

Thank you for the support you provide as an employer of a valuable volunteer member of the Rural Fire Service (RFS). The RFS provides essential fire prevention and management services to Queensland communities. RFS volunteers are essential in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all Queenslanders.

This brochure will provide you with important information on the RFS, the role we play in protecting the community, and how you can participate by supporting our volunteers.



Information for employers of **Rural Fire Service Volunteers**

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Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) provides fire and rescue services to the communities of Queensland through permanent firefighters, auxiliary firefighters, and the Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers.

The RFS is made up of approximately 27,000 volunteers, forming around 1400 brigades. Brigades around the state provide essential services to the people of their community, and it is only through the generosity of volunteers that these services exist.

Although the character and operational method of brigades across the state may vary, they all have the same primary goal – to protect the people and assets of their community against the destructive force of fire and respond to severe weather impacts.

This protection is provided through:

Fighting Fires – responding to the outbreak of fires within their local community and supporting the response of other brigades in their local area.

Fire Prevention – brigades work with paid staff to deliver a range of planning and preparation activities throughout the year. This includes hazard reduction burns; used to strategically reduce excess vegetation identified as a local risk should a bushfire occur.

Community Education – Increasing awareness in the community for timely and effective fire prevention.

Permits to Light Fire – the RFS controls the use of fire by only allowing fires to be lit with a specific permit. RFS Fire Wardens and Authorised Officers manage the Permit to Light Fire system.

Deployments and assistance during disasters – RFS volunteers may be requested to assist across Queensland or interstate during major fire events. Members may also be requested to assist other emergency service agencies during disasters such as floods and storms.

Employer Benefits

There are many benefits to having a member of the RFS as an employee. Throughout their time with the RFS, volunteers undertake mandatory training and develop skills in a wide range of areas. They also have access to additional knowledge and skills training programs provided by the RFS, which equip them with capabilities that can be useful in the workplace.

RFS volunteers learn to work well in teams, follow instructions, communicate effectively, think quickly, take responsibility, use their initiative, and develop capabilities to keep calm in a crisis.

By supporting an employee who is a member of a brigade, you are supporting the community. Volunteers are essential to providing the services offered by rural brigades and essential to protecting the community.

Employer Incentives

QFES and the RFS acknowledges the significant contribution to the community that employers make when releasing staff from their work responsibilities to respond to emergencies. Businesses release staff at their own cost, and an employer must consider the operability of their business when considering employee leave entitlement requests, particularly at short notice.

As an incentive and in recognition of their support, employers whose staff members volunteer for RFS may be eligible for an exemption on payroll tax for the hours staff spend away from work serving the community. This exemption recognises the importance of volunteers and the commitment of employers for allowing staff to take time away.

Information can be found through the Queensland Office of State Revenue by calling 1300 300 734 during office hours or visiting their website at qro.qld.gov.au.

Employee Leave

QFES and the RFS encourages its volunteers to discuss release from work and make suitable leave arrangements with their employers prior to the need to attend an emergency. These arrangements may be informal, such as verbal, or can be made more formally in writing.

The type of leave to be used should form part of these discussions. The decision of when and how leave of absence will be granted and processed is at the discretion of the employer.

Employers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the legislative requirements to support emergency service volunteers, such as the *Industrial Relations Act 1999* and the *Fair Work Act 2009*. For a detailed fact sheet, visit fairwork.gov.au/leave/community-service-leave.

RFS Responsibilities

The RFS provides workers compensation cover for volunteers while attending training and operational activities. If a volunteer is hurt while undertaking brigade activities, they can apply to Workcover to claim for medical expenses or lost wages.

