

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009 – 2010**

**NSW FIRE BRIGADES ADVICE**

**Questions from Mrs Pavey:**

**QUESTION:**

1. Of the 26 fires that occurred as at September 2009 as a result of problems with ceiling insulation and down lights, how many more have occurred since then, and has anyone being injured or lost their house to the fire?

**ANSWER:**

As at 4 December 2009 there have been 33 additional ceiling fires.

There have been a number of people treated for smoke inhalation. No injuries have been recorded.

While a range of damage to houses has resulted from fires that have originated in ceiling insulation, no houses have been destroyed.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**QUESTIONS:**

2. How many staff cars does the NSW Fire Brigade currently own?
3. How much of the budget was spent on staff cars? (including purchase, maintenance, repair, etc)

**ANSWERS:**

2. The NSWFB has a total of 242 passenger type vehicles broken down into the following categories

<b>Category</b>	<b>Leased</b>	<b>Owned</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b><i>PASSENGER</i></b>			
Light	0	0	0
Small	0	11	11
Medium	2	5	7
Large	3	67	70
Upper Large	2	0	2
Compact SUV	1	37	38
Medium SUV	2	41	43
Large SUV	0	0	0
People Movers	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>173</b>
<b><i>LIGHT COMMERCIAL</i></b>			
Standard Utility	9	12	21
PU/CC 2x4	2	11	13
PU/CC 4x4	2	28	30
Van < 1 tonne	0	0	0
Van > 1 tonne	0	4	4
Bus – 8-16	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>69</b>

All non-packaged passenger vehicles are fitted with two-way radios, lights and sirens, and are marked with NSWFB markings. Eight vehicles allocated to operational SES officers are fitted with concealed lights and sirens and are part of the officers' salary packages. Two packaged vehicles for non-operational positions are not fitted with lights and sirens. The ten packaged vehicles are included in the total of 242 passenger type vehicles.

3. **Table reflects budgeted 2009-10 costs**

<b>Item</b>	<b>2009/10 Budget</b> <b>\$</b>
Leasing Costs	1,200,000
Capital Costs	2,345,000
Emergency service fit out and strip, maintenance and service	250,000
Fuel	642,152
CTP	146,393
Registration	130,489
Comprehensive Insurance	171,315
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,885,349</b>

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**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**QUESTION:**

4. When will the report on the NSW Fire Brigade ICAC investigation into corruption and travelling rorts be finished and made public?

**ANSWER:**

The NSWFB and ICAC received an anonymous letter alleging fraudulent travel claims by a senior officer in July 2008. ICAC asked the NSWFB to deal with the matter, and a retired Judge was engaged via IAB services. His subsequent investigation confirmed irregularities. This led to an internal NSWFB disciplinary process, recovery of monies and demotion of an officer. The matter was also referred to NSW Police, and charges were laid resulting in a hearing at the Sydney Central District Court. ICAC was advised of the NSWFB's actions and have indicated that no further action will be taken by that agency.

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**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions from Mrs Pavey:**

**QUESTION:**

5. How many people are being investigated who are currently seeking to obtain retirement packages?

**ANSWER:**

The NSWFB does not offer “retirement packages”.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions from Mrs Pavey:**

**QUESTION:**

6. Currently, how many brigade officers have a complaint lodged to the Professional Standards and Conduct Officer.

**ANSWER:**

Seventeen (17) complaints against brigade officers are currently being investigated by the Professional Standards and Conduct Officer Unit. These range from minor grievances between employees to allegations of misconduct.

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**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions from Mrs Pavey:**

**QUESTION:**

7. How many complaints are currently being investigated by the Internal Audit Bureau?
8. How many complaints have been lodged with the IAB over the past 5 years and how many of them have resulted in disciplinary action being enforced?

**ANSWER:**

7. Four complaints are currently being investigated by the IAB Services.
8. Over the last 5 years, there have been 9 matters referred to IAB Services that would be classified as complaints about behaviour of NSWFB staff with some involving multiple complainants.

Of the 9:

- 4 are ongoing matters as per 1 above;
- 1 resulted in disciplinary and criminal action;
- 3 resulted in remedial action (some claims founded); and
- 1 resulted in no action being taken (claims unfounded)

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**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions from Mrs Pavey:**

**QUESTION:**

9. How many allegations that have been investigated have been found to be breaches of the NSWFB Harassment Prevention Policy?

**ANSWER:**

For the period 2008-09, 10 harassment complaints were formally investigated through the Professional Standards and Conducts Office, of which 4 were substantiated.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions from Mrs Pavey:**

**QUESTION:**

10. How much is it costing the NSWFB to sub in officers at brigades where other officers are absent due to being unfit for work etc?

**ANSWER:**

The New South Wales Fire Brigades utilises existing relieving staff to cover absences. Only when there are no relieving staff available or where distance precludes the use of relieving staff are absences covered by staff on overtime.

NSWFB does not capture data relating to absences due to harassment.

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**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**RURAL FIRE SERVICE ADVICE**

**Questions by the Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**

11. Given reports in the Sunday Telegraph that there are approximately 1.3 million houses in NSW that are in high risk bush fire areas, why will you not release the location of these houses to the public so that they can adequately prepare especially given that Victoria has?

**Answer:**

Bush fire prone areas are identified on local Bush Fire Prone Land Maps, which have now been prepared by all local councils that have a bush fire risk management plan. The risk plans are developed locally for all bush fire prone areas in NSW highlighting local risks as well as strategies to reduce the risk to that community. This information is available to the community through the local councils and S149 planning certificates.

Approximately 1.3 million properties across the State are situated within 100 metres of at least one hectare of bushland, putting them at high risk of bush fire.

The NSW RFS has advised me that risk in this context is determined by a range of factors including: vegetation, slope, fire history and weather. Risk changes over time according to weather, drought indexes and community preparation.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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12. Given also that 73 per cent of addresses in the Blue Mountains are located within 130 metres of bushland, does the RFS provide additional funding to the local brigades?

**Answer:**

There are addresses in many parts of New South Wales that are within bush fire prone areas.

The Government is providing record funding to ensure adequate resources are matched to the need of all RFS districts in the State, including the Blue Mountains which has been allocated more than \$30 million over the last ten years.

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**Minister for Emergency Services**

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13. Have there been any injuries from RFS volunteers or paid workers falling from the CAT 1 trucks steps?

**Answer:**

Yes. Over the last five years there have been 27 claims involving falls or slips while embarking or alighting Cat 1 vehicles.

The RFS advises that modifications to the design of the steps have been made to mitigate the problem.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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14. How many RFS volunteers or paid workers have claimed Work Cover for an issue involving falling from the Cat 1 truck steps onto the ground?

**Answer:**

See answer to Question 13.

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**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**RURAL FIRE SERVICE ADVICE**

**Questions by the Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**

15. How long ago did you start working on the new utility shirts project?

**Answer:**

The shirt was originally produced for the Service's air base operators in 2005 and has subsequently been improved for the use by all members who wish to wear them.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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16. How much will the entire roll out of the new utility shirts cost (including testing and research etc)?

**Answer:**

The shirts are not a compulsory part of uniform and therefore the cost to each District is dependent on the uptake by the volunteers in the District. The unit cost for each shirt is \$59.40 plus GST. Testing of the shirts formed part of the Service's regular testing regime designed to ensure the highest level of protection for our volunteers and as such it is not possible to separate the specific testing and research costs for these shirts.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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17. Were the volunteers consulted? Why were they not consulted? (VFFA said they were not and were furious about it given their members reaction).

**Answer:**

The volunteers were consulted through the normal consultative committee process involving the Rural Fire Service Association (RFSA) the officially recognised body representing both volunteers and staff alike.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions by the Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**

18. Where are the T-shirts produced?

**Answer:**

The shirts are produced in Australia and supplied as part of a Government contract.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions by the Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**

19. When will all brigades be issued with them?

**Answer:**

As the shirt is not a compulsory part of the uniform the question of timing of their issue rests with the volunteers who choose to request them.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions by the Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**

20. Are RFS volunteers ever disciplined for speaking to the media?

**Answer:**

The RFS advises me that there are guidelines provided for all members of the NSW RFS in regard to their dealings with the media. According to records held at head office, there are no incidents of any volunteers having been disciplined for speaking to the media.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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21. If so, how many have had this disciplined enforced over the past 5 years?

**Answer:**

See answer to Q20.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions by the Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**

22. Has anyone ever been de registered as a member of the RFS after disciplinary action has been taken?

**Answer:**

See answer to Q20.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions by the Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**

23. At the Brooms Head RFS meeting in the wake of the fires, why didn't a head office RFS member attend?

**Answer:**

The NSW RFS became aware of a community meeting about the fires after the meeting was held. The NSW RFS was not invited to attend the meeting and is not aware of any other land management or fire authority that was invited to attend.

Steve Whan MP

**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions by the Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**

24. Prior to the Brooms Head fire, were all of the fire trails clear?

**Answer:**

The NSW RFS has advised that the Clarence Valley Bush Fire Management Committee developed the Village Protection Strategy for Brooms Head which, among other things, identifies and classifies fire trails. The NSW RFS confirms that all Primary fire trails were open and in good condition.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

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**Questions by the Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**

25. Prior to the Brooms head fire, when was the last time hazard reduction burns had taken place?

**Answer:**

The Brooms Head Village Protection Strategy has been implemented on an ongoing basis by the Bush Fire Management Committee. Prior to the Brooms Head (Centre Road) Fire, various hazard reduction works were completed including maintenance of asset protection zones in and around the village and two hazard reduction burns by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

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26. Do the RFS have regulations ruling the farming of pine trees in NSW?

**Answer:**

No.

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27. Does the RFS have any role in managing pine tree plantations?

**Answer:**

No.

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28. When was the last time the Hawkesbury Bushfire Management Committee carried out hazard reduction in the Mountain Lagoon community, including of the surrounding National Parks land?

**Answer:**

The RFS advises that in 2004, approximately 1500 hectares was hazard reduced by the Hawkesbury Bushfire Management Committee to south-west of Mountain Lagoon village and North of Mountain Lagoon Road. Further hazard reduction north of Mountain Lagoon is scheduled to be undertaken in 2010.

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29. Is the RFS aware of the concerns of the Mountain Lagoon community in regards to the lack of an alternative access/exit road to and from the area, which could be dangerous in a bushfire?

**Answer:**

Yes.

The NSW RFS has been liaising with Hawkesbury Council, the authority responsible for maintaining Mountain Lagoon Road, concerning the state of that Road.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Emergency Services**