

Submission
No 54

**THE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS OF THE NSW
AMBULANCE SERVICE**

Name: Mr William Clifford

Date received: 23/06/2008

My name is William Clifford and I hereby make a formal submission to the Upper House into The Management and operations of the NSW Ambulance Service (inquiry).

My background is I was a member of the NSW Fire Brigades for over forty years and just retired. I have received the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) in 2007 for my work on providing support programs within the NSWFB. I was granted a Churchill Fellowship in 1994 to look at Trauma within the Emergency Service and in 2002 was presented with the Commissioners Commendation for Meritorious Service.

I have worked closely with many Ambulance officers during that period. My submission relates to Employee Assistance and Critical Incident Support after any incident which may impact on employees of the Ambulance Service.

In 1989 I made a submission to the Board of Fire Commissioners for a Critical Incident Support Program for the NSW Fire Brigades. This was accepted and prior to it being put in place I met with senior members of the Ambulance as they already had a Critical Incident Program in place at that time, with Peers (ambulance officers) trained to support their colleagues after any major incident. We were able to use some of their ideas in our program.

The NSW Fire Brigades already had an Employee Assistance Program in place (1980) and a Chaplaincy Program (1986) but it was recognised that more assistance was needed to meet the needs of the fire fighters which was why the Critical Incident program was accepted by the Department. In about 1992 the Ambulance program ceased. It was tried again on a few occasions during the 1990s but I believe did not get going again or if it did only for a short while. At the end of the 90s Professor Beverly Raphael while head of the Health Dept I believe put out a directive that Critical Incident Programs were not to be used by the Ambulance Service.

Our program began in 1989 just as the Kempsey Bus accident occurred this was our first incident involving the Critical Incident program of the NSWFB. I will just provide the facts on a few major incidents proving the use of Critical Incident programs.

Kempsey Bus accident 1989 (35 dead) no suicides or loss of staff

Major bush fires (1993/4) with loss of life of fire fighters due to the fires. No suicides or loss of staff

Thredbo Landslide 18 deaths, over 100 fire fighters on sight to assist in rescue/body recovery. no suicides or time off or loss of staff

On many occasions after major incidents Ambulance officers have attended NSW Fire Brigades Critical Incident debriefings as they have had no contact from their department and needed some help. On other occasions a phone call may have come but no assistance was offered. I believe the Ambulance Service has failed in its Duty of Care to its employees by not providing assistance at these times. The NSW Fire Brigades has a proven program for a Critical Incident Support, Employee Assistance and Chaplaincy for its employees after any incident which may impact on the employees. The Critical Incident Support Programme has the full support of the Fire Commissioner and all senior staff. There have been no suicides or loss of staff due to any incident since the Critical Incident Support Program has been introduced.

I believe that the Ambulance Service has failed to provide proper assistance to its employees (Duty Of Care) and that is one of the many reasons why there is many members leaving the service and the suicides that have taken place.

In making this submission, I wish to bring to your attention the importance of providing all types of support programmes for staff in the Ambulance Service and in the hope that a proper contact would be made with employees and assistance provided as may be necessary on all occasions.