



Stuart Ayres MP

Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Sport and Recreation
Minister Assisting the Premier on Western Sydney

MEDIA RELEASE

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HIDDEN SUPPORT BEHIND RFS VOLUNTEERS HONOURED

Employers are a vital part of the volunteer firefighting effort in NSW and today Minister for Police and Emergency Services Stuart Ayres awarded 12 businesses with Special Commendation for their outstanding support.

Mr Ayres said that employers that actively encourage employees to volunteer are contributing to a safer community.

“NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers continually dedicate their time to protecting communities across the State and this couldn’t happen without supportive employers behind the scenes,” he said.

“The businesses receiving Special Commendation today have not only been generous with releasing employees for volunteer duties, but have gone above and beyond in their support, including creating specialised leave, promoting volunteering achievements and providing donations to NSW RFS brigades.”

Mr Ayres also acknowledged the thousands of other employers not recognised today who offer support, including 80 businesses who have received a NSW RFS Certificate of Appreciation since January this year.

“Without question, the support of these employers is one of the key elements in helping NSW RFS volunteers protect their local community,” he said.

NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons highlighted the vital role employers played during the difficult 2013/14 bush fire season.

“This past season was the busiest in over a decade, with damaging fires occurring as early as August. With 6,643 fires burning some 599,398 hectares across NSW, the strain was not only on volunteers but on the businesses that spared their valued workers,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

“While we lost more than 200 homes along with livestock and other property, it is clear those losses would have been much greater if these employers, and thousands of others across the State, had not allowed their staff to join the firefighting effort.”

The businesses honoured today range from universities and government agencies, through to small businesses and medium enterprises, along with large corporations.

The Supportive Employer Program was launched in March 2013 to recognise the essential contribution employers make to the volunteering effort. Since then, 147 businesses have been presented with a Certificate of Appreciation and 24 have received Special Commendation.

Details of the businesses receiving Special Commendations follow.

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Details of the businesses receiving Special Commendation

Allianz Australia Insurance – Staff at Allianz Australia Insurance have access to flexible and generous paid volunteer leave. Allianz has also provided generous donations to local brigades which have included cars for training exercises, furniture for brigade station renovations and tents. The attitude of senior management towards volunteers continually reflects the support of the organisation, particularly when major fire events are occurring across NSW and beyond.

AstraZeneca – This global biopharmaceutical company provided volunteers with as much paid leave as required during the fire events of October 2013. They also were vocal in their support of individuals, regularly sending emails to check on staff's wellbeing whilst fighting the fires.

Australian Astronomical Observatory (AAO) – With nine NSW RFS volunteers employed, AAO has showed its support over many decades. Examples of this support include formalising the practice of willingly releasing employees for duties by developing Community Service Leave, nominating NSW RFS volunteers for National Volunteer Week awards and developing a culture of volunteering within the organisation by encouraging employees to participate.

Big W Dapto – This large department store was nominated by Laura Wilson for its support throughout her seven years of employment. This includes approving leave on weekends to allow her to complete training along with support of deployments, often on short notice. Laura has been a great asset to her brigade due to the support of Big W Dapto.

Liverpool Hospital, South Western Sydney Local Health District – Despite the strain that an absent staff member places on this busy trauma hospital, management continues to be supportive of the 10 NSW RFS volunteers taking leave to attend incidents. Furthermore, this support is regularly documented in the both the hospital and local district newsletters where achievements are reported and celebrated.

M & A Green Plumbing – Martin and Adrienne Green, owners of M & A Green Plumbing, are both active NSW RFS volunteers. Both regularly give up their time, and therefore income for their business, to attend training and incidents. Their plumbing knowledge significantly assists in their operation of pumps and truck equipment. Furthermore, Martin continually uses his business contacts and clients to recruit new volunteers.

Mars Australia – Mars encourages participation in volunteer organisations, including NSW RFS. A generous Community Services Leave policy allows employees to access both paid and unpaid leave to attend incidents.

Moolarben Coal Operations – Moolarben Coal Operations employs 25 NSW RFS volunteers. These employees' unique firefighting skills are put to use within the workplace and Emergency Response Training provided by the mine assists the volunteers in their activities with local brigades. Volunteering is actively supported and promoted by management, which is demonstrated by the training facilities freely available to Cudgegong District volunteers.

Moree Plain Shire Council – Captain Kym Standford of the Mungindi Rural Fire is employed by Moree Plain Shire Council as the Mungindi Pool Manager. The Council

has been supportive of her activity with the NSW RFS and has often allowed her to close the pool at short notice to attend incidents.

Shepherd Electrical – This family owned business in the ACT regularly provides employees time away from work to complete training and attend incidents. Furthermore, they provided man power, equipment and goods to assist with the Wallaroo Brigade shed upgrade.

Singtel Optus – Tim Parsely nominated Optus because they have always been supportive of staff engaging in emergency operations. On top of dedicated Emergency Leave, staff are able to access additional leave at their manager's discretion. Tim has attended many incidents as a NSW RFS volunteer and has never been refused leave. Optus is also supportive of him occasionally working from home and using work computers for NSW RFS purposes.

University of New England (UNE) - UNE encourages staff to be involved in NSW RFS by providing Emergency Services leave provisions and flexible work arrangements. Furthermore, lecturers at UNE support students who volunteer by being flexible in attendance at lectures, assignment submission and practical exercises if an emergency or training course conflicts with study timelines.