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**We're going twice weekly**

This week *Mainland Press* will start to come out twice weekly. In addition to our usual Wednesday edition, readers will also be able to enjoy a Friday weekend edition packed with plenty of exciting content.

See you Friday!

## Firefighters want boss replaced

Chris Tobin

**Exclusive**

**CHRISTCHURCH** professional fire fighters are calling regional fire management's performance during the February 22 earthquake "woeful" and want the regional boss, Rob Saunders, to resign or be dumped.

New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union southern branch president Denis Fitzmaurice said an inquiry by the chief executive national commander Mike Hall into the February 22 earthquake backed up their claims.

"The inquiry praises the firefighters but (at the time of the quake) apart from one assistant manager, there were no managers - they disappeared. One went home, one Dan Coward, was coming back from Wellington in a helicopter and the regional management team was non-existent."

According to Mr Fitzmaurice, Transalpine regional commander Rob Saunders who is responsible for the area from Timaru to Nelson and the West Coast was on leave at his home in Chester Street, Christchurch, near the central station on February 22.

"He was there within an hour of the quake but was shunted aside after a couple of hours. He was not up to it," Mr Fitzmaurice said.

"There's a lot of angst coming from senior ranks, the senior station officers - they ran the whole thing in the absence of these people."

Mr Saunders said he was not aware of the firefighters union wanting him to resign and he would not comment on the inquiry or other questions regarding his leadership. He referred *Mainland Press* to the communications staff of the national office in Wellington.

*Continued on page 3*



**Go black:** Hoon Hay School and Our Lady of the Assumption School took to the streets on Friday morning with more than 700 students decked out in All Blacks colours to show support for the team ahead of the Rugby World Cup quarter-final match against Argentina which the ABs won.

Among the keen All Blacks fans was Tyson Collins, centre, aged 9, from Hoon Hay School. They will be cheering all over again this weekend as the All Blacks play the Wallabies in the semifinals. More photos page 39.

*Photo: Samantha Early*



Fire service and USAR members work on the damaged ChristChurch Cathedral in February.

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# Firefighters union wants boss replaced

Continued from page 1

National Commander Mr Hall was unavailable for comment but Assistant National Commander Trevor Brown said the Fire Service was concerned that a union official would make a public and personal attack on one of its senior managers in Canterbury.

"The comments, as reported to us, may be defamatory and this type of staff relationship issue is not something we deal with via the news media. We have full confidence in our managers in Canterbury."

The inquiry stated the NZ Fire Service response to the February 22 earthquake was outstanding but added that the Transalpine fire region was unable to provide any Civil Defence plans or emergency plans that could effectively support continued operations during a natural disaster.

"This lack of plans, combined with the absence from the region of the Regional Commander (Saunders) and the Christchurch Area Commander (Coward) contributed to the delay in setting up formal management structures."

Fire service national media advisor Karlum Lattimore said the plans were in a red stickered building which was not accessible.

The inquiry stated operational crews worked in extreme conditions for a long duration without appropriate management support and leadership that would normally be expected. Communication after the quake across the fire service was "ad hoc."

"The Southern Communication Centre did not receive communication from region or area management for approximately two hours after the initial earthquake."

The inquiry considered there was such a significant disconnect between regional and area management and staff that a review of the management structure was needed.

Mr Fitzmaurice said firefighters' anger and frustration was directed more at the regional and national commanders Mr Saunders and Mr Hall, rather than at Christchurch area command under Mr Coward. He said Mr Saunders had been in his position for seven to eight years.

"The first couple of years were OK. The last five years have been dysfunctional."

Mr Fitzmaurice had made his union's concerns regarding Mr Saunders' leadership known to Mr Hall on a number of occasions. "It goes on and on. If the national management don't do anything, we will," Mr Fitzmaurice said.

"We are totally disgusted with his leadership and we don't want a bar of him."

"There are very angry people out there, firefighters who put their lives on the line. To see how they've been led by that gentleman and his officials is just not on. If it was a battle, they'd be relieved of command."

## 'There's a lot of bitterness'

MICHELE Gyde, says seeing her firefighter husband Terry Gyde and other professional firefighters hurting after the February 22 earthquake is distressing.



**Unhappy:** Michele Gyde says wives and families support their firefighter husbands and fathers but management support is lacking.  
*Photo: Chris Tobin*

"When they come home the wives and kids have to pick up the pieces; we support them, but they don't get support from above."

Mrs Gyde said police, army and other emergency services had acknowledged acts of bravery by their staff in the February 22 earthquake aftermath - but not the fire service management in Christchurch of its personnel.

"A lot of firemen say they were just doing their job but in the first 24 hours some people did some pretty amazing things. No-one's said 'you've done a good job.' The impact on them has been huge. Some didn't want to go into the CTV building, some were braver and went in."

Assistant National Commander Trevor Brown said the fire service had acknowledged the brave actions of firefighters at a function held at the Air Force Museum in Wigram but professional firefighters chose not to take part.

Mrs Gyde said morale

among firefighters was low and the effects of February 22 were ongoing.

"Every time the images come on TV firemen get distressed and they're hard buggers. It takes a lot to move them. I've never seen so many firemen in tears."

"They're displaced, fire stations are down, they've lost faith in management, there's a lot of bitterness. They still want to be firemen but faith in those above them has gone."

"The psychological impact will stay with them forever knowing they risked everything."

### Pay dispute ongoing

THE NZ Professional Firefighters Union and NZ Fire Service national management have been in dispute regarding a 8.93 percent pay claim.

The Fire Service Commission made a 2.5 percent pay offer which the union rejected.

Last month some Christchurch firefighters attended a commemoration of the New York September 11 terrorist attack in spite of a directive that on-duty officers could not take part in memorials. Management said the on-duty firefighters who attended could face a fire service investigation.

Christchurch has 180 professional firefighters

### 'Amazing rescues' made

THE Fire Service's national commander's inquiry into the February 22 earthquake praised the actions of fire service staff, members of the public, construction workers, retired and off duty firefighters in the hours after the February 22 earthquake.

"All were involved in amazing rescues in extremely hazardous conditions at times without regard to their safety."

"Many personnel took calculated risks that were beyond normal expectations and it noted that without accepting this level of risk, more lives may have been lost."

The inquiry said the initial response to the CBD was a 'self response' initiated by senior station officers which "was appropriate under the extreme circumstances and worked well."

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