

WITNESS STATEMENT CORY JAMES WOODYATT

1. I, Cory James Woodyatt, Senior Station Officer (**SSO**) with the County Fire Authority (**CFA**), [REDACTED], in the State of Victoria, say as follows:
2. I have been employed by the CFA for approximately 15 years and 6 months. I currently hold the rank of SSO and I have held that rank for approximately three and a half years
3. As well as holding the rank of Senior Station Officer I hold the following qualifications/memberships:
 - i. UFU BCOM member
 - ii. Teleboom
 - iii. Ladder Platform
 - iv. High Angle Rope Operator
 - v. Steep Angle Rope Operator
 - vi. Confined Space Operator
 - vii. Road Rescue
4. I have also received a 15 Year Service Award, National Medal, and National Emergency Medal.
5. As a UFU member I have represented the UFU on numerous consultative committees/subcommittees including:
 - a. Enterprise Bargaining Implementation Committee
 - b. EBA negotiations
 - c. Appliance design
 - d. Station Design
 - e. Learning and Development
 - f. PPE/PPC subcommittee
 - g. Health, Safety and the Environment
6. I have read the UFU's submissions and I support the UFU's position.
7. I wish to add specifically further information on the following matters:

CFA TAIT RADIO

8. As a CFA fire fighter, I currently use the CFA Tait Radios
9. My experience of the radios is that they are not always fit for purpose. For example, I am stationed at Melton Fire Station. In October 2013 a new Shopping Centre built within our turn out area. Initially we were being turned out quite regularly to false alarms at the shopping centre and one structure fire. My experience as an incident controller was that as soon as my fire fighters entered the building I lost all contact with them via radio.
10. This is extremely dangerous as I do not know what is occurring inside the building. Further, it meant that I had to utilise a fire fighter as a runner who would relay messages in person between me and the fire ground. Alternatively I myself would enter the building and would leave another fire fighter outside who would relay messages to us inside. The need to use a fire fighter as a runner severely compromised our safety on the fire ground as, at that time, Melton Fire Station only

had three fire fighters meaning I was already turning out completely understaffed to manage an event of that nature, and had to utilise a vital resource of one firefighter to be the runner.

11. Consultation occurred between Centre management and Station staff which resulted in CFA having to put a repeating in the centre at a cost to overcome the communication issues. The same issue occurs at a number of facilities in our response area.
12. Further issues relating to staffing will be discussed below.
13. It is my view that the CFA purchased these radios because they were cheaper. As I understand, the CFA had committed to purchasing these radios prior to them even being tested and it quickly became apparent that they had real issues.
14. I am aware that even during the trial of these radios, testing showed that even standing on opposite sides of a glass door, fire fighters could not communicate with each other via radio. Further, we have tested them on station ourselves when sitting next to each around the table and have found that they simply fail on occasion.
15. I am at a loss to understand why the CFA would purchase these radios other than due to cost.

CFA PAGERS

16. New pagers were purchased approximately 3-4 years ago, and in my experience they are hit and miss on when they receive messages.
17. All CFA fire fighters are turned out by pager. Therefore, the pager is a critical piece of equipment to get us on the road.
18. It is quite often that we are all in a room and we notice that some people's pagers will receive the message whilst others don't.
19. I have noticed that this batch of new pagers, and the previous brand we used have had particular issues. I believe that the reason for this is because the CFA has purchased inferior, and most likely cheaper equipment.
20. Further, I note that many volunteer fire fighters have now installed a system called BART on their mobile phones. This system picks up on a pager message and automatically relays to their phone as a text message. I have noticed that, the volunteers at our station will receive that message on their phone before the pager even receives the message. This has made me seriously question the reliability of our pager system.

CFA's LACK OF SPARE APPLIANCES

21. On this matter I wish to add that if an appliance breaks down today, as an SSO I could spend hours of time trying to source a spare truck. I am therefore acutely aware of the lack of spare appliances in the CFA.
22. Further, due to this lack of spare appliances,
23. For example, I am aware that recently Ballarat City Fire Stations primary appliance (pumper) had a minor collision resulting in the need to be put out of commission. It took the members at that station two days to source a new primary appliance for that station. This means that for those two days, the city of Ballarat, a city of some 100,000 people had a reduced appliance response. Normally the station responds with 2 x pumpers. On this occasion it was required to respond with 1 x pumper and 1

x tanker. To add context, a pumper is an urban based appliance which will carry relevant gear to respond to urban type fires such as a structure fire. This includes BA's, atmospheric monitoring, positive pressure ventilation and in some cases EMR equipment. A tanker on the other hand is an appliance designed to respond to rural type incidents such as bushfires and grass fires and it carries significantly more water but a lot less equipment.

24. In that particular example, it was requested by professional fire fighters that they utilise a local volunteer brigade's pumper. This request was refused by the CFA. The next day, that volunteer Brigade received a call and failed to turn out. This means that that appliance was not utilised. Had it been at Ballarat City Fire Station, it could have been used by professional fire fighters and turned out as part of the response.
25. The lack of spare appliances in the CFA has resulted in us being required to turn out appliances which are some decades old and have significant safety risks associated. It is my belief that this situation has arisen as a direct result of budget cuts and a failure of the CFA to properly maintain their fleet.

TRAINING DEFICIENCIES

26. I am aware that due to lack of funding across the districts and inequality in funding at districts, training opportunities have been limited.
27. For example, in District 8 fire fighters have a regular opportunity as part of the promotional courses to attend a training centre and receive a full days training on the PAD to gain practical fire fighting training. In district 14 on the other hand, this opportunity is not available.
28. In my 15 ½ years of service as a professional fire fighter, I have limited opportunity to attend hot fire training at a training ground. I can honestly say that the last opportunity I had was approx. 10 years ago.
29. This is common across the districts and leads to different standards of training and opportunities to access training depending on where you are stationed.

CFA STAFF SHORTAGES

30. As an Officer, I find the CFA's system of cross-crewing particularly frustrating and dangerous.
31. For example, at Ballarat City Fire Station, there are 7 fire fighters on shift who are responsible for 6 appliances. there are 3 specialist appliances been the aerial appliance, hazmat and BA van. These specialist appliances are absolutely crucial if an incident comes in requiring their response. It is important to note that these specialist appliances are required to turn out to a relevant incident from Bacchus Marsh to the South Australian Border.
32. If there is a structure fire in Ballarat City's primary turn out area, as an Incident Controller I would turn out both the primary appliances with four fire fighters on one appliance, and three on the other. This leaves me in the very difficult situation where if another incident occurs, or I require one of the other appliances on station at this incident, i.e. the ladder platform to perform a rescue, I need to find a way to transport one of my much needed fire fighters from the fire ground, back to the fire station to pick up the appliance, bring it back to the fire ground and then, somehow manage to have the seven fire fighters operate all three appliances. Ideally, you need at least

two fire fighters to run a ladder platform as you need one fire fighter in the cage, and one operating from the pulpit. This means I am left with only five fire fighters (including myself as the incident controller) for the other appliances. I would usually therefore have to resort to having two in BA working inside, two outside which may or may not be in BA one if which would be operating the pump. If something was to go wrong inside and a fire fighter set off their duress alarm I would need to quickly get those outside, into BA and inside the structure leaving myself to operate the pump to make sure water is still getting on the fire and continue to manage the incident. In the back of my mind, as an Incident Controller I will always be thinking at times like these, what might happen if an incident was to occur in Ballarat City's support area (which may be some 3200kms away) where a specialist resource such as the Hazmat was required.

33. This situation does occur regularly and all I can do in this situation is try to recall professional staff and wait for them to arrive and turn out the appliance. This can take half an hour to an hour depending on how quickly I can get off-shift fire fighters to the station.
34. The stress that these types of situations put on the Incident Controller in charge of a fire ground is immense. It means that not only are we responsible for managing the incident and the safety of the fire fighters and public on the fire ground, but we can now also need to divert our attention to help find resources for a second incident occurring some kilometres away.
35. I chose the example of Ballarat because I was stationed there for 5 years. I understand that the CFA's response to my concerns outlined above would be that I can rely on further support from Volunteers. In the greater Ballarat area there are 5 volunteer Brigades with approximately some 120 operational volunteers. In my experience though I would not get extra support from volunteers very often in particular during the day time hours when people are at work. Further, volunteers are not able to turn out the specialist appliances I have back at station as they do not have the necessary qualifications so they cannot alleviate that concern.
36. As an Incident controller I would strongly support a move to appliance based crewing. Having sufficient staff to be able to safely crew all the appliances would alleviate huge amounts of stress I feel every day about not being able to provide the service to my community that I want to be able to provide.
37. I am aware that due to the recent increase in recruitment and a variation to the Staffing Schedule contained in the EBA, that we will now have appliance based crewing for all our primary appliances at professional Fire Stations. I think this is the most positive action the CFA has taken in years and I commend the work of the UFU and its members for achieving this.
38. I have read the UFU's submission regarding OH&S best practice and the outcomes of the Caple report and I support this contention. I agree that best practice requires seven on a fire ground to safely respond to a standard structure fire.

BEST TRAINING MODELS

39. I was previously a CFA instructor at the CFA's training facility at Fiskville. During that time I trained in technical rescue, training external agencies such as corrections Victoria and occasionally volunteers from Districts.

40. As an Incident Controller training models of professional fire-fighters means that I have certainty, depending on their rank and qualifications, exactly what their skill set is, and I can trust that their training has been rigorous in that skill set. When a volunteer response comes on scene, I do not have the same certainty. For example, in Melton we are supported by Rockbank Volunteer Brigade who will often arrive on scene but not any would have BA training.
41. Further, the CFA's method of training volunteers is ad hoc and not well planned. For example in the low urban areas, which Rockbank's turn out area is classified as, they are required to have a minimum number of volunteers BA trained. The problem in training in this way is that while there may be a minimum trained, you can't guarantee that these will be the fire fighters you get on scene.
42. Further, skills maintenance for volunteers is a particular issue as they may not turn out regularly and may not get the opportunities to undertaking training to maintain their skills.
43. Further. I do not believe that current assessment of all volunteers is sufficiently rigorous to give me comfort as an Incident Controller that volunteers can always operate their skills safely. For example, prior to Melton Fire Station getting professional fire-fighters, about 10 volunteers were endorsed as pumper driver/operators. The decision that the incoming OIC took when we came into Melton Fire Station was to have the volunteers undertake a challenge test to gain an understanding of what skills they had. We now ensure that our volunteers receive the necessary training to meet the same standard as professional fire fighters.
44. Since staffing Melton the pumper has changed from an Isuzu to a more state of the art Scania. Conversion training and assessing was required to allow you to become endorsed in the new pumper. We have only 5 volunteers endorsed.

INTEROPERABILITY

45. I support the UFU's call for greater interoperability between the fire services and see huge benefits in these developments.
46. I note that a particular recent experience I had which highlighted the lack on interoperability between the agencies to me involved a structure in Melton. In this instance, we were required to determine the cause of the fire however I was unable to source a CFA Fire Investigator from anywhere. Within the CFA/ Fire Investigator is a specialist trained fire-fighter who can investigate a fire and determine its cause. In this instance I attempted to find an MFB resource to undertake this tasks and was notified by CFA Headquarters that there was no agreement between the MFB and CFA to utilise each other's fire investigators and as such I was unable to use and MFB fire investigator and had to leave the incident not being able to determine the cause of fire.
47. Further, in this instance, one of the CFA Fire Investigators is currently on the CFA/MFB secondment program and is seconded to the MFB but even he was not allowed to return and do this job.

LACK OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT

48. I can honestly say that I have lost all trust and confidence in CFA Senior Management. They have consistently acted in a manner that has resulted in me

believing that they do not have the best interests of professional fire-fighters, and in fact all fire-fighters as their first priority.

49. Their constant renegeing on agreements, refusing to recruit the extra fire-fighters needed, bringing unsafe or substandard equipment and generally acting in a way to seek to denigrate the standing of professional fire-fighters has lead me to a point where I do not believe the relationship with this current Senior Management can be repaired.
50. Further, their actions relating to the Fiskville training college and the subsequent cover-ups (which are subject to a separate inquiry) have completely killed any final confident or trust I have in our Senior Management. (See Attached)
51. In the last three year [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has seemed absent particularly in relation to major events.
52. I no longer trust [REDACTED], and I believe that many other professional fire-fighters in the CFA feel the same and I am concerned what impact this has on our overall chain of command.



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Cory Woodyatt

Date: 30 August 2015