

Chris Smith
2GB

Dear Chris,

I'm advised that a topic on your show today concerns the house fire in Ramsgate yesterday during the industrial action imposed on the state of NSW by the Fire Brigades Employees' Union (FBEU). More to the point, your feelings that the times of the response are incorrect or in some way have been 'spun' to suit fire authorities.

I am also advised that your producer declined offers for me, as Acting Commissioner, to provide an on-air response regarding yesterday's operations.

To help clarify, there is no doubt that yesterday's industrial action was extraordinary. There is no doubt that 'normal' firefighting capacity and response in the Greater Sydney Area was significantly impacted, including the way in which emergency calls were received and processed.

What is not in doubt is the following:

- A '000' call to a house fire in Sans Souci was received by NSW Police at approximately 1.02pm, Thursday 21 June.
- The call was immediately referred to the FRNSW Major Incident Coordination Centre at Alexandria for resources to be dispatched.
- During this time, two FRNSW crews from Hurstville and one from Kogarah were enroute to the industrial action in the Sydney CBD. They saw the smoke from the fire and immediately responded to the location.
- FRNSW fire crews were on scene within **13 minutes from the time of the call**
- Firefighters conducted primary search and rescue and commenced firefighting operations. They then conducted a secondary search, remaining on the scene until the arrival of personnel from the Aviation Rescue and Firefighting Service and the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS).
- The initial responding FRNSW crews then proceeded to the industrial action.
- Crews from Mortdale and Arncliffe, who were also enroute to the industrial action, also responded to this fire, along with a fire truck from the training college in Alexandria. These resources were turned back by the FRNSW Duty Commander when the situation was in hand.

The process time of call handling for fires was impacted by yesterday's industrial action. This was as a direct result of the calls – normally directed by '000' operators to fire services – being routed through to police (a part of our contingency planning), then the call being forwarded to the temporary fire communications centre at Alexandria. I acknowledge there was a delay compared to 'normal services', a fact I

also personally acknowledged to the Ramsgate home owner when I spoke to him yesterday, and again, this morning.

I also think it is important that your listeners understand that while normal FRNSW operations were significantly impacted by yesterday's union action, there were a small number of staff – both firefighters and support staff – who remained on duty to provide, where they could, essential services. While there was a delay in our normal call-taking times and a delay in our normal firefighting operations response, the dedication of FRNSW staff on duty continued to provide what services they could. This included: limited firefighting operations, radio communications and support. The staff operating the temporary communications centre dispatched the most available resource they had. To reiterate, those resources comprised:

- Firefighters from FRNSW (enroute to industrial action who responded)
- NSWRFs crews deployed as a part of the state-wide combined emergency services response to cover FRNSW crews during the total work stoppage, and;
- Aviation Rescue and Firefighting crews responding with a police escort from Sydney Airport.

As you would appreciate the FRNSW media mobile can be busy during periods of high activity which is why we have a number of contact details listed on our media releases. Producers and newsrooms can contact the general media enquiries line on (02) 9265 2907 should the media mobile be unavailable.

Yours sincerely,

John Benson AFSM
Acting Commissioner