

## Transcript

Station: **RADIOLIVE** Date: **21/05/2010**  
Program: **DRIVE** Time: **04:53 PM**  
Compere: **MITCH HARRIS** Summary ID: **W00039068073**  
Item: **PETER HALLET FROM THE NZ FIREFIGHTERS UNION  
DISCUSSES THE DECISION BY THE FIRE SERVICE TO CUT  
BACK ON THE NUMBER OF APPLIANCES IT SENDS TO  
BUILDINGS WITH SPRINKLERS.**  
**INTERVIEWEES: PETER HALLET, VICE PRESIDENT, NZ  
FIREFIGHTERS UNION**

Demographics: Male 16+ Female 16+ All people ABs GBs

**MITCH HARRIS:** The fire service are standing by its decision to cut back on the number of fire engines it sends to buildings with sprinkler systems, despite fierce criticism from the fire fighters union. Peter Hallett is Vice President of the New Zealand Firefighters Union.

Good afternoon Peter.

**PETER HALLETT:** Good afternoon Mitch.

**MITCH HARRIS:** How does this new rule work?

**PETER HALLET:** Well the fire service have put into place obviously an assessment or lack of assessment really on buildings with sprinkler systems and are claiming that some best international practice will allow them to send two fire appliances to most of those buildings. Where in the past we may have had more, we may have had the same but that's

dependent on the size of the building and the complexities within it.

MITCH HARRIS: Is it an efficiency drive?

PETER HALLETT: Well obviously we're claiming it's not. I think fire fighters are quite reasonable people and we want to get the job done effectively and safely and as quick as possible and this policy and cases, some cases won't allow us to do this. So I don't see much efficiency in there.

MITCH HARRIS: Are you concerned about safety or because it requires fewer fire fighters?

PETER HALLETT: I think the two go hand in hand. Obviously there's the safety of the people who are in the buildings and the safety of fire fighters who may get asked to perform a job. And the fire service is quite correct you know, eight times out of 10, nine times out of 10, sprinkler systems may put out a fire. But there's always the chance that it doesn't and no matter what happens in any event, fires create smoke, sprinkler systems create a lot of water and then damage which needs controlling.

So we need the people there in any event and particularly larger buildings, high rises, shopping malls to deal with that.

MITCH HARRIS: So what do you propose to do about it? Are you going to fight it all the way?

**PETER HALLETT:** Well, our advice to members at the moment, is, if you know that they're - the buildings in question haven't had a proper risk assessment and there's been sort of no discussion about the responses, the appropriate responses of fire engines to them is to make up for the level of calls that we had prior to 29 April and work through it that way.

And I think the proof is in the pudding. Our members are finding around the country buildings that don't comply or don't fit in within the policy properly which aren't fully sprinkled and they themselves, the fire service believe they are when they're not. And obviously that creates bigger issues.

**MITCH HARRIS:** Peter Hallett from the Firefighters Union, thank you very much. Bill Butzbach is the Assistant National Commander of the fire service.

Good afternoon Bill.

**BILL BUTZBACH:** Good afternoon.

**MITCH HARRIS:** Is this a disincentive for people to install sprinklers?

**BILL BUTZBACH:** Not at all. In fact sprinklers provide absolute safety in a building - in fact we think of every sprinkler as being a fire fighter. And when you've got a whole lot of sprinkler heads in the building, it's like having the whole fire brigade there. So they're tremendously reliable. In most cases a sprinkler



puts out a fire or keeps it small. So really they are the safest buildings in the country, in fact safer than your own home.

**MITCH HARRIS:** Are you concerned that it might open you up for criticism if a sprinkler system fails to work and you haven't got enough trucks there?

**BILL BUTZBACH:** The practice that we've just employed is only about the initial investigation call. We've seen two appliances which we actually do in half of the country now and in one of our biggest cities in Manukau. If there's any indication at all of it being any more than a false alarm, which most of them are, we call on more resources just like that.

**MITCH HARRIS:** How do you look to resolve this issue with the union?

**BILL BUTZBACH:** Well this is an issue between us and our officers, I guess and it's open to our officers to assist in this process. Every day sprinklers are added, every day sprinklers are taken away. So the risk assessments go on all the time. Our staff know that if they bring these things to our attention, we've got the systems and processes in place to change whatever we need to do.

**MITCH HARRIS:** Does that mean that you will be able to get by with fewer fire fighters?



**BILL BUTZBACH:** What it doesn't mean actually is that this approach means we'll have more trucks available for real emergencies. All too often we commit all of our fire trucks and a city like Hamilton sometimes sending four or five, that's all of them and then you get another call at the same time and there's nothing in reserve and so what this does mean is that we've got a much safer community.

**MITCH HARRIS:** Can you guarantee the fire service won't be compromised by this move?

**BILL BUTZBACH:** Absolutely.

**MITCH HARRIS:** Alright Bill Butzbach, the Assistant National Commander of the fire service, thank you for joining us this afternoon. By the way, when does it start?

**BILL BUTZBACH:** It started on 29 April.

**MITCH HARRIS:** It's already started, it's already in place is it?

**BILL BUTZBACH:** Yeah.

**MITCH HARRIS:** And is this common overseas?

**BILL BUTZBACH:** Yes it is, very common. In fact they send a lot less.



**MEDIA MONITORS**

MITCH

HARRIS:

Ri

BILL BUTZBACH: Thank you.

MITCH HARRIS: Thanks for your time.

\* \* END \* \*

**TRANSCRIPT PRODUCED BY MEDIA MONITORS**