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Union tells of risky shortage as fire brigade fleet kept off the street

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Thornbury fire trucks sit idle in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Technical Services Division depot. Picture: Eugene Hyland Source: News Corp Australia

THE Metropolitan Fire Brigade is a “ticking time bomb” with 31 of its trucks sitting in workshops waiting to be fixed.

The Herald Sun can reveal the emergency service’s entire reserve fleet of 29 trucks is out of action. The situation is so dire, an additional two training trucks have been sent to fire stations to replace broken vehicles because there are no other engines available, the United Firefighters Union says. It also says this has caused a teaching program to stop and there is a backlog of 150 firefighters waiting to be trained on how to drive a fire truck.

The MFB confirmed “approximately 30 vehicles” were in workshops but refused to comment about the training trucks and the firefighters waiting to be trained.

The union says the trucks have not been fixed due to mismanagement while the MFB blames another union over industrial action, which ended nine months ago.

“This is a ticking time bomb and if we have one more truck failure the community will have reduced protection and the potential of loss of life and property damage will rise,” UFU Victoria secretary Peter Marshall said.

“This has never happened before - it is unprecedented - and it’s purely down to MFB mismanagement.

“They are playing with people’s lives,” he added.

Mr Marshall said the community had a right to know more than \$25 million of vehicles it had paid for through taxes were simply sitting in a workshop yard unable to be used.

The MFB said it was “very comfortable” with the current level of coverage and said in the event of an emergency, it would call on the CFA fleet for support.

“There is no issue with -operational service delivery,” Acting Deputy Chief Officer David Bruce said.

“The organisation does have a backlog of vehicle maintenance stemming from previous industrial action with approximately 30 vehicles in for servicing maintenance and repairs.”

He added: “In the event of a major incident, the MFB has spare vehicles currently being used for training and can call on the extensive CFA fleet for support.”

The UFU said there were three fire trucks intended to be used for training, however the vehicles had not passed safety checks, were not commissioned and could not currently be used for training.

“There is a critical shortage of fire trucks and if another goes offline, there is a chance of station closures in metropolitan Melbourne,” Mr Marshall said.

“The MFB may say it has been a hectic summer for bushfires, but that’s the job we’re in.

“The fire services are supposed to plan in advance, not react afterwards.

“Never before have we run out of fire trucks.”

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