



SitRep 17

COVID-19 update, current state of play

As most would know, the COVID-19 infection rate in Australia is flattening. Although this is occurring it does not mean we can or should be complacent. The Union's leadership strategy has been to silo off as many work locations from each other as possible. The following instructions and recommendations are the current "state of play" as we see it:

As recent SitReps have said, these are long but important to be read. Please do.

General provisions

The following points are to be adhered to:

- All external engagements that are non-emergency related are to be suspended.
- Any member who has any 'flu-like' symptoms is not to attend work and self-isolate. Call your GP or Health Direct 1800 022 222 and ask for advice regarding the need for screening for COVID-19 and further isolation. If no screening is advised, return to work when all symptoms have subsided. If your screening test is negative, return to work when all symptoms have subsided. If screening is advised and results are positive for COVID-19, remain isolated for 14 days.
- Any member that has been directly exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 is not to attend work and is to self-isolate for 14 days or until he or she has a negative test result.
- Any member, Permanent or Retained that returns from overseas is not to attend work and must self-isolate for 14 days in line with the Federal Government Directive effective midnight 13th March 2020.
- If any staff/member develops 'flu-like' symptoms whilst at work, they are to immediately inform their supervisor and isolate themselves from other workers. The sick firefighter is to be dismissed immediately and sent home to seek medical advice regarding need for screening and further isolation.
- Vehicles and equipment should be cleaned in accordance with cleaning vehicles, equipment, stations and work areas as per the Infection Prevention and Control Manual and crew to remain on shift. The station/location and appliances are to be off line while the station is cleaned. Whilst it cannot be guaranteed that this will totally eliminate any chance of infection, we are satisfied, on the current evidence available, that the risk is low and will be no greater than being in a normal public place. This may change as a greater understanding of the virus is gained. If no screening is required, the sick firefighter is to return to work when all symptoms have subsided. Any crew members who were in contact with the sick firefighter, are to remain on shift and self-monitor symptoms. If they develop flu like symptoms, they should self-isolate until the symptoms have subsided as per normal sick leave process.
- If screening is required and the results are negative, the firefighter is to return to work when all symptoms have subsided.
- If the screening test returns a positive result, the firefighter is to remain isolated for 14 days. The supervisor must contact all crew and advise them to remain isolated for 14 days post exposure. When staff members are out in public both on and off shift they are advised to practice social distancing as per NSW Health's advice Where possible this involves keeping a distance of 1.5m from others.
- Duty Commanders and other Senior Officers should only visit workplaces, other than their own, for critical operational and safety related matters.



SitRep 17

- All stations/work locations should not receive visitors to the station and only on duty personnel are permitted entry to stations/work locations. If an urgent issue (such as provision of first aid) requires a visitor to enter the stations/work locations, practice social distancing wherever possible and as a precaution, disinfect the area and any utilised equipment afterwards.
- Workplace renovations or movement are not to commence. Already commenced renovations, as in construction work not tender processes, should continue but contact with workers by members should be avoided wherever possible.
- All deliveries should be left outside, and staff should avoid signing for deliveries (quote service number). This will minimise contact with couriers. After taking and storing deliveries, wash hands and disinfect as required.
- Random drug and alcohol testing have been suspended.
- Attendance management policy is still in place; however, members will not need to produce a medical certificate. Members may be required to sign a statutory declaration regarding their absence. FRNSW and the FBEU will monitor AMP related issues and update this advice as required.
- All stations/work locations need to have an adequate supply of disposable gloves, P2 masks, clear glasses, disinfectants, soap, hand sanitiser and disposable overalls.
- All stations are to have hand sanitising and decontamination stations readily available to all staff members.
- All appliances should have hand sanitiser in the cabin and an adequate supply of disposable safety PPE. (Disposable gloves, P2 masks, clear glasses, disposable overalls.)
- Stations and work locations should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, as a guide we recommend at the start and end of each shift. This should include the interior of vehicles, BAs, keyboards etc. It is vital that we minimise the risk of spreading any illness amongst ourselves.
- Personal hygiene, regular washing of clothing, towels, bedding and other washable material products will help limit any exposure.
- The use of station gyms are as follows:
 - strictly one firefighter in the Fitness Room at any time
 - exercise sessions must not exceed one hour
 - strict hygiene practices must be observed, including hand hygiene and the wipe down of equipment before and after use.
 - must consult the Station Commander regarding the availability of the Fitness Room on the day they desire to use it, scheduling their session if/as available.
 - per existing Fitness Program procedures, must enter the commencement and completion times of their session into the eOccurrence Book (eOB).
- Permanent firefighters:
 - only on duty personnel are permitted use of the Fitness Room.
- Retained firefighters:
 - must be at the station, as reflected in EOB, solely for the use of the Fitness Room.
 - must observe strict social distancing and hygiene guidelines at the station.
 - [Guideline: in line with directives to permanent firefighters, it is recommended, provided all other current directives in controlling exposure to COVID-19 are adhered to, that retained staff have access to the Fitness Room up to 2 times per week]



SitRep 17

- FRNSW Fitness Rooms NOT in fire stations may NOT be used (Greenacre, Emergency Services Academy)
- Stations/appliances are not to attend other stations and/or other FRNSW locations unless it is in the course of responding to an emergency or other operational requirement such as a standby or move up.
- Communication centre (Comcen) staff are essential to FRNSW operations therefore all Comcen relievers are instructed to remain in their respective Comcen even if spare. They should not be performing relief duties or standbys.

Training

All non-critical face to face training is to stop until and including the 13 of April 2020 except for the following which must be observed with social distancing and appropriate risk mitigating measures:

- Appliance crossover training to keep an appliance/capability online (no license upgrades)
- Return to work assessments (one on one)
- Station training program for permanents and retained on the proviso that permanents do these as a single station platoon and retained in their platoons as discussed
- Comsafe staff have suspended all training conducted externally, except for Fire warden training at COVID-19 isolation hotels. (this is deemed critical to protect firefighters, and other emergency personnel, as these hotels now have specific “invacuation plans”). Members that respond to these hotels should familiarise themselves with these new procedures.

Response

These provisions are to be observed by permanent and retained members:

- When more than one station/appliance is attending an incident and it is not readily apparent that the second and subsequent arriving crews are going to get to work, the second and subsequent arriving crews are to remain in the appliance, contact the IC by fireground radio and only alight the appliance if required.
- If responding to an incident at either a hospital, aged care facility or COVID-19 confirmed case location in addition to your normal PPC – wear disposable gloves and a mask if your BA is not donned. (The mask is both for your added protection as well as for members of the public in these locations who may be exposed to illness from us.)
- Nursing homes/hospitals or other at-risk locations. If not notified an AFA is an actual fire by FireCom, witnesses, or representative. Only one FRNSW firefighter will enter the facility to investigate and determine the cause of the AFA and confirm the point of alarm, that is reflected on the AFA panel. Once confirmed the AFA panel will be reset.
- When entering a facility, FRNSW crews will don nitrile gloves, a disposable P2 respirator mask and clear safety glasses to provide personal protection against surface contact.
- The remaining FRNSW crew will remain pre-deployed outside, equipped ready to deploy if required
- If responding to an Assist Ambulance call and there is a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case (flu symptoms) in addition to your normal duty wear crews (minimum required) should wear, disposable gloves, masks, eye protection, and either disposable overalls/gown or a spillage suit.



SitRep 17

Retained

- All firefighters marked Compulsory Available, Available or Blank in GARTAN will be paid for the fire call.
- Percentages for fire calls will be frozen for this period.
- GARTAN will be reverted to remote access.
- Members that are available but do not attend must still record themselves on their timesheet in GARTAN as one of the three options available.
- **Consistent with our past instructions, members should not 'follow on' in their cars. The only possible way of knowing that 4 firefighters are going to be in the fireground is if they are in the same truck. SAFE and effective minimum crewing is exactly what it says...**
- It's recommended that each station should break up into two clearly defined platoons. If possible, split Captains and Deputies evenly onto each platoon. Each platoon should minimise 'new' contact - for example, members of the same household or those in the same primary physical workplace should be put on the same platoon where possible.
- At mixed stations, Platoons shall if possible, align to permanent rosters. This is to help minimise contact with multiple crews unnecessarily (so Retained Platoon A should where possible only turn out with Permanent A and C platoons and Retained Platoon B should where possible only turn out with Permanent B and D platoons).
- Availability should be provided by 1800 hrs the previous day.
- As a result of the smaller number of available members and given that the Department are now paying for attendance based on availability on GARTAN, it is important that you keep your availability as up to date and accurate as possible.
- If a retained station cannot separate crews in at least two groups, then we say you minimise crew contact by running a 'station full' model. This means:
 - the first four members arriving at the station attend the call.
 - If a fifth member arrives then they shall attend the watch room, and inform any other members arriving to not enter the station and update them as to if they are required by monitoring the call or liaising with the IC.
- If this arrangement is not working in your location, please contact your station delegate if you have elected one, or the Retained Sub-Branch Secretary, and/or Junior Vice President to discuss. We will then consider other arrangements together with Local Zone Command with the emphasis on reducing exposures.

Government assistance

Many, especially retained members, will have primary employment in addition to your work with FRNSW as a retained firefighter and we have had a number of calls to the office about your entitlement to the recently announced Job Keeper policy.

The union movement has been central in negotiating the wage subsidy policy and an ACTU Factsheet can be found here: https://www.actu.org.au/media/1449028/cv04-41-jobkeeper_factsheet.pdf



SitRep 17

This factsheet broadly outlines the policy and eligibility. It specifically states that employees are required to nominate a 'primary employer' and notify that employer if they have multiple jobs (can only claim once).

On page 8 of this factsheet from the Australian Tax Office you can find information for those who have more than one employer.

In Summary, you can receive the JobKeeper payment if you still have other employment. Employees need to nominate one employer as their primary employer as you are only eligible for the JobKeeper payment from one employer, your primary employer. That employer needs to meet the requirements to be eligible for the JobKeeper payment. You can continue to work as a retained firefighter and receive Job Keeper for any other job you held where you are eligible.

Sole Traders may also be eligible for JobKeeper. We encourage members in that circumstance to read the fact sheets and where required seek independent advice specific to your situation.

The union movement has welcomed the JobKeeper subsidy but has some concerns for those who it will not assist including some casual workers and migrant workers.

You can participate in the campaign work of the union movement by searching and using #wagesubsidyforall and #NoWorkerLeftBehind on Twitter and Facebook. You can read the ACTU's updates and actions here: <https://www.actu.org.au/coronavirus>

In Unity,

Leighton Drury
State Secretary