

**Question on Notice
No. 496
Asked on 23 March 2010**

MR MALONE asked the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services (MR ROBERTS) -

QUESTION:

For the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (reported separately) for 2009, 2008 and 2007 (reported separately), will the Minister detail the annual sick leave rate and its financial cost to the state and for each region?

ANSWER:

The Bligh Government has a proud history of supporting our emergency services. This includes ensuring staff and volunteers are properly supported and assisted.

As I have previously advised the Member in my response to his Question on Notice No. 401 asked on 10 March 2010, the Department of Community Safety has implemented its Workplace Health and Safety Strategy 2007-2010. Under this strategy, workplace hazards and risks are targeted with an ultimate goal of zero harm to departmental personnel. The performance of the 'ZEROharm' initiative is assessed against two key performance indicators in the Department's Annual Report: lost time injury frequency rate which is the number of lost time injuries (one day or greater) per million hours worked and injury downtime rate which is the hours lost to injury as a factor of the total hours worked in the department. The lost time injury frequency rate was 26.73 in 2008-09 and the injury downtime rate was 0.71% in 2008-09. This is a decrease from the lost time injury frequency rate of 28.64 in 2007-08 and the injury downtime rate of 0.77% in 2007-08.

Vital support services like Priority One and FireCare and a peer support network are available to support QAS and QFRS staff and their families. These services provide early specialist intervention, trained peer supporters to provide debriefs following incidents and specialist counselling services.

The QAS encourages staff and immediate family members to utilise the professional services of 'Priority One' Staff Support Program. Ambulance officers and their immediate family are provided with counselling sessions for both work-related and non-work-related matters. Local counsellors' names and contact details are available from QAS stations or by contacting Priority One.

The QAS Staff Support Services have also developed a range of other initiatives to help support ambulance officers and their immediate families. These include a 24-Hour Telephone Counselling Service which is available both to officers and their immediate family members.

Telephone counselling is confidential and is available for both work-related and non work-related matters. Other services include Peer Supporter Officers who have volunteered to undertake special training to assist their work colleagues cope with personal and job-related difficulties. There is a network of Peer Supporter Officers throughout the State who provide a first line of contact following an incident or when QAS officers may need them.

FireCare is the counselling and support program designed specifically for Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFRS) staff, volunteers and their immediate families. The Peer Support Program provides a team of specially selected and trained co-workers across the state to help staff cope with personal and/or work-related difficulties. Confidential Professional Counselling is provided to staff and their immediate families. A 24-Hour Telephone Crisis Counselling Service is also provided. Telephone counselling is confidential and is available for both work-related and non work-related matters. QFRS offices and stations have a list of Peer Support Officers and list of FireCare counsellors throughout Queensland.

The Member has recently asked a number of similar Questions on Notice relating to sick leave takings in the QAS and QFRS. In particular, I refer the Member to my answer to his Question on Notice No. 643 asked on 18 June 2009 which provided sick leave taken by region including the financial cost and hours for the QAS for 2007-08 and 2008-09. I also refer the Member to the answer to his Question on Notice No. 401 asked on 10 March 2010 which provided sick leave taken and the percentage of employed hours for QAS ambulance officers by financial year. To now provide that same information by calendar year for the same periods would be a duplication of work, diverting QAS resources away from front-line service delivery. I can advise, however, that the QAS sick leave rate was reduced from 3.63% in 2007-08 to 3.37% in 2008-09.

I refer the Member to the answer to his Question on Notice No. 401 asked on 10 March 2010 which provided sick leave taken and the percentage of employed hours for QFRS firefighters and station officers by financial year. Once again, to provide the same information by calendar year for the same periods would be a duplication of work, diverting QFRS resources from front-line service delivery. Data relating to the sick leave cost and hours taken for QFRS for each region has not been previously requested and this information is provided below.

QFRS Sick Leave Cost

Region	2007-08	2008-09
Brisbane	\$1,649,815	\$1,919,623
Central	\$283,189	\$229,228
Far Northern	\$153,070	\$184,229
North Coast	\$352,411	\$420,284
Northern	\$259,007	\$265,076
South Eastern	\$688,922	\$761,169
South Western	\$180,278	\$226,744
Rural Operations	\$37,240	\$137,463
Total	\$3,603,933	\$4,143,815

QFRS Sick Leave Hours

Region	2007-08	2008-09
Brisbane	69,988	76,557
Central	11,721	9,904
Far Northern	7,643	7,656
North Coast	15,364	15,296
Northern	11,490	11,413
South Eastern	31,217	32,173
South Western	7,615	8,257
Rural Operations	2,151	4,069
Total	157,190	165,325

* The increase in sick leave between 2007-08 and 2008-09 takes account of wage increases granted during 2008-09.

* The sick leave rate in 2007-08 was 3.24%. It was 3.27% in 2008-09.