

FIRE SERVICES BILL SELECT COMMITTEE 2017

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Submitter: Kieran Purcell

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My name is Kieran Purcell and I am a Leading fire-fighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Melbourne. I have been a very proud member of the MFB for the past 14 years following in my fathers, Senior Station Officer Harry Purcell (ret) and Uncle Station Officer John Purcell's (dec) footsteps.

Within my immediate family I have two brothers and myself who have chosen careers with Victorian Fire Services continuing our proud family tradition. One a senior forest fire management officer/fuel management with the DELWP and the other a career fire-fighter with the CFA stationed at Sunbury. Currently I rotate between Thomastown Fire station where I perform my duty as a road accident, trench and urban search and rescue operator, and VEMTC Training College where I instruct in Structural fire-fighting.

I have been a volunteer for over 20 years, starting at Taggerty CFA and now currently a Volunteer with Kilmore CFA. In that time I have responded to many fires as a Volunteer, from a Petrol Tanker Rollover on the Hume to most notably being a Ground observer and fire-fighter for the Kilmore CFA on February 11 2009 (Black Saturday). Through this work as a volunteer I have appeared in the SP Ausnet trial in the Supreme Court in defence of the CFA, along with assisting the Phoenix taskforce who were investigating the response on that fateful day.

My involvement as a Volunteer and a Career fire-fighter has allowed me to observe how fire coverage is achieved in this state. Both Career and Volunteer fire services are imperative, we are both proud and passionate about our work and the people we protect.

But the current model needs to change.

We need a fire appliance turning up to structure fires within 7.7 minutes in metropolitan Melbourne and major regional centres. This figure is not set by KPI's this is set by physics.

A small fire in a room will reach flashover 609C (every flammable item in the room will ignite) within 3 to 8 minutes depending on ventilation ie. Door left open.

To extinguish this fire, a crew, consisting of 1 pump operator/driver, a Station officer/crew leader, and a BA crew consisting of a minimum of two fire-fighters needs to advance a charged hose line into the house, positioning themselves between the fire and any section of the building/ casualties that is yet to be involved in fire.

A second BA crew from the next fire appliance will then enter and perform the search and rescue/establish a second line on the fire. This is what is required to perform a safe fire attack and search and rescue within a residential house.

However without this timely response physics will take over.

The single room fire will flashover into nearby rooms at a rate of one room per three mins "ventilation dependent", the initial crew entering the house will encounter a much larger fire. The survivability within this house will drastically decrease as crews will now be experiencing the neutral plane lowering "smoke logging" and intense radiant heat.

If the second crew is not as timely or qualified in all aspects of structural fire-fighting they will give the initial crew no backup in the event of becoming trapped in a rapidly progressing structure fire.

From my experience the problem faced in the Melbourne fringe is that we never know the skills or experience that a CFA volunteer truck may arrive with. Often they will have no BA qualified fire-fighters to back up our initial operations. This is not their fault as volunteers have lives and jobs to attend but it can seriously affect my safety and ultimately the outcome of the fire.

This crew will now face the dilemma of an aggressive internal attack on a growing fire, searching the house for the community members we have sworn to protect or self-preservation.

This is our current dilemma faced on a daily basis by career and volunteer crews with sections of metropolitan Melbourne and major regional centres.

A two minute search through calls over the past few days shows us sadly a very common example of our current fire cover in this state:

170616743 EXC SF AL<1> MOOROOLBARK, BRICE AV /STATION ST +
GEORGE ST <37 G12>

This is a fire call yesterday that Mooroolbark CFA could not turnout to in Mooroolbark due to volunteers being unavailable. This is just one of hundreds of examples of Volunteer appliances unable to respond or responding with a crew that is not qualified in essential fire-fighting requirements i.e. Breathing apparatus, structural fire fighting, pumping, EMR etc. which can and will be the difference between life and death on a fire ground.

To say I am passionate about seeing this fire service reform get through the upper house is an understatement

Volunteers do an amazing job, I have worked with and been one for years. However it is well overdue to revamp our fire coverage which has been largely unchanged in over 60 years across all of metropolitan Melbourne and major regional centres.

This is how we look after our community.