

Ref/OOC-20

Wednesday, 10 April 2024

Ms Sofia Hajdari  
Coroner's Registrar  
Coroner's Court of Victoria  
65 Kavanagh St  
SOUTHANK VIC 3006

**By email only:**

[cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au](mailto:cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au)

Dear Ms Hajdari

**INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH OF VIVIANNE MAY RODGER - COR 2019 000309**

1. I refer to Coroner Lawrie's findings and recommendations made on 18 December 2023 regarding the death of Ms Vivianne May Rodger, who died on 17 January 2019 from the effects of fire on a background of a previous right, middle cerebral artery territory stroke and pulmonary emphysema.
2. Fire Rescue Victoria (**FRV**) acknowledges the tragic circumstances of Ms Rodger's death and extends our sincere condolences to her family and friends.
3. FRV accepts the findings made by Coroner Lawrie.
4. The purpose of this letter is to provide a formal response on behalf of FRV in accordance with section 72(3) of the *Coroners Act 2008* (Vic) (**the Act**).
5. FRV has carefully considered Coroner Lawrie's findings, including with regard to the implementation of appropriate policies, procedures and training with respect to responding to firecalls where the signs of fire are not immediately apparent. FRV is committed to upholding the highest standards of safety and ensuring that thorough checks are undertaken when attending fires which may not be immediately apparent.

**Response to Coroner's recommendations**

6. Coroner Lawrie made two recommendations, the second of which was directed to FRV and the first of which, while directed to the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission (**NDIS Commission**), FRV considers it has a relevant interest.
7. In this letter FRV addresses both recommendations, but with a greater focus on recommendation 2.

### **Recommendation 1**

8. Coroner Lawrie's first recommendation was:

*"That the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission ensure that training and information provided to NDIS service coordinators and providers includes information regarding the importance of ensuring appropriate fire safety measures are put in place for clients, including hardwired smoke alarms connected to monitored personal alarm devices."*

9. This recommendation has been directed to the NDIS Commission. FRV acknowledges that it cannot and does not purport to respond for the NDIS Commission. However, FRV has considered the Coroner's recommendation and has assessed how FRV can assist and work collaboratively with the NDIS in order to ensure safe outcomes for clients.
10. In that regard, FRV has been engaging in discussions with the NDIS and reviewing its own policies, which include:
- assessment of policy procedures with respect to how the NDIS assesses individuals for different types of smoke alarms. as relevant, such smoke alarms which can be connected to monitored personal alarm devices. The implementation of such a system would need to form part of an education program designed and delivered by the NDIS, for which FRV would support and advocate for continuing modernisation of this technology into people's homes; and
  - the potential for shared databases on individuals with high dependency requirements, which would include sharing addresses and identifying accessible ways in which FRV might connect with those higher need individuals in respect of fire safety measures
11. FRV advocates strongly for the installation of domestic sprinkler systems and for education strategies on assisting high dependency individuals in preparing for potential risks arising from fire hazards, particularly if those individuals may be known to the NDIS to engage in heightened risk behaviours. It accordingly respectfully supports the principle behind the Coroner's recommendation and welcomes the opportunity to continue to work with the NDIS as appropriate to ensure the greatest possible safety for NDIS participants.

### **Recommendation 2**

12. Coroner Lawrie's second recommendation, as directed to FRV, was -

*"That Fire Rescue Victoria implement appropriate policies, procedures and training to ensure that firefighters responding to a firecall, where the signs of a fire are not apparent, take appropriate and sufficient steps to identify the correct location associated with the firecall, and that these steps are confirmed with the Fire Rescue Victoria communication centre."*

### **FRV's response to recommendations**

13. Recommendation 2 is fully supported by FRV and is being implemented through measures comprising:
- (a) the preparation and dissemination of an advisory bulletin for all FRV operational staff;
  - (b) the intended incorporation of that advisory bulletin into FRV doctrine;

- (c) the creation of a case study, drawn from the Coroner Lawrie's report, for use in standard training; and
- (d) the creation of a new fire drill for use in assessments of candidates for Leading Firefighter rank; and
- (e) proposed discussion with the Country Fire Authority and state fire agencies on sharing educational lessons arising from critical incidences.

14. I discuss each of these further below.

*Advisory bulletin*

15. FRV circulates an advisory bulletin to all operational staff on a weekly basis. The bulletin provides updates on a range of educational topics and contains communications to firefighters regarding community and firefighters safety issues and guidance for the interim procedures that should be taken to manage identified risks. It is FRV's expectation that all firefighters receive and take account of the information and guidance contained in advisory bulletins.
16. On 21 February 2024, an advisory bulletin was issued to provide guidance on the actions that should be taken to validate incident locations, noting that the information that responding crews are given regarding an incident location is not always accurate, or the address of an incident is not always easily identifiable. The specific advisory bulletin is attached to this correspondence as **Attachment 1**.
17. The Advisory Bulletin provides the following actions to assist firefighters in confirming the address and type of incident as soon as practical:
- Use correct communication procedures (as outlined in OMS 040 – Incident Communications Plans (FRV's Incident Communications Plans in Operational Method Statement 040) which is attached to this correspondence as **Attachment 2**.
  - Confirm address and incident location with Communications Centre (Firecom) if there is any ambiguity or unable to locate.
  - Confirm details of incident with Firecom, request any further information from the call-taker
  - Commence Size Up (as outlined in OMS 005 – Size Up) which is attached to this correspondence as **Attachment 3**, taking into consideration all the available information relative to the property type, address and incident.
  - Communicate and update/change to original information via Firecom.
  - If still unable to confirm the location of the incident:
    - validate address by use of mapping tools i.e., Melways/spatial maps or Google Maps QR Code link on STO turnout information
    - validate address with Calling Line Identification details
    - confirm location/details of Incident with persons onsite. If no one is onsite, confirm address and seek further information from neighbours/bystanders.
  - Communicate to Firecom all steps that have been taken to confirm the address before providing a "Wordback" and giving "returning".

18. Pending incorporation into FRV Doctrine (discussed further below) the Advisory Bulletin operates as clear guidance for all firefighters on how to ensure that they identify fire locations correctly.

#### *Incorporation of content of advisory bulletin into FRV doctrine*

19. 'FRV Doctrine' is the term given to the body of policies and procedures which together constitute the standard operating procedures and expectations for FRV firefighters. FRV Doctrine is developed through a formal consultative process with operational employees and their union and, when finalised, is published on FRV's intranet and disseminated through the training of firefighters and at relevant ranks and by other means to ensure that all FRV firefighters are aware of, and carry out their duties consistent with, applicable doctrine.
20. The content of the 21 February 2024 Advisory Bulletin relating to the validation of incident location is presently subject to the formal consultative process. Once finalised, it will be included, in an expanded form and with relevant explanatory notes, in FRV Doctrine. This will mean it will form part of standard training and expectations for all firefighters seeking promotion to the rank of Leading Firefighter or above (at which rank a firefighter is most likely to take the role of Officer in Charge of a responding crew), in the future.

#### *Case study for use in standard curriculum*

21. FRV has also drafted a comprehensive case study, attached to this correspondence as **Attachment 4**, which details the surrounding circumstances of the attendance at Ms Rodger's home and incorporates your Honour's findings to allow for more specific training for firefighters on the enquiries and steps that they should take in circumstances where there may be uncertainty about the existence and location of a fire.
22. The case study includes an aerial diagram of the incident location in order to demonstrate the challenges for firefighters in determining the correct address for an alarm of fire, including areas where traditional blocks of land have been developed and subdivided.
23. The case study has now been incorporated as training material in the training course curriculum for Station Officers and Senior Station Officers. The case study is being delivered as part of the practical training in the next cohort of firefighters who are undertaking the Station Officer and Senior Station Officer courses which have commenced on 5 February 2024 and 18 March 2024 respectively. The case study will continue to be delivered as part of the course material in the future.
24. The learning outcomes of the case study are also being embedded in the Leading Firefighter training program, which is to be included within the 'Incident Management training module'.

#### *New drill for Leading Firefighter promotional assessment*

25. FRV has developed a new drill which has been integrated to the Leading Firefighter promotion training yard assessments. The Leading Firefighter rank serves as a pivotal stage in the careers of most firefighters, marking their potential transition to Officer in Charge roles and their involvement in coordinating emergency responses.
26. The drill entails crews being dispatched to an incorrect location, thereby prompting them to conduct a size-up assessment upon arrival to gather additional informational about the call.

27. The primary objective behind the development and implementation of this drill is to expose firefighting crews to scenarios which involve misinformation or missing information about callout.
28. The aim of the drill is to not only instil, but to highlight the importance of thorough investigation to accurately identify and respond to incidences.

#### *Discussions with interstate fire agencies*

29. FRV is part of an informal discussion group with interstate and respective fire agencies in New Zealand, New South Wales and South Australia whereby respective members of management from each service will attend for the purpose of discussing current issues which each agency is experiencing. The discussion group acts as a forum to receive and provide updates on lessons learnt arising from key issues that the agencies are experiencing, as well as sharing the solutions and preventative actions that those agencies have taken to remediate and minimise those issues in the future.
30. FRV has shared the findings of Coroner Lawrie to the group and have tabled the learnings and changes to doctrine and operational procedures as an agenda item at their next meeting for discussion with the purpose of ensuring that such incident is highlighted to equivalent emergency service departments and so that the respective agencies can consider whether it may be necessary to review their own doctrine and policy.

#### **Conclusion**

31. FRV strives to engage in continuous improvement efforts in order to ensure the well-being of the community. As part of this commitment, FRV will continue to work collaboratively with the NDIS Commission to identify any gaps in the service scope for high needs individuals in relation to fire safety and education, as well as advocating for policies regarding the implementation of technology with is connected between monitored personal alarm devices and smoke alarms, as well as how data may be shared between FRV and the NDIS Commission to maximise the precautions and safeguards in respect of sprinkler systems.
32. In relation to the crucial question of location validation, FRV will continue to identify and incorporate effective risk mitigation measures into its operational strategy procedures and training courses as set out in this letter.
33. FRV acknowledges the important role of the coronial process in seeking to reduce the number of preventable deaths and is grateful for the opportunity to take as much learning as possible from this tragic case.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Kirsty McIntyre, General Counsel [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,



Gavin Freeman AFSM  
Commissioner  
**Fire Rescue Victoria**