

SUBMISSION
TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND
WORPLACE RELATIONS COMMITTEE
ON THE
SAFETY, REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION
AMENDMENT
(FAIR PROTECTION FOR FIREFIGHTERS) BILL 2011

Submitted by Philip Brown

1. My full name is Philip Alexander Brown and I am a Leading Firefighter employed by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in Victoria.
2. I will not personally benefit from this Bill but when I heard about this Senate Inquiry I decided I wanted to assist by telling my story.
3. I have been a firefighter since 1986 and I still love it. I am still an operational firefighter but have to take some precautions. Because of my illness I cannot drive the trucks.
4. In December 1997 I was diagnosed with an inoperable, malignant brain tumour. The tumor was 7.5 cm in diameter. The prognosis was not good at all.
5. I was 33 years old and had been a firefighter for 11 years. My partner and I were expecting our first baby. I was told I would be lucky if I was alive long enough to see the baby born.
6. As the tumor was inoperable I had other treatment including radiotherapy and chemotherapy. You name it, I've had it.
7. I have no doubt that my tumor was a result of my job as a firefighter. I was fit and healthy. There was nothing else in my life that would raise the risk of cancer for me.
8. I had previously trained as a cabinet maker but we were not exposed to the toxins and chemicals in that job. We did use glue but in well ventilated areas. We did not have exposure to benzene or formaldehyde. We did use some alcohol-based products. At not time as a cabinet maker did I experience exposure to toxins like I have as a firefighter.
9. At a fire you can smell it. You can see the smoke. There is soot on your skin after a fire even when wearing the state of the art gear. Sometimes that soot is still coming out of your skin after a couple of showers. The cabs of the fire trucks can smell of smoke. It is just part of the job.
10. We knew, and it is still the case today, that we are exposed to a range of chemicals and toxins on the job. We wear protective gear and use protective equipment. We take whatever precaution is available to us. But that does not guarantee we won't be exposed.

11. In the earlier days our gear and equipment was not as good as it is today. Sadly though, we know there is no gear that can fully protect us at a fire scene.
12. I did seek compensation at the time. I was very concerned that I was going to die and leave my partner and baby without someone to support them. I was really unwell and unable to actually pursue the case myself. The union assisted me and my partner had to really take the brunt of it. She had to organising the paper work and assist the legal team with my case as I was not in a state to do that I really was not understanding everything that was happening around me.
13. My case was settled on the court room steps – as they say. It did not happen quickly and the case had to be fully prepared before settlement was reached. It was not an easy time. I felt I had little option but to settle as I was seriously ill and needed to know that my partner and child had some security. It was a terrible experience, not just for me, but for my partner as well.
14. Had legislation like this Bill been in place for me it would have made a significant difference. It would have taken considerable stress and worry from us. It would have meant I could have concentrated on the treatment and getting well rather than a worrying about how my family would be looked after. It would have meant my partner and I could have spent the time together doing something positive rather than putting a legal case together.
15. I have never been classified as in remission. I live with this cancer every day. I am monitored and have a MRI scan every year. When that time rolls around it is very nerve wracking. I am very anxious to hear the results but very nervous as well. It would help if I knew my family would be looked after if I was diagnosed with the worst.
16. I respectfully ask the Committee to support this Bill being enacted.

Phil Brown