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## **Firefighters slam ACT Emergency Services Agency as 'lead in their saddlebags'**

The United Firefighters Union has slammed the ACT's Emergency Services Agency (ESA) over its failure to provide firefighters with the fire trucks and rescue equipment they need to keep the community safe. 11 critical appliances are off the road and 9 remain service despite faults. The union has called for the ESA to get out of operational service matters.

United Firefighters Union ACT Branch Secretary Greg McConville slammed the 'paradoxically named' enabling services of the ESA as amounting to nothing more than lead in the saddlebags of firefighters.

"Right now, across Canberra in key locations like Fyshwick, Gungahlin, Woden and Charnwood, ACT Fire and Rescue trucks are off the road or being driven with faults, leaving those local communities dangerously exposed during an emergency.

"Through the ESA's mismanagement and incompetence, at least 20 invaluable fire trucks are compromised due to breakdowns and faults at a time when firefighters are desperately short of rescue equipment such as the 'jaws of life' pumps and breathing apparatus maintenance.

"It appears that every pumper in the ACT Fire and Rescue fleet has faults.

"Many of these faults, such as broken speedometers, were reported as long as 14 months ago, yet the ESA has not addressed these faults."

Mr McConville said the ESA's bungling has meant many fire trucks were unavailable to firefighters through poor project management and a negligent attitude toward maintenance.

"The much-vaunted 'electric fire truck' is unregistered and does not meet Australian Design Rules. As a result, it could be months before it's available for use.

"In a project management failure, three brand new Volvo fire trucks need to be retrofitted with shielding to their brake lines before they are operational.

"This is required to prevent a similar catastrophic incident that occurred during the Canberra Fires of 2003, which saw firefighters stranded after their brake lines burnt through and locked up. These trucks will also be out of action for months as a result.

"Our aerial pumper was on the road for just 24 hours last week before it broke down again and was forced to return to the repair workshop, where it has already spent much of its short service.

"The Gungahlin pumper is in service despite a broken speedometer and other faults. The Charnwood pumper has a broken radio and can't communicate, and the pumpers at Fyshwick and Woden have broken monitor sprays, compromising their operational capability.

"It has been the ESA's responsibility to ensure firefighters have the trucks and equipment they need to protect the community and once again they have failed.

"Firefighters have lost confidence in the ESA's fault logging system: even that has broken and doesn't keep track of logged faults."

Mr McConville said that instead of being a help, the ESA was a hindrance that was not up to the task of providing effective operational support to the emergency services, and it needed to get out of the way of first responders.

"Through its failure, the ESA is actually making the jobs of firefighters harder, and in doing so, it's putting the lives and safety of the community at risk.

"The ESA also constitutes a significant barrier to accountability which should flow to the Minister, the Parliament and the people of the ACT.

"We call on the ACT Government to get the ESA out of emergency service operations and return the ESA to its original intent as an administrative and governance body.

"The community's safety cannot be left in such inept hands."

The revelations about fire trucks coincide with the news that a health screening initiative for firefighters, agreed upon in 2020, has been re-routed to cover ESA Executives and Officers.

"We wrote the technical specifications for this health screening program in August 2021. Since then the technical specifications haven't changed, but the scope has been radically expanded by nameless executives to include themselves.

"The World Health Organisation identified firefighting as a cancer-causing occupation in July 2022.

"We designed a health screening program based on those risks. For almost 3 years, firefighters have seen no action on cancer prevention, and now others want a "piece of the action".

"With all due respect, they are not firefighters, and they should stop pretending their risks are the same as firefighters" Mr McConville concluded.

**ACT UFU Secretary Greg McConville is available for interview and comment on 0488 000 465**

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