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MEDIA STATEMENT

WODONGA FIRE STATION WAS NOT CLOSED ON SATURDAY

The body representing CFA volunteers has urged people in the Wodonga region not to be anxious over irresponsible union claims that they were not adequately protected from fire on Saturday.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) says the claims are just part of a union campaign for more paid positions with the CFA.

“We respect their right to campaign for their members, but if you listened to the United Firefighters Union, you would think there was no fire brigade on duty at all,” said VFBV Executive Officer Allan Monti.

“While the paid firefighters were off for the day, the Wodonga fire station was open as normal, and the city was protected by a full crew of professionally trained volunteers,” Mr Monti said.

“Those volunteers manned the station and performed all the normal duties, including having a fully crewed fire engine on the way to a fire at Wodonga West within one minute of the call being received.”

The VFBV spokesman pointed out that the volunteers who manned the station are fully trained veterans of the Black Saturday fires and are the same firefighters who turn out to any house fire or car accident rescue in the Wodonga area.

“The union campaign ignores the reality that there are 60,000 CFA volunteers in Victoria, and that the volunteers manning your local tankers are professionally trained firefighters,” Mr Monti said.

He said the union is just doing what it is paid to do, campaigning for more jobs and more influence.

“Unfortunately, what serves the union’s best interests is not always what serves the community’s best interests,” Mr Monti said.

“And any suggestion that Wodonga was without proper protection from fire on Saturday is irresponsible,” he said.

“For the people of a regional city like Wodonga, a day without paid firefighters is a day like any other – any fire will still be fought with courage, experience and professional skills.”

VFBV points out that when it comes to the local CFA brigade, there’s a lot of training, experience and knowhow that goes into the word ‘volunteer’.

“When a CFA crew responds to an emergency, the volunteers on that tanker will have TAFE-level qualifications in fire fighting and rescue work, and most will have 10 or 20 years of fire fighting experience as well,” Mr Monti said.

“The union and the CFA may be involved in the claim and counter claim of enterprise bargaining at the moment, but the volunteers are always there, trained, professional and ready when you need them,” he said.

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