



THE UNITED PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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URGENT CIRCULAR Light Tanker Safety Issues

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) is required by law to ensure it provides a safe workplace free from hazards.

For firefighters, this means the DFES is, amongst other things, required to provide firefighting appliances that are safe for use in emergency driving conditions.

It also means light tankers must be fit for use as bushfire firefighting appliances.

A number of unresolved safety issues have been identified regarding the current Light Tanker Fleet.

Light Tankers without Airbags Unsafe.

In July this year, DFES accepted that firefighters at the Osborne Park Fire Station, were within their rights to refuse to accept an aging light tanker that did not have airbags, because it was not safe to be driven under emergency driving conditions.

As a result, the light tanker was withdrawn from use and DFES gave the Union an undertaking the situation would not happen again.

Yet despite this commitment the same thing was recently repeated at the Butler Fire Station. A 2008 Light Tanker without airbags, was delivered to the station for use as an additional bush firefighting appliance.

It is not safe, lawful or reasonable to require firefighters to drive light tankers that lack basic safety features like airbags, which are standard fare in modern emergency vehicles.

If it was accepted by DFES in July that it was not safe for firefighters to drive light tankers without air bags, then consistent with the Department's undertaking at the time, these vehicles should be withdrawn from use.

Nothing has changed.

Crew Protection Issues

It appears the Crew Protection System (CPS) that was supposed to have been installed on all light tankers, to protect the vehicles, when in use in an off road environment, from radiant heat and/or ember attack, either

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- has not been fitted at all; or
- not correctly installed in accordance with DFES specifications.

There are reported gaps in lagging to protect critical components such as fuel lines, brakes and electrical wiring. There are also reports rear windows have not been removed as required and replaced with plating.

Added to these issues is the fact deluge systems are not able to be retro-fitted because light tankers cannot carry enough water, both to fight a fire and to provide deluge protection for people in the vehicle.

The dangers of being caught in a burn over in a light tanker, without a deluge system were made starkly clear on the ABC Documentary Series "Big Weather".

Go to the link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6qY_09iMSY to see what could happen if you are caught in a vehicle without deluge protection during a burn over.

Referred To Worksafe

A complaint has been made to Worksafe regarding the DFES Light Tanker Fleet and the use of light tankers as "attack firefighting appliances".

While this complaint is being investigated by Worksafe and in view of the serious safety risks, firefighters are urged to take the following steps for their own safety and the safety of their colleagues;

- Refuse to use and accept light tankers that do not have airbags;
- Do not use light tankers as "fire attack" appliances.
- Until the true extent of the gaps in CPS for light tankers is known, remediated & rectified, should only be used for command/control & reconnaissance and to assist with mop-up and patrol activities **where no running or live fire is involved**.

If you have any questions about the contents of this circular please contact the UPFU on 9228 8122 or by email admin@ufuofwa.net.au

Thanks



Tim Kucera
Secretary