

WOMEN IN FIREFIGHTING

Working as a firefighter can be a challenging journey, but if you ask Peta Doyle, one of the NSW Fire Brigades up-and-coming firefighters, plenty of women have what it takes to have long and rewarding careers with the NSWFB.



When most people think of firefighters they think of sirens, smoke and pulling people from a burning building, but being a firefighter involves so much more than this. Our firefighters not only manage major emergencies, but they often work in specialist fields and have a strong presence in the community, talking to residents about fire prevention and making communities safer.

With more than 92 full-time female firefighters and 168 part time female firefighters in its ranks, the NSW Fire Brigades strongly encourages women to consider a career with the NSWFB.

Three years ago, Firefighter Peta Doyle, who is currently stationed at the busiest fire station in Australia, City of Sydney Fire Station, steered her life in a new direction, when she successfully applied for a role as a full-time firefighter after years of training as a professional athlete.

Peta competed at state, national and Olympic trials over the past 12 years, and represented Australia at various World Cup Swimming Championships during her swim career. Peta applied for a firefighting role with the NSWFB because she was attracted to the challenge of working as part of one of the leading fire and rescue organisations in Australia.

“I needed a new challenge in my life and I was craving job satisfaction. Many people told me it was really difficult to get a position with the NSW Fire Brigades, so I saw this as another challenge. I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do with my life at that point, but knew I had to be working outdoors, working as part of a team, and helping people.”

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Aim high and specialise

The NSWFB prides itself on being one of the leading fire and rescue services in the world and the career opportunities it offers to its employees are extensive.

While many people join the NSWFB and have long and rewarding careers as firefighters, others choose to go on and specialise in areas across education, risk management, training and development, communication, rescue, breathing apparatus management, hazard materials and fire research and investigation.

“As a fully qualified firefighter I can specialise in other fields and I am keen to develop my rescue qualifications and to operate a Bronto (a 37 metre high ladder platform for high-rise rescues and firefighting) so I can help respond to major emergencies. In the future I’d also like to train new firefighting recruits and I think working as a station officer (who leads a team of firefighters and coordinates the crew at an incident) could also be rewarding,” Firefighter Doyle says.

“What is really important is an ability to think outside the box, learn quickly and take a very proactive approach to your work.”

Recruitment and testing

Before her career change, Firefighter Doyle was a qualified personal trainer and worked at her local swimming pool. Once the firefighting recruitment drive was announced, she took steps to tackle aspects of the recruitment process to increase her chances of success.

“Initially, I browsed the NSWFB website and learned about the series of tests that I needed to complete, including the physical aptitude test (PAT). I investigated the test more and found out I needed a 9.6 on the shuttle run. I remember getting over 11 at school so I wasn’t too worried, but I made sure I gave it a go before the actual testing began,” she says.

The shuttle run, also known as the Beep Test, is a test of speed, fitness, and agility. It requires a person to sprint between two parallel lines at an increasing pace and after each interval is achieved, a new level is announced and the aim is to reach the highest level possible.

“With a couple of friends I simulated the test and discovered after achieving a score of 8.2, I was exhausted. However I practiced a couple of times a week over a month and found that a score of 9.6 wasn’t too hard to achieve after all.”



Qualities of a firefighter

Firefighting is a career which requires strength of body and character. It's a job where you get to make use of many skills, not just one. While physical strength and endurance are necessary attributes to do the job, a balance of additional qualities are equally as important to ensure your success as a firefighter.

Supporting your team and fellow firefighters is considered to be one of the hallmarks of firefighting and qualities such as leadership and compassion are also very important. Striking a balance of these qualities leads to a more effective and efficient team.

While Firefighter Doyle was fit when she joined the NSWFB, she says you don't need to be a superhero to get your foot in the door.

"A reasonable amount of fitness and strength are necessary, but what is really important is an ability to think outside the box, learn quickly and take a very proactive approach to your work."

“ Firefighting is a very satisfying career. It feels good to be working with the community, helping people, making life long friends, saving property and helping to protect the environment. ”



Female firefighters

The NSWFB is committed to ensuring equality in the workplace across gender, race and age. As an equal opportunity employer, the NSWFB treats everyone who works for them with fairness and respect.

While the majority of the NSWFB's 3500 full-time firefighters are male, it is important to know there is no distinction between men and women throughout the firefighting recruitment process or while 'on the job'.

Speaking from her own personal experience, Firefighter Doyle says fire officers work in a positive environment where women can flourish.

"Any woman who wants to become a firefighter must like working with people and have good interpersonal skills. It is very important you can relate to others and work well as part of a team. If you have these qualities, you'd be mad not to give it a go."

Rewards of the job

One of the best things about a career as a firefighter is you never know what's going to happen when you arrive for work and it is often the diversity of firefighting that keeps people in the job for years.

Firefighters are constantly testing themselves and the skills they learn in training and there are plenty of opportunities to continue learning and development throughout your career.

The NSWFB attracts people who are drawn to the idea of responding to an emergency, but the realities of firefighting involve much more in terms of mental and physical challenges. Teamwork is vital to the safety of individual firefighters on the job, and Firefighter Doyle says one of the most rewarding aspects of being a firefighter is forging new friendships with the people you work alongside.

“One of the most rewarding aspects of the job is the relationships you build with your crew. They become your extended family and you build this relationship where you trust them with your life and vice versa. If you think you have tons of friends, just wait until you join the NSWFB,” Firefighter Doyle says.

Firefighters play a crucial role in protecting the community. Whether attending a motor vehicle accident, fighting a factory blaze or giving an information session on fire prevention and safety – in working for the NSWFB you are serving and protecting your community.

“Firefighting is a very satisfying career. Every duty we perform has the potential to generate instant results. It feels good to be working with the community, helping people, making life long friends, saving property and helping to protect the environment,” Firefighter Doyle says.

“The most amazing times can be when you actually help someone and have a positive impact on their life. You can be rescuing someone from a fire or presenting a fire education course to the community but you know within yourself, you are really making a difference to people's lives.”

For further information please visit our website at

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