



Wellbeing and Health Promotion, Fire & Rescue NSW

Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW) manages fire emergencies in NSW’s major cities and towns and responds to rescues, hazardous materials incidents and possible terrorist activities across the State. FRNSW also work with other agencies to minimise the impact of bushfires, storms, floods, landslides, building collapses, motor vehicle accidents and other emergencies.

At 30 June 2013, FRNSW had 6825 operational firefighters who had responded to 133611 emergency incidents in that year. That’s an average of one incident every four minutes.

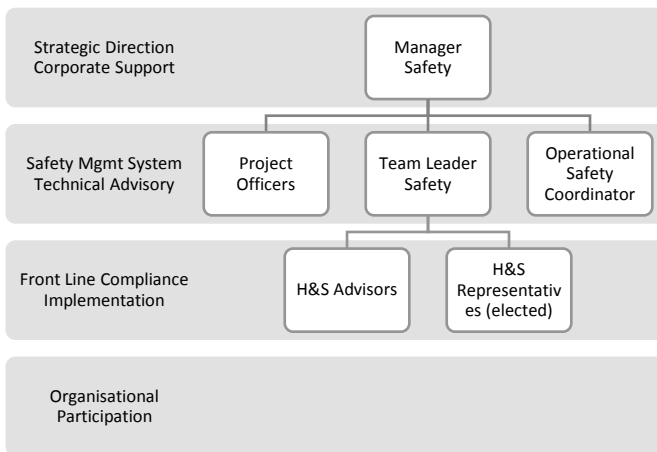
Considering the dynamic and complex services provided by FRNSW, which may involve risk of injury, the organisation is committed to implementing programs for the safety, health and wellbeing of their firefighters and staff.

This snapshot aims to provide a background to the current structure of WHS within FRNSW and to highlight current developments in Mental Health/**Wellbeing** and **Health Promotion** Programs implemented throughout the service.

Firefighting is a demanding occupation both physically and psychologically. Firefighters generally work in a high temperature, risky environment and may carry up to 50 kilograms of weight including protective gear and firefighting equipment. Climbing stairs in high-rise buildings, fighting bushfires, working in confined spaces, and helping injured and distressed victims with this weight, puts considerable strain on a firefighter’s body and mind.

NSW Commission of Audit Report, Fitness of Firefighters, April 2014

WHS Management Team



FRNSW’s safety team is a combination of:

- **Uniformed personnel** who have a deep understanding of incident related procedures, culture and challenges faced at the front line
- **Non-uniformed personnel** who have WHS expertise from working in areas of the emergency response sector.

By working together the safety team can provide a unified approach to safety management. The safety team comprises:

- **Manager Safety:** a uniformed Superintendent, responsible for developing the strategic safety framework
- **Team Leader Safety** and a team of four Health and Safety Advisors (HSAs)
- **Two project officers (1.4 FTE):** responsible for the Safety Management System (SMS) and the Safety Strategy Implementation
- **Operational Safety Coordinator:** a uniformed position who provides specific technical WHS advice on operational issues.

WHS in Context

2005: Establishment of the safety team.

2007: Executive level Work Health and Safety Advisory Committee (WHSAC) established to provide strategic guidance for the organisation. This





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coincided with the first and overriding principle in the organisation's corporate plan of 'ensuring safety is the guiding principle in everything we do'. In the same year the Incident Cause Assessment Methodology (ICAM) was adopted as the primary safety incident investigation tool allowing the safety team to produce high quality and high reliability reports.

2009: The first Safety Strategy document was released, formalising the look ahead for 2009-2012.

2010: An electronic system was implemented which allows for the notification of injury, illness, exposure and near miss (NIENM) process. The system improved the collection of statistics and trends to identify improvement strategies as well as monitor the corrective actions taken to reduce injuries.

2011: FRNSW committed to formalise its safety systems to meet the requirements of AS/NZS 4801 Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems and employed a full time project officer to oversee the development and maintenance of the SMS. The use of the Treasury Managed Fund (TMF) OHS self-assessment tool guided the development of the SMS.

A Safety Workshop brought together 120 employees from both metro and regional NSW from all levels of the organisation. The purpose was to:

- Engage the workforce and determine ways to improve safety culture and performance
- Gain buy-in from the attendees regarding safety
- Generate ideas of how best to develop and implement FRNSW's SMS and foster ways to effect collective change.

2012: WHS legislation in NSW brought a renewed focus on safety especially for the Executive Leadership Team. The Act's clear articulation of the responsibilities of 'Officers' drove a series of improvements including due diligence training and a

renewed focus on health and safety reporting and tracking. As part of a communications strategy a series of monthly safety promotional posters highlighting FRNSW safety messages were distributed to all workplaces.

2013: The second Safety Strategy document was released with a look ahead for 2013-2017 and the development of a number of communication and consultation programs, including the roll out of Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs).

2014: Inaugural Commissioner's Safety Awards were held to acknowledge employees who demonstrate outstanding efforts to improve or promote safety. Awards are applicable to both injury prevention and injury management initiatives which demonstrate exceptional achievement.

Highlights in WHS

- Leadership commitment: the Commissioner has been driving the commitment to safety as the number one priority
- Successful implementation of the Be Safe Program and Safety Strategy have provided a strategic framework to measure WHS compliance and demonstrate organisational safety commitment
- Increasing acceptance and individual responsibility for safety across the organisation and improved recognition of excellence through the Commissioner's Safety Awards
- The safety team has strategic and operational roles with uniformed officers which has connected well with firefighters
- Safety is now included in the procurement and planning processes
- Improved reporting of incidents, investigation and incident cause analysis as well as improved collection of injury statistics and



Case Study

management of workplace injuries through use of the NIIENM system

- Executive Advisory Committee oversees reports and incident analysis with communication back through the organisation
- A safety communication strategy has been applied with the use of case studies and lessons learnt
- Measurable targets have been developed for the organisation.

Future Plans in WHS

FRNSW plans to continue to build on the foundations of its Be Safe Program; implementing a safety ownership program promoting individual accountability and responsibility for safety.

The NIIENM system will be redeveloped to allow for detailed trend analysis and focused preventative strategies. The NIIENM will also be enhanced to include detailed incident analysis to assist supervisors when identifying causal factors and developing preventative actions.

FRNSW needs to ensure a culture of safety ownership both vertically and horizontally throughout the organisation. The Safety Team has commenced an engagement strategy by consulting across Directorates and the Health and Safety Representatives to gain some simple key messages that will connect with firefighters. Other challenges include financial and resourcing constraints, industrial constraints, and middle management priorities.

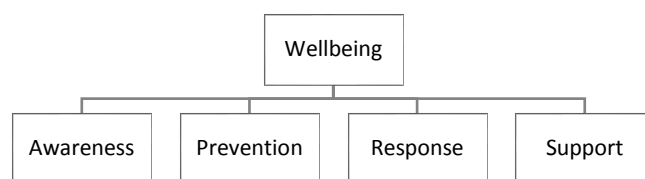
Focus on: Wellbeing Programs

Responding to emergency incidents often creates exposure to traumatic and highly emotional scenarios which can impact on the mental health of firefighters and their families. Physical and psychological fitness is critical to the effective performance of firefighters.

Initially the FRNSW Wellbeing Program was developed by a Chaplain in 1980. In 1983, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) was implemented, which provides counselling by clinical psychologists.

Sometime after, it was discovered that firefighters do not proactively seek help. The reactive nature of firefighting meant that FRNSW needed to evolve its Wellbeing Program from a response and support model into one that placed more emphasis on awareness and prevention. In 1990, a Critical Incident Support Program (CISP) was established to provide peer based support for firefighters following traumatic incidents and guide them towards support services available.

In 2011, FRNSW commenced a review of the evidence-based strategies which could be applied to proactively monitor and enhance the mental health and resilience of employees. In 2013 a Mental Health Policy was developed after union engagement. A key part was a shift towards a proactive approach with key pillars of: increasing **awareness**, creating **prevention** and resilience, and ensuring **response** and **support** systems are available.



Various projects and programs were rolled out including these (described in more detail below):

1. *FIT MIND* Program
2. *RESPECT* Program
3. *SANE Mindful Employer Program*
4. *Peer Support*





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5. Mental Health Toolkits, Treatment Plans and Wellness Checks.

1. FIT MIND Program

Find Time	Pause and catch your breath and reflect before exiting the fire truck and leaving to go home each day
Individual	Think about how you feel. Are you ready to face the next incident?
Team	Check in with your team mates: are they stressed out or 'flat'?
Mates	Talk to your mates about incidents and issues
Internal	Use internal support such as Critical Incident Support Program, Chaplaincy and EAP
Network	Establish a strong network of friends and family
Doctors	Access mental health professions

With assistance from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and funding from the Australian Research Council, FRNSW:

- Surveyed firefighters' attitudes toward the CISP which uncovered that 83% sought initial support from their peers
- Designed and implemented a training program targeting recruit firefighters with videos of firefighters talking about their experiences and the skills they themselves identified as necessary for building resilience and managing their mental health.
- Rolled out the *FIT MIND* acronym (see above).

The evaluation of this program will see 400 firefighters engaged in the program complete follow up surveys at six months, one year, two years and three years to identify any behavioural changes.

2. RESPECT Program

Managers are responsible for managing psychological risk at the frontline, determining appropriate controls to mitigate risks and minimise impacts. They are charged with treating all worker concerns regarding mental health seriously, respectfully, impartially and confidentially.



BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

FRNSW partnered with UNSW and the Black Dog Institute to develop this awareness program for duty, zone and area commanders (managers) throughout the Service. This program included a face-to-face half-day training session which:

- Addresses mental health literacy amongst managers
- Provides managers with practical guidance on how to undertake difficult and sensitive conversations with their employees
- Boost managers' skills and confidence to improve communication with workers.

The acronym *RESPECT* was developed to assist with this program:

Regular contact is essential
Earlier the better
Supportive and empathetic
Practical help, not psychotherapy
Encourage help seeking
Consider return to work options
Tell them your door is always open, arrange next contact.

Follow up mentoring of managers is provided after the initial training session by counsellors from the *Manager Assist Program* (part of the FRNSW's Employee Assistance Program). This consists of telephone conversations at three and six weeks post training.

3. SANE Mindful Employer Program

SANE Australia is a national charity that works for a better life for people affected by mental illness.



In 2012 SANE Australia approached FRNSW to work collaboratively to implement their online *Mindful Employer Program* for up to 1000 regional Station Commanders and Deputy Captains. Due to its initial success FRNSW funded the continuation of the program within regional operations and an extension program to metropolitan station officers, zone and area





commanders. Over 500 members of FRNSW have taken part in the *Mindful Employer Program*. The program provides:

- independently developed online health resources
- confidential advice and information on mental health
- three e-learning modules titled:
 - What is mental illness?
 - A guide for the workplace
 - A guide for people managers.

4. Peer Support

FRNSW has a team of *Peer Support Officers* who volunteer their time to promote mental health. While the traditional role of this team was built



around supporting firefighters following traumatic incidents, their role has evolved to become

more proactive in line with the 'Awareness' and 'Prevention' pillars of FRNSW's mental health program, including delivering mental health education sessions across the state. These sessions aim to improve mental health literacy, decrease the stigma associated with mental illness, encourage help seeking behaviours and improve knowledge of both internal and external support services available to employees and their families.

Peer Support Officers are trained by Crisis Intervention and Management Australasia (CIMA) in facilitating a range of diffusing, debriefing and demobilisation sessions. The delivery of these interventions follows the attendance of fire crews at traumatic incidents. Peer Support Officers attend two workshops per year focusing on professional development, networking and strategies to ensure their personal wellbeing.

5. Mental Health Toolkits, Treatment Plans and Wellness Checks.

- FRNSW supports its employees engaging with a mental health professional through their GP to address mental illness. Any gap payments on mental health treatment plans are reimbursed by FRNSW.
- Fire Stations with operational response profiles that expose firefighters to a high number of potentially traumatic incidents are offered wellness checks facilitated by a clinical psychologist specialising in trauma counselling.
- The Mental Health Toolkits were developed on the following topics:
 - Suicide Prevention
 - At Risk Employees
 - Work Place Culture and Conduct
 - Preventing Secondary Psychological Illness
 - Overcoming Barriers To Seeking Help
 - Managing Workloads
 - Improved Peer Support
 - Shift Work and Fatigue
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Overseas Deployment
 - Exposure To Trauma
 - Family Support
 - Grief and Loss
 - Accessing Mental Health Support
 - Court Attendance
 - Incident Controller

Results

FRNSW was recognised by the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance as a leader in the area of



workplace mental health and featured in a case study released as part of their *Heads Up* initiative.

Indicators of the success of these proactive programs can be seen through:





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- Significant reductions in the frequency and cost of psychological injuries (reduction in claims)
- Attitudes are changing demonstrated by a steady increase in requests for assistance from managers over the last 5 years
- An increased utilisation of FRNSW’s EAP.



Ongoing awareness and education campaigns are delivered through the intranet and special event days like *Movember* and *R*

U OK? Day.

Future strategies

Subject matter experts from UNSW and Black Dog Institute were engaged to build on the platform laid by the *FITMIND* and *RESPECT* projects by developing a *Resilience at Work Program* that tailors a program to develop a firefighter’s skills in areas including mindfulness, diffusion, expansion and value based actions.

The use of technology such as e-learning on tablets is emerging as a key tool in the delivery of wellbeing initiatives to time poor and/ or geographically isolated firefighters. Importantly, it is also anticipated that engaging firefighters in a highly interactive learning process using a combination of video vignettes, game like exercises, audio and animation will ensure training is memorable and effective.

Challenges

As with most major projects road blocks present themselves in the form of:

- Logistics: Delivery and scheduling of training across a geographically diverse workforce
- Time: Finding available time for interventions amongst an already busy training and response timetable

- Budget: Cost associated with the delivery of training on mental health
- Industrial Relations: Opposition from Union relating to assessments
- Firefighter engagement.

Focus on: Health Promotion Programs

The NSW Fire Brigades Firefighting Staff Death and Disability Award covers permanent and retained fire fighters. It includes the need for a compulsory health and fitness program and FRNSW has developed the necessary framework and programs to support this Award obligation. A team of allied health professionals complements the work being performed by Occupational Physicians (OP) and supporting medical staff in the areas of pre-employment screening and fitness for duty assessment. As a result of this increased capacity a large number of awareness and prevention programs have been developed and implemented.

The journey to change

In 2008 FRNSW enhanced its musculoskeletal injury prevention programs using evidence based initiatives to improve the musculoskeletal health and operational readiness of firefighters.

To identify the required strategies, analysis was undertaken on the trends related to injuries sustained by firefighters. It is interesting that the number of firefighters sustaining injuries relating to heat stress, smoke inhalation or fire were dwarfed by the frequency of musculoskeletal injuries, with approximately 25% of these occurring during station based activities.

It was found that a large proportion of incidents are preventable and related to three key and interrelated variables of:

- firefighter physical capacity
- awareness of body positioning
- awareness of operating environment





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It was recognised that the required injury prevention initiative needed to integrate the above variables into the broader context of the hierarchy of risk controls in order to optimise the prevention of musculoskeletal function. The initiative also needed to acknowledge the unique operating environment of firefighters therefore included:

- education on the three identified variables (physical capacity, body positioning, operating environment)
- dynamic risk assessments
- equipment selection

The Health and Fitness Team were also recognised and engaged as subject matter experts in the biomechanical and physiological impact of personal protective equipment. This has seen them work with strategic procurement and equipment research and design units in order to minimise the biomechanical and physiological burden of personal protective equipment.

The Health and Fitness Team responsible for the above initiatives consists of a Team Leader and three Health and Fitness Advisors/ Exercise Physiologists. They deliver a variety of services for firefighters at different stages of their career including:

- pre-employment Physical Aptitude Testing – facilitates testing of applicants using a highly validated testing protocol developed in conjunction with the University of Wollongong
- functional movement screening (FMS) – this program identifies movement deficiencies likely to predict injury within firefighters. The FMS is widely used amongst firefighters internationally and allows focused injury prevention conditioning programs to be prescribed. This screening and corrective programming is offered to both recruit and incumbent firefighters

- cardiovascular risk factor profiling using mobile testing equipment that measures blood glucose, cholesterol and triglycerides.
- development of online resources targeting lifestyle modification, cardiovascular risk and physical conditioning:
 - Waste the Waist
 - Virtual gym
 - Cardio Chek



Results

- FRNSW workers compensation data is showing reduction in the incidence of musculoskeletal injuries being sustained by firefighters
- Anecdotally the physical capability exhibited by recruits during their initial 12 week skills training course is very good since the implementation of the new Physical Aptitude Test.

Future Strategies

Health Promotion aims to develop and implement targeted initiatives using data which highlights hot spots and trends regarding health conditions and injuries. Some of the planned initiatives include:

- Upgrade the Waste the Waist program to a more interactive site which also allows family and friends to participate
- Create a 'health by decade' resource on the intranet
- Create a sun smart policy and procedure
- Enhance FRNSW's screening and immunisation procedure
- Develop, implement and monitor a comprehensive health surveillance program





Case Study

- Implement a mandatory periodic health and fitness assessment program in line with the recommendations from the report on firefighter fitness released by the NSW Auditor General in April 2014.

Challenges

- A voluntary health and fitness assessment program post-recruitment limits firefighter engagement with the FRNSW Health and Fitness programs.
- Like any preventative health program it is difficult to quantify the performance of the

Health Promotion programs i.e. how many heart attacks would have occurred without the program?

- Limited information available from voluntary fitness assessments shows that over 40% of firefighters assessed had one or more cardiovascular risk factors. A focus on continued preventative measures is essential given the above statistic and the nature of firefighting duties i.e. sedentary period followed by extremely high physical demand.

Summary of successful strategies

Primary – preventative / proactive approaches Reducing risk factors	Secondary – proactive / reactive approaches Minimising risk impact	Tertiary – reactive approaches Injury management, rehabilitation and return to work interventions
Safety summit, consultation workshop with a cross section of the organisation	Incident Cause Analysis Method (ICAM) for the investigation of serious safety incident	Assessment and management protocol for physical claims based on psycho-social triage
Monthly safety promotional posters highlighting FRNSW safety messages	Peer Support/ Critical Incident Support Program	Assessment and management protocol for psychological claims
Health and safety calendars to take the safety message home	Mental Health Toolkits	Devolvement of workers compensation deposit premium and development of organisational KPIs relative to premium
Voluntary Well Checks for rescue operators with EAP	RESPECT Program - Education/ Mental Health Literacy	EAP
FIT MIND Program	SANE Mindful Employer	
Peer Support Program	Peer Support/ Critical Incident Support Program	
Mental Health Policy	EAP	
FRNSW Fitness Program	Notification of injury, illness, exposure and near miss (NIENM) process	



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Primary – preventative / proactive approaches Reducing risk factors	Secondary – proactive / reactive approaches Minimising risk impact	Tertiary – reactive approaches Injury management, rehabilitation and return to work interventions
Voluntary Periodic Health and Fitness Assessments		
Enhanced Pre-employment Medicals		
Enhanced Pre-employment PAT		
Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention Program		
Waste the Waist Program		
Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention Program		

This document was prepared Big Picture Communications with input from Alison Donohoe, Assistant Director Health & Safety, FRNSW Alison.Donohoe@fire.nsw.gov.au and Jill Charters, Risk Management Consultant, WHS & IM, Suncorp Risk Services, jill.charters2@suncorp.com.au.

