

NEWTOWN

Fire station hits unwanted ton

UNION'S SAFETY CONCERNS

Alexis Carey

IT'S a milestone no one wanted to reach, but Newtown fire station has marked its 100th closure in two years as a result of the State Government's controversial cost-saving measures.

The closures began in late 2012 when the then-O'Farrell government introduced the TOLing (taking stations temporarily offline) policy.

TOLing means stations are closed temporarily when staff call in sick or are on leave.

Another practice, known as stand-bys, occurs when crews and trucks from one station are sent to cover a TOLed station.

Newtown fire station has emerged as one of Sydney's most-closed stations and on August 16 was closed for the 100th time.

Other inner west stations have also been affected since the policy was introduced, including Ashfield, Leichhardt, Balmain and Marrickville.

Fire Brigade Employees' Union inner west sub-branch secretary Martin

WHAT TO DO

- If you experience a fire, call 000 as usual. Operators will determine which station responds, depending on closures
- You can report station closures to the union at fbcu.net/cutscostlives
- The union has also encouraged residents to speak to their local MP about their concerns

Dixon said it was only a matter of time before a disaster occurred.

"Who is going to provide fire protection for the residents of Newtown if their house is burning down, the Hub is on fire or, God forbid, another large animal runs down King St?" Mr Dixon said.

"When a fire station is temporarily closed it means that the local community does not have fire protection from their local fire crew.

"Instead residents have to rely upon fire crews from stations outside the Newtown area who do not know the area and therefore



Newtown station has been closed 100 times since TOLing (taking stations temporarily offline) was introduced by the O'Farrell government.

may take extra time to attend to an incident. As we all know every minute counts in a fire.

"The only reason that fire stations are being temporarily closed is because Fire and Rescue are subject

to the Government's public sector budget cuts. All the Government has to do is reverse the budget cuts to Fire and Rescue."

A Newtown firefighter, who asked to remain anonymous, said he "wouldn't be

surprised if an inner-west station closed down altogether" in the near future.

A Fire and Rescue NSW spokesman said inner west residents were not at risk from the closures.

"Fire safety is the highest

priority for Fire and Rescue NSW and the NSW Government," he said.

"On any given day across the Sydney Metropolitan Area, Fire and Rescue NSW has a network of between 96 and 109 permanently staffed fire engines, rescue and specialist trucks ready to respond to emergency incidents.

"The network of permanent resources is supported by a number of retained (on-call) brigades.

"Fire stations are only taken offline when nearby stations are available to respond to emergencies within Fire and Rescue NSW response time standards.

"Residents and businesses in the inner west are well protected by Fire and Rescue NSW with response coverage provided by fire crews not only in Newtown, but from nearby suburbs including Marrickville, Redfern, Balmain, Glebe, Pyrmont, Randwick, Leichhardt, Alexandria, Mascot, Arncliffe, Campsie and Ashfield."



Are you concerned about Newtown closing? Comment at innerwestcourier