

What I Need to Know

- QFRS has a responsibility to ensure its interaction with young people occurs within a child safety framework that is consistent with Government policy and direction. By law a child is anyone under the age of 18 years. It is the obligation of all volunteers to ensure that all practicable measures are taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of volunteers under the age of the 18 who are members of the brigade.

Screening

- Blue Cards

The legislation that covers blue cards places the onus on the employer to ensure staff and volunteers eligible for a blue card do actually have one and that any staff and volunteers who are required to have a blue card are provided with the necessary information and the application form to complete. The blue card application process is managed and coordinated centrally and any costs for acquiring a blue card will be met by QFRS.

The key messages are these:

- The majority of staff and volunteers working in emergency services are not required to have a blue card.
- The legislation has time-based criteria for employee's interaction with children that determines who should have a blue card, and in most cases, QFRS staff and volunteers do not meet this criteria.
- It is also important to remember that blue card eligibility is defined by legislation – the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000*. This legislation is very clear about the types of child related employment where a blue card is required. People who work with children are either required to have a blue card or not required to have a blue card – this is not a screening process that can be arbitrarily opted into. If you are a volunteer who needs to have a blue card you will be advised of this by the Department and provided with the forms to complete.

The Children's Commission website has a number of fact sheets and background information about blue cards that provides more detailed information.

<http://www.childcomm.qld.gov.au/employment/index.html>

- Criminal History Checks

Unlike other Department of Emergency Services (DES) volunteers, Rural Fire Brigade members are not currently required to undergo a criminal history check prior to becoming a member. This policy may change into the future.

Code of Conduct

- The DES Code of conduct includes specific references to working with children. For further information refer to the copy of the Code of Conduct section of this manual.

Reporting of allegations of inappropriate behaviour

- All volunteers and staff are obliged to report inappropriate behaviour. The code of conduct outlines expectations and the process to be followed if inappropriate conduct is alleged.

Information about child abuse

- A copy of the DES Child Protection Information Kit is available by request from your Area Office. The kit includes a range of information including: information on indicators of abuse, responding to disclosures, confidentiality of information, the child protection system in Queensland, how to make a

report if abuse is suspected, who to call, what information to provide, legislative protection for people who make a report.

Information about appropriate ways of interacting with children

- A new Department of Emergency Services' policy relating to the management of volunteers under the age of 18 years, is currently under development. This will then require interpretation and evaluation by QFRS against brigade activities and processes, to provide clear guidelines to volunteers on appropriate strategies to ensure the risk of children coming to harm is minimised.
- Further policies and guidelines will be released in later versions of the manual.

How I do it

For further information or advice regarding dealing with volunteers under 18 years of age, contact your local Area Office.

Reference Materials

- DES Child Protection Information Kit
- Child Employment Act 2006
- Child Protection Act 1999
- Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000
- <http://www.childcomm.qld.gov.au/employment/index.html>
- Rural Fire Brigade Manual – D7.16 Code of Conduct, Criminal History Checks