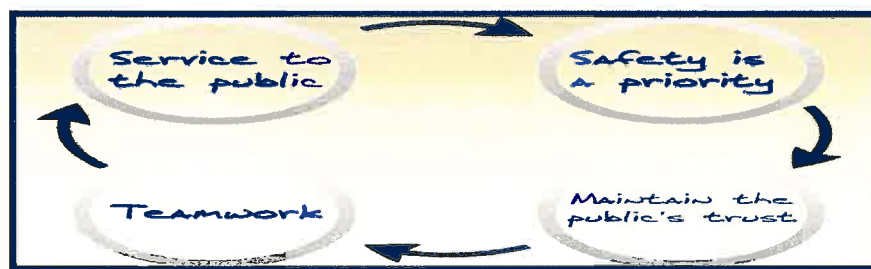
There are many impacts of presumptive cancer coverage that are immeasurable but beneficial to both our organization and our firefighters. One of these is simply raising the awareness of the correlation between firefighting and the probability of cancer. Raising awareness leads to proactive rather than reactive thinking.

In 2005, Edmonton Fire Rescue Services introduced a joint Health and Wellness program at a cost of \$500,000 per year. A key part of this program is voluntary medical assessments to ensure that personnel are healthy enough to work safely and effectively during their careers. As a result of medical assessments, early detection of occupational cancer has been diagnosed in five of our firefighters. Three of these cases have resulted in successful treatment and cancer free status.

Through early occupational cancer detection, there is transferring of costs between death benefits and issues such as lost time and medical claims. This is essentially a balancing and neutral costing, while detecting a cancer early and hopefully saving a firefighter, which is the right thing to do.

Other intangible benefits we have experienced include a higher level of employee engagement, making our fire service an attractive employer and this assists with recruiting and retention.

Edmonton Fire Rescue Services is a progressive and leading-edge fire service in North America. Much of our success is derived from constant reference to the four cornerstones under which we operate:



Each of these cornerstones link together. In our fire department the safety of our firefighters is a top priority. We work as a team and members of a team take care of each other. This results in outstanding public safety service to our public, and maintaining the public's trust, which is imperative in a service that is publicly funded.

Science has proven the connection between firefighting and occupational cancer. We cannot dispute this and therefore we are doing our best to take care of our firefighters and their families, through progressive initiatives such as lobbying for presumptive cancer legislation and health and wellness programming. The result is an engaged and motivated workforce and a supportive and safe community.

MITIGATION INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE FIREFIGHTER WELLNESS

CITY OF EDMONTON **FIRE RESCUE SERVICES** **JOINT HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAM**

BACKGROUND

The Joint Health and Wellness Program is a collaborative undertaking by the Edmonton Fire Fighters Union and Edmonton Fire Rescue Administration.

The City of Edmonton Joint Health and Wellness (JH&WP) implementation began in 2005 when Edmonton City Council approved annual funding of \$500,000. The funding allowed for the following:

- Fitness equipment was purchased for 22 fire stations
- Twenty four Firefighters were trained as Peer Fitness Trainers
- Wellness Consultant hired

The JH&WP is voluntary, confidential and non-punitive and is in cooperation with the Edmonton Fire Fighters Union. The aggregate data collected from the medical assessments informs the development of health promotion program. Besides fitness assessments and personal training programs, the Peer Fitness Trainers deliver most of the health promotion programs.

MEDICAL SCREENING

The Health and Wellness medical assessment is completed by a contracted third party provider. The medical assessment is to ensure that uniformed personnel are healthy enough to work safely and effectively during their careers. This medical is not a “fitness for duty”. Participation is voluntary.

Due to the Health Information Act and the Freedom of Information Act (Canada), only aggregate health data is collected. Aggregate data is used to inform the development and delivery of health and physical fitness programs. Fire Rescue Services currently captures data on every laboratory test and physical examination.

PARTICIPATION DATA

Medical assessments began in April of 2006. With only three quarters of the year to conduct medicals 67% of the eligible 873 firefighters received a medical.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
# of Medicals	579	613	667	728	720

From 2006 -2009 there was a 68% increase in firefighter participation in the medical assessments.

MEDICAL RESULTS

LAB RESULTS AND REFERRALS

The medical assessment captures relevant data that is tracked to identify predominant health and fitness issues. Once the health information is reviewed health promotion programs are developed to reduce the frequency and severity of injury or illness.

MEDICALS	2008		2009		2010	
Results of Annual Medical Assessments	667 Medicals		728 Medicals		720 Medicals	
Abnormal Test Results	376	56.37%	294	40.38%	368	51.11%
Formal referral to General Practitioner or Specialist	340	51%	270	37%	285	40%

From 2008 – 2010 there was a 5% reduction in abnormal lab results, and an 11% reduction in referral to a General Practitioner or Specialist.

CONDITIONS LIMITING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

During the medical exam the Doctor will examine the firefighter and determine whether they are cleared for physical activity, or participation in the fitness component of the program.

Results of Annual Medical Assessments Conditions Limiting Physical Activity	667 Medicals		728 Medicals		720 Medicals	
	2008		2009		2010	
Abdominal	2	0.29%	5	0.68%	4	0.55%
Cardiovascular	12	1.79%	8	1.09%	17	2.36%
Musculoskeletal	56	8.39%	63	8.65%	73	10.13%
Respiratory	5	0.74%	8	1.09%	12	1.66%
Other	31	4.64%	39	5.35%	53	7.36%

Firefighters work related injury rate is higher than most occupations (i.e. 8.6 times higher than that of miners). Tens of thousands of firefighters are injured each year while fighting fires, rescuing people, responding to hazardous materials incidents and training for their jobs.

These medical results demonstrate how many firefighters may be working with a physical limitation from a previous minor or chronic workplace injury.

Abdominal limitations are most commonly the result of hernia—a firefighter is required to bend, lift and carry awkward objects in less than ideal conditions.

Musculoskeletal injuries are an ongoing issue. The fitness and rehabilitation programs, (i.e. functional fitness training, movement screens, and myofascia release) help to minimize the frequency or help to recondition an existing musculoskeletal issue.

Cardiovascular problems are looked at in more depth in order to determine that the condition does not put the firefighter at risk of a cardiovascular event on the fire ground. Firefighters also receive education on the “cardiovascular demands of firefighting” and annual fitness testing and training to promote their aerobic fitness.

Respiratory issues are also a concern.

PREVALENT HEALTH ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE MEDICAL ASSESSMENT

Prevalent health issues change from year to year. Firefighters are at greater risk than the general population of being exposed to a variety of toxic or cancer-causing agents. As of May 2010, the Province of Alberta Workers Compensation Board provides compensation coverage for 14 primary site cancers. These cancers are presumed to be an occupational disease and the firefighter may be eligible for WCB-Alberta benefits.

From 2007-2009 the JHW medical assessment has diagnosed 5 cancers. Three of the firefighters stepped forward to speak about their diagnosis, surgery and outcomes. All three were successfully treated, two are still working and one has since retired. All three remain cancer free.

Prevalent Health Issues Identified	2008		2009		2010	
	Cancer	1	0.15%	2	0.14%	0
Altered lipids HDL, LDL, Cholesterol	85	12.74%	90	12.36%	38	5.28%
Reduced vision acuity	19	2.85%	11	1.51%	8	1.11%
Cardiovascular	8	1.20%	10	1.37%	16	2.22%
Reduced pulmonary function	7	1.05%	15	2.06%	23	3.19%
Elevated urea	3	0.45%	9	1.24%	18	2.50%

Note: In 2007 there were 2 diagnosed cancers

Conclusion

Worksite health promotion has been well documented from research outside of the fire service. In fact, 143 studies have demonstrated positive ROI (Return On Investment) associated with worksite health promotion. Examination of this peer reviewed literature concludes that the financial benefits of well-designed, well-implemented health promotion program substantially exceed their costs and have a positive ROI and benefit cost/ratio.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ken G. Block,
Fire Chief
Edmonton Fire Rescue Services



ALBERTA
EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION

Office of the Minister
Deputy Government House Leader
MLA, Edmonton - Castle Downs

AR 57668

August 22, 2011

Mr. Ken G. Block
Fire Chief
Edmonton Fire Rescue Services
4 Floor, 10351 - 96 Street
Edmonton AB T5H 2H5

Dear Chief Block:

As Minister of Employment and Immigration, responsible for occupational health and safety and the Workers' Compensation Board - Alberta, I am pleased that you have been invited by the United Firefighters Union of Australia to attend and give evidence to the Australian Senate Standing Committee regarding firefighting and occupational cancers.

As you know, amendments to Alberta's *Workers' Compensation Act* extend cancer coverage presumed to be work-related to Alberta's 10,000 volunteer, part-time and casual firefighters, along with the province's 3,500 full-time firefighters. In May 2011, four more cancers (prostate, breast, skin and multiple myeloma) were added to the list of cancers with presumptive coverage. Alberta firefighters, along with those in Manitoba, now have access to the most comprehensive list of presumptive cancers in Canada.

This is reflective of the Government of Alberta's ongoing commitment to the brave men and women who put their lives on the line so that we can enjoy ours. They regularly expose themselves to hazardous environments to protect the public. I encourage Australia to join Alberta in extending legislation to protect firefighters from occupational cancers.

I appreciate the commitment and ongoing excellence demonstrated by you and your staff at Edmonton Fire Rescue Services in protecting our communities. Have a safe and successful journey, and thank you for offering this important information to Australians.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Lukaszuk
Minister of Employment and Immigration
MLA, Edmonton - Castle Downs

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Curriculum Vitae

Fire Chief Ken G. Block, Edmonton Fire Rescue Services

Edmonton Fire Rescue Services was recently granted Full Agency Accreditation (March, 2010), by the Center of Public Safety Excellence, Commission of Fire Accreditation International (CFAI).

Fire Chief Ken Block, began his career in the Edmonton Fire Service in 1980 as a recruit firefighter and progressed through the ranks, being promoted to Senior Firefighter Qualified in 2004, Captain in 2006, Deputy Fire Chief of Public Safety in 2007, and was appointed as Fire Chief, Edmonton Fire Rescue Services, on February 1st of 2009.

Throughout his thirty one plus years of service, Chief Block has been an advocate for Public Safety, Firefighters and the Fire Service.

Fire Chief Block has successfully completed numerous leadership, and management courses over his career, the most notable being the Harvard University Kennedy School of Executive Education, Leadership for the 21st Century (2008).

Chief Block currently is a member of the following Boards of Directors, Councils and Committees:

- International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Section, Metro Fire Chiefs Association Board of Directors as Board member.
- Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) Board of Directors as Board member, Canadian Metro Chiefs Representative.
- Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) Government Relations Committee 2009 – present.
- Chair of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) National Building Codes Committee in 2008.
- Canadian Fallen Firefighter's Foundation (CFFF) Board of Directors as Board Member, Alberta representative.
- Alberta Fire Chiefs Association (AFCA) Board of Directors as Presidential Advisor.
- Alberta Safety Codes Council, Building Technical Council member.

In 2007, Fire Chief Block was appointed to a Working Group by the Province of Alberta Minister of Municipal Affairs to identify significant residential fire loss trends in Alberta, and tasked with bringing recommendations forward to address these emerging trends through the Building Code. The Working Group identified twenty two recommendations of which eighteen have been accepted by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Alberta Building Code has been amended to include these recommendations.

Chief Block has been both honoured and humbled to have received the following awards:

- Federal, Canadian Exemplary Services Medal, 2000.
- Alberta Centennial Medal (Outstanding Citizen), 2005.
- Alberta Provincial Emergency Services Medal, 2002.

It is a distinct honour to have been asked to travel to your beautiful country and appear before this Senate Committee to offer whatever information I can in support of this important, noble initiative to recognize certain cancers as being job related and presumptive in nature to Australia's Firefighters.