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New tool to help assess firefighter occupational cancer claims

ACC has introduced a new tool to help assess work-related cancer claims by firefighters.

ACC worked with Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ) to develop the assessment tool which enables an independent toxicology panel to analyse clinical evidence and combine this with improved data provided by FENZ about the experience of firefighters.

The tool will be used alongside ACC's current assessment process by presenting a set of evidence-based considerations about risk factors such as fire exposure, firefighting history, use of protective equipment and cancer type.

Chief Operating Officer Mike Tully says the tool was developed by looking closely at overseas assessment frameworks, as used in Canada and Australia, and emerging scientific evidence on this complex issue.

"Firefighters put themselves in harm's way to keep our communities safe and we recognise the high risk of being exposed to hazardous elements throughout their careers.

"We are always looking for ways to improve the way we do things and this new tool gives us a better picture of the fire exposure experienced by firefighters. It also has the flexibility to evolve as new research comes to light," Mike Tully says.

Work-related cancer claims by firefighters are assessed by a Toxicology Panel of independent clinical experts.

New considerations for the panel include:

- The decade in which the firefighter mostly worked. This may signal the type of protective gear they did or didn't wear
- How long the firefighter has been working
- Whether the firefighter was exposed to 'exceptional events', such as chemical factory explosions
- Whether the disease has developed outside the usual demographic for that type of cancer

Every claim for cancer lodged by a firefighter is considered on a case-by-case basis to determine whether it was more-likely-than-not work-related.

If a firefighter or former firefighter develops cancer and there is evidence that it was due to significant fire exposure at work, then they may be covered by ACC under work-related gradual process injury/disease legislation.

ACC will continue to partner with FENZ to adapt the new tool, and to improve workplace safety.

ENDS

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