



SitRep 56/2021

SafeWork say: Wrong way, go back

This week SafeWork NSW met with FRNSW to discuss complaints concerning the adequacy of consultation and risk mitigation strategies surrounding proposed medical work (PAD) and the Safety Visit program.

FRNSW have been ordered to scrap current processes and return to legitimate and methodical evidence-based consultation. This will also include FRNSW management having the appropriate understanding of their obligations under the WHS Act. In the job, we call this a straight talk.

Update on medical call work proposal

I have taken this opportunity to rewrite the planned update on PAD to also respond to Commissioner Baxter's email this afternoon.

FRNSW's proposal for members to undertake the "PAD program remains in dispute with the IRC, as it has since lodgement in 2020. The IRC clearly stated the program is an extra claim outside of the normal duties of firefighters. Commissioner Sloan noted that evidence-based consultation and discussion was required to determine how the work is to be performed, whether the work is safe, appropriately resourced, and remunerated. FBEU members understand this and agree - as proven by the long-standing 2015 SGM decision on medical work. FRNSW have continually failed in its obligations to progress these discussions with your representatives and you.

This week, SafeWork NSW intervened in the risk assessment for PAD, which had failed to meet the basic requirements for consultation and for workplace health and safety. FRNSW have had to throw its risk assessment out. The IRC, SafeWork NSW and the FBEU have continually encouraged FRNSW to approach this issue the correct way. FRNSW are not only required to do so by law they have an obligation to consider their staff- an obligation it all too readily ignores. It's not a big ask.

The notion that 'FBEU members don't want to help the community' is utterly unprofessional, divisive, dangerous and untrue. If FRNSW wants to see why there is disengagement within the organisation than they need to look no further than the correspondence to staff from the Commissioner.

It is nothing more than vacuous posturing which reeks of desperation: Desperation which may come from a promise to deliver the same shambolic medical work programs that NZ firefighters got. The program NZ firefighters are still trying to fix.

<https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2019/08/firefighter-mental-health-a-crisis-union.html>

Ploughing blindly ahead are actions I would expect of an organisation either seriously out of touch or seriously out of its depth. Maybe both. Don't get my criticism of the organisation and of the process wrong. The FBEU agree that the safe introduction of a well-thought-out medical work model could have a positive impact on our community. We have seen as much in other brigades across the globe. We welcome a genuine conversation about the capacity for this work to be introduced properly. The community deserve this. Not 'thoughts and prayers'.



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The FBEU acknowledges the hard work of our members, day-in-day-out, for our communities. I want to apologise on behalf of FRNSW for any suggestion that you don't already do this or that you don't have concern for the community. We are the best at what we do and we serve our communities well every day. Time for FRNSW ELT and the Government to do the same.

COVID Level 4 restrictions

With the first stage of the 'NSW Roadmap to Freedom' coming into effect on Monday 11th October, members of the community will be able to move more freely between LGA's. The advice received by the FBEU is the projected number of COVID infections in the community is expected to increase significantly.

The FBEU takes the health and safety of its members seriously and after discussions with FRNSW, believe the best way to protect members is to continue to limit the movements of firefighters and staff at stations. This measure, along with following COVID guidelines at incidents will minimise firefighters exposure risk.

Therefore, the **Statewide COVID Level 4 pandemic restrictions** code red issued 20th August 2021 and contact changeovers will remain in place until FRNSW can demonstrate the provision of a safe workplace, to the satisfaction of the FBEU.

LGAs of concern return to work

There has been confusion around public health orders and the ability for members to attend their normal place of work due to residing in specific LGAs and vaccination status requirements associated with these areas. With the removal of the LGA's of concern the FBEU is advising all vaccine hesitant members who were unable to attend their rostered shifts due to PHO's to resume working as normal from Monday 11th October.

This is an agreed position with FRNSW, therefore if there is any resistance from zone management, please contact your SCOM rep or the FBEU office immediately.

Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT)

The FBEU has been advocating for FRNSW to commence RAT testing for several months. We are pleased to announce that a trial has taken place today, Friday 8th October, at a multi-agency hazard reduction with further trials to come in the near future at the ESA. More to follow.

In Unity,

Leighton Drury
State Secretary