

**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: Guy McCrorie

1. My full name is Guy McCrorie and I am a Commander employed by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in Melbourne. I have been a firefighter for 25 years.
2. I am making this submission as I strongly believe this Bill should be passed. I have seen too many firefighters diagnosed with cancers, and sadly far too many die of cancer. We are a small group/occupation. It cannot just be a coincidence that so many of us are diagnosed with cancer.
3. I was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2009. My prostate was surgically removed. I am still monitored having tests every six months.
4. At the time of my diagnosis and treatment, I took three months off work. I was able to do this through the support of the United Firefighters Union of Australia and my employer. I had significant leave accumulated and was able to take that time.
5. My employer encouraged me to record the cancer as an occupation disease. I was sent to a Work Cover doctor. That doctor told me there was no way that my cancer was work related. I referred him to studies and evidence that links firefighting and cancer and he just would not listen. I tried to explain that we are exposed to chemicals and toxins all the time when attending incidences, and even just exhaust fumes from the fire trucks and he was still not prepared to listen. He said it could never be proven. That doctor asked me for the specific incident where I think I was exposed and the cancer resulted. I told him I could not do that and it was more likely the continued exposure over a long period of time.
6. As a result my cancer was not accepted as an occupational disease and I was not entitled to any assistance or compensation.

7. I have read some of the studies and it is clear that our exposure to range of toxins over a long period of time increases the risk of cancer. We cannot pinpoint when that exposure has been detrimental to our health yet that seems to be the threshold currently to get the cancer recognised as an occupational disease.
8. For me there is one incident though that sticks in my mind. I attended a fire in a photographic studio in Keilor and there were a range of chemicals in that studio. It was a pretty toxic situation. Four of us that attended that incident have had serious health problems. I have been treated for prostate cancer, another was treated for bowel cancer, another died of cancer and the fourth has been seriously ill. I don't think that is a coincidence. I am sure that fire had an impact on our health.
9. If this Bill is passed, a significant benefit will be that it will set a benchmark and as a result data will be accumulated on the number of firefighters being diagnosed with the listed cancers. At the moment that is not being recorded as the cancers are not being accepted as occupational disease.
10. This protection for firefighters is very important. It will not only enable some current firefighters to access compensation but will also assist those that come after us in the future. It is important that firefighters are looked after as they are putting their lives and health on the line. If we do not take steps to recognise that and assist when they need it, then those that considered being a firefighter may be discouraged. Some may decided not to be come firefighters because they are too scared of the increased risk to cancer.
11. I also think that such legislation will ensure that all steps are taken to reduce the risk and that safeguards are put in place. It will mean that it is accepted that we are exposed to toxins at a range of incidents and that we must keep up with the science in terms of better gear and equipment.

12. We are only a small group, a small occupation. But we are a vital occupation for the community. Firefighting is a dangerous job and the risks need to be identified, recognised and worked through. We will never be able to prevent all exposure to toxins, so we need the livelihoods and families protected for those firefighters who are diagnosed with the cancer.

Guy McCrorie