



Working together to make a difference

NSW Rural Fire Service Supportive Employer Program

Supportive Employer Program

About the NSW RFS Supportive Employer Program

The NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) Supportive Employer Program has been developed to recognise the vital contribution employers make to the NSW RFS; in particular by releasing volunteers to attend incidents and other NSW RFS activities during work hours. The program seeks to recognise and acknowledge the contribution of employers and self employed volunteers.

The program aims to:

- formally and informally acknowledge the significant contribution employers and self employed volunteers make to the NSW RFS;
- encourage employers to become more flexible and supportive of their employees when called upon to perform their volunteer duties with the NSW RFS;
- educate employers about the type of work undertaken by NSW RFS volunteers and the skills and attributes NSW RFS volunteers bring to the workplace;
- increase public awareness and appreciation for the important role NSW RFS volunteers and their employers play in bush fire prevention and mitigation within NSW.

The NSW RFS Supportive Employer Program does not extend to include recognising, or publically acknowledging financial contributions and donations made by businesses or organisations to the NSW RFS.

Program definitions

The following definitions apply for the NSW RFS Supportive Employer Program:

Employers refers to small, medium and large businesses, government organisations, not-for-profit and private sector companies.

Self Employed volunteer refers to volunteers who run their own business; to include both sole traders and partnerships. The business must generate their principal source of income.

Supportive Employer Special Commendation is a special commendation honoured to businesses and self employed volunteers who have made an extraordinary contribution to the NSW RFS and their community.

Volunteer refers to a volunteer member of the NSW RFS.

NSW RFS refers to the NSW Rural Fire Service.

What is the NSW RFS Supportive Employer Program?

The NSW RFS Supportive Employer Program comprises of two parts:

1. A **toolkit** which assists Districts and Brigades. To recognise employers and self employed volunteers at local level through thank you letters and by inviting employers to locally held events. The toolkit also contains a guideline for employers about volunteering with the NSW RFS, and a guide for NSW RFS volunteers to assist them to structure conversations with their employer about their volunteer role.
2. A **Certificate of Appreciation and/ or Special Commendation** The Certificate of Appreciation is available all year round and the Special Commendation nomination opens around November and Closes around April. The Special Commendation is a wonderful way to publically recognise a combination of employers and self-employed volunteers across NSW who have made an extraordinary contribution to the NSW RFS.

Working together to make a difference

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NSW RFS Supportive Employer – Toolkit

This toolkit of resources has been developed to assist Districts and Brigades thank employers for their contribution to the NSW RFS and their local community.

The toolkit includes:

- a **Certificate of Appreciation**. This is a certificate signed by the Commissioner;
- **thank you letters**. Two thank you letters have been created to cover both employers and self employed volunteers. Districts are encouraged to personalise correspondence, for instance, by including details of a specific fire that an employee attended. Thank you letters can be signed by the District Manager;
- 'Volunteer Friendly Employer' **stickers**;
- **NSW RFS Supportive Employer Guide**. A fact sheet which can be distributed to existing and prospective employers of NSW RFS volunteers. The guide aims to increase awareness about the emergency management work undertaken by the NSW RFS and its volunteers;
- **Building a Good Relationship with your Employer, a guide for NSW RFS volunteers**. A fact sheet to enable volunteers to better structure a conversation with their employer about their volunteer role. It includes advice on how to negotiate leave arrangements, promote the benefits of volunteering and how to maintain employer goodwill;
- **How to apply the Toolkit and key messages**. Containing suggested ways Districts and Brigades can engage with local employers as well as a range of key messages that can be included in local speeches and/or media releases.

How to apply the Toolkit

Districts and Brigades can customise components of the program to suit their local area and the employer they are recognising. Options to expand and customise include:

- thank you telephone calls to employers;
- newspaper adverts or local radio announcements thanking employers for their contribution to the NSW RFS and the local community;
- personalising thank you letters to include details about fires their employees or self employed volunteers have attended and describing the positive impact this has had on the local community;

- the use of NSW RFS social media to thank local businesses e.g. Brigade or District Facebook announcement.

Inviting employers to local Brigade or District events is another way to thank employers; it is also a good opportunity to promote the NSW RFS and the work their employee undertakes in a voluntary capacity. You may consider inviting employers to award presentations (if their employee is a recipient), Brigade station openings, open days and other informal events like Brigade BBQs.

Presentations to local businesses, boards or other groups can help to promote to employers the benefits NSW RFS volunteers can bring to the workplace. The presentation may be specifically tailored to target employers, or may form part of a broader discussion that promotes volunteering, fire safety, community education and so forth.

Regional and District championships or training days are also fantastic ways to showcase the skills and abilities of NSW RFS volunteers. Why not invite local employers along so they can see first-hand how resourceful and professional NSW RFS volunteers are.

Remote Areas

It is at the discretion of Districts and Brigades to determine how best to recognise supportive employers in remote areas. Given the geographical distances involved it may be impractical to invite an employer to a Brigade event or other official occasion. Likewise, the use of social media to publically thank an employer for their contribution to the local community may go unnoticed by the business' customer base.

In remote areas, local radio announcements, newspaper adverts and/or a thank you letter or telephone call may be a more appropriate way to recognise supportive employers.

Working together to make a difference

NSW Rural Fire Service Supportive Employer Program



NSW RFS Supportive Employer Special Commendation

The NSW RFS Supportive Employer Special Commendation has been developed to publically recognise those businesses and self-employed volunteers who have gone 'above and beyond' to help the NSW RFS and its volunteers, protect the community from bush fires and other emergencies.

How will recipients be recognised?

Generally, employers value public recognition amongst their customers highly, and recipients of a NSW RFS Supportive Employer Special Commendation will be:

- featured on the NSW RFS public website for a period of one year. The feature will include photographs, a company profile, an interview with the employer and volunteer who nominated them as well as a link to the (employer's) company website or business listing;
- announced via all available NSW RFS social media;
- featured in a NSW RFS e-bulletin article;

Other privileges might include:

- an announcement in the local newspaper and/or local radio.

Who can be nominated for a NSW RFS Supportive Employer Special Commendation?

Any supportive employer can be nominated, including:

- self-employed volunteers;
- small, medium and large businesses;
- private sector organisations;
- government agencies;
- not-for-profit organisations.

Self-employed volunteers can nominate themselves (self nominate) for a Special Commendation or be nominated by a fellow NSW RFS member.

How will nominations for a NSW RFS Supportive Employer Special Commendation be assessed?

A committee will assess all nominations to evaluate an employer's contribution against their capacity to provide support to the NSW RFS and its volunteers.

Nominations not supported at a Brigade and District level will not be considered.

The committee's decision is final and there will be no appeal process as part of this program.

Assessment Criteria for the Supportive Employer Special Commendation

Given the varied size and types of employers who will be nominated, a set of loose criteria has been developed to paint the picture of what a supportive employer or self employer might look like. This criterion is not definitive; it is purely provided as a prompt.

Employers **may**:

- Release employees to attend emergency incidents during work hours (in excess of 25.5 hours per year);
- Release employees to attend specialist NSW RFS training exercises during normal working hours;
- Provide special leave provisions/flexible work arrangements which allow volunteers to attend emergency incidents and/or NSW RFS training exercises without being financially disadvantaged;
- Actively promote NSW RFS volunteering in the workplace;
- Actively promote NSW RFS volunteering prior to the fire season;
- Have more than one staff member that is a NSW RFS volunteer;
- Release employees to attend emergency incidents at short notice;
- Recognise the additional skills and attributes NSW RFS volunteers bring to the workplace.

Self-Employed volunteers **may**:

- Attend emergencies during work hours (in excess of 25.5 hours per year);
- Attend special training exercises held during normal work hours;

Working together to make a difference

NSW Rural Fire Service Supportive Employer Program



- Actively promote volunteering opportunities with the NSW RFS to business partners, employees, business associates or members of the community;
- Have frequent or extended attendance at emergency incidents e.g. during a specific fire season.

Length of service with the NSW RFS might also be a consideration for the purposes of submitting a nomination.

Nominate an employer for a 'NSW RFS Supportive Employer Special Commendation'

Applications for the NSW RFS Supportive Employer, Special Commendation are assessed once a year.

Nominations will be assessed by a committee and those selected will be advised in the month of July.

Successful employer profiles will feature on the NSW RFS public webpage for a one year period.