

# VFBV Policy – Volunteers and Payments

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employers

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## Payment of Income for Firefighting Services

VFBV is not in favour of volunteers receiving income in return for their voluntary firefighting services.

### *Rationale:*

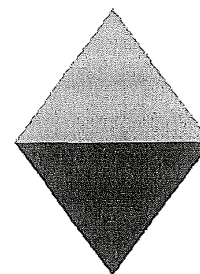
According to the National Standards on Volunteering<sup>1</sup>, volunteering is defined as an activity which takes place in not for profit organisations and is undertaken

- to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer,
- of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- for no financial payment; and
- in designated volunteer positions only.

Volunteering one's time is a gift to the volunteer's community. When income is attached, it is no longer given freely.

## Reimbursement of Expenses

VFBV supports payments to volunteers to cover some out-of-pocket travel and incidentals expenses.



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<sup>1</sup> *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-profit Organisations*. Volunteering Australia Inc. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. 2001, Appendix 1, p.62.

*Rationale:*

Volunteers give freely of their time but do not expect to be out-of-pocket for their efforts.

Receipt of reimbursement for some travel or incidentals costs is not income and is a fair and reasonable way to reimburse costs associated with providing volunteer services.

**Right to Decline**

Volunteers have a right to decline participation in emergency callouts or strike teams where their personal income will be seriously affected.

*Rationale:*

Volunteers' families and personal circumstances must be considered along with their volunteer commitment to their communities. Where volunteering will disadvantage them financially, they must have the right to say no and be respected for that decision.

VFBV supports and respects volunteers who choose to say no to volunteer activities because it affects their family or their income.

**Emergency Service Leave**

VFBV is opposed to mandatory emergency service leave being forced on employers through industrial awards. On the other hand, VFBV supports voluntary emergency service leave being negotiated at personal/local levels.

*Rationale:*

Just as volunteers have a right to choose to offer their services, employers should have the same right to choose to support employees who are volunteers. It is unfair to mandatorily impose a financial or operational burden on employers. Some employers may not be able to afford the leave or may find that the absence from the operation impacts negatively on the business. The guiding principle is choice.

On the other hand, employers may choose to provide leave arrangements to employees who are registered emergency service volunteers. It is expected that employees will negotiate and agree leave conditions with their employers beforehand and provide timely notice of absences for being reasonably absent from work to attend emergencies.

Maintenance of an existing employee benefit or income can be seen as being fundamentally different from the provision of additional income. Payment for emergency service leave is seen as an employer donation that supports an emergency service volunteer by maintaining an existing benefit. It upholds the principle that volunteers should not be out of pocket as a result of their volunteering. Payment for emergency service leave is not regarded as income in return for voluntary services.

**Reimbursement for Employers or Self Employed**

VFBV would support any government initiatives to provide full or partial reimbursement to employers or self-employed persons for release of workers who are emergency service volunteers to attend specialist training.

*Rationale:*

The level of training required of emergency service volunteers is increasing. In order to meet requirements for competency development as well as occupational health and safety requirements, it is essential that volunteers attend these training courses.

A government system that reimburses employers or self-employed persons for leave taken to attend necessary training will decrease the burden on employers and the self-employed.

Such payments are seen as maintenance of existing benefits and not seen as additional income.

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**Broad Consultation**

The above policy was amended and endorsed by the VFBV Board on 27 June 2003 following wide distribution to all brigades during April and May 2003 for comment and feedback.