

Welcome to our family

Nau mai ki tō mātou whānau



Families Guide

What to expect when a member of your family volunteers with Fire and Emergency New Zealand



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Welcome and thanks

Haere mai me ngā mihi

Welcome to our whānau! As a family member of a Fire and Emergency volunteer, you play a vital role in our mission to create safe communities and strengthen community resilience across New Zealand, and for this, we thank you.

We acknowledge that without your support, encouragement, and sacrifices that enable your volunteer to respond to incidents (sometimes daily), we wouldn't be able to provide New Zealanders with the help they need in an emergency.

Without our volunteers and their families:

- there wouldn't be a fire and emergency service that covers all of New Zealand
- many more people would lose their homes, or even their lives, every day.

Your contribution as a family member will connect you to a nationwide support network. You'll be a part of an extensive network of volunteers and families who share similar experiences and will understand both the sacrifices and the pride you'll feel.

Volunteering may also take a while to adjust to ... there'll be a few missed dinners, early morning emergency calls, and from time to time, a need for your support when an incident hasn't gone quite as planned. For many, volunteering becomes – over time – a way of life.

So for all the missed dinners, family time, special events, birthdays, bedtimes and storytimes, to the sense of pride, community and connection that comes from volunteering, from us all ... thanks for joining our whānau.

“For many, it’s a new way of life, and the whole family is along for the ride.”

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They've volunteered, but what does that mean?

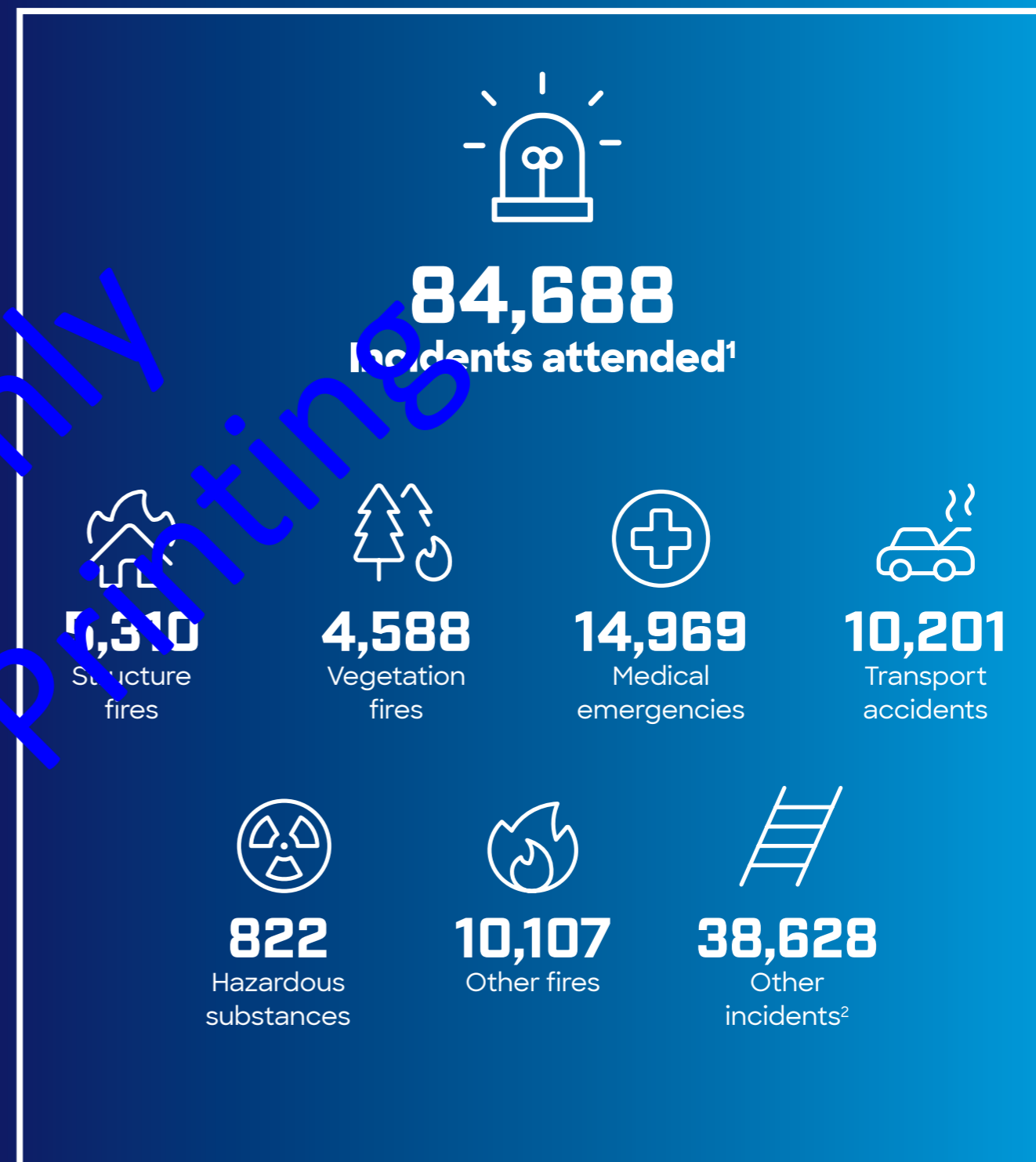
He kaimahi tūao rātou, engari he aha te tikanga o tērā?

Your Fire and Emergency New Zealand volunteer will be expected to:

- respond to three to four call-outs a week (on average), stepping into potentially dangerous situations to help others
- attend regular training
- race out the door at a moment's notice when someone needs them
- put in a few extra hours each week to learn the skills they'll need to stay safe and save lives
- form strong bonds with other members of their brigades, so they can make a great team that works together to keep people and property safe.

We will fully train your volunteer to keep themselves safe as they deal with whatever comes their way. They may be asked to respond in a wide range of emergency situations. On the facing page you'll find out more about some of them, as well as the approximate length of time dealing with each type of emergency could take.

Please note this is just a guide as each incident is different and the geography and location of your volunteer's station will impact on drive times.



¹ Incidents attended by career and volunteer personal across the 2021/2022 financial year.










² Other incidents include special services, assisting public, false alarms and incidents that have not been categorised as a specific incident type at the time of data collection. Special services calls include call outs for animal rescues; assist public calls include rescues and assisting with evacuations.



We do the right thing Kia tika

We hold each other to high standards, are trusted by and trust others. We do what we say we will do, and show courage to do what's right, rather than what's easy. We take responsibility and think of others.

What types of incidents will your volunteer attend?

Code	Incident type	Approximate incident length
 STRU	Structure fire, private fire, alarm activation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> False alarm: 30 mins Actual fire: 2 hours +
 HAZ	Hazardous materials event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 hour +
 MED	Medical call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 45–90 minutes
 RESC	Rescue call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehicle crash: 1–2 hours + Person rescue: 30 mins +
 VEG	Vegetation fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> False alarm: 30 mins Actual fire: 2 hours +
 NAT (1–3)	Natural disaster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flooding, storms, etc. – varies depending on the event, but can be 8 hours + and involve working jobs back to back.
 AIR (L/M/H)	Aircraft crash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1–5 hours or more
 SHIP	Ship fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1–5 hours or more
 MIN	Minor event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small fire: 30–60 mins General assistance to public: 30–60 mins

What your volunteer will deal with Ngā mahi a te kaitūao

Your volunteer will be fully trained to handle the various situations they'll find themselves in. But that doesn't mean they won't find it physically challenging, even exhausting.

They'll be wearing heavy gear, often dragging hoses, responding to medical emergencies and vehicle crashes, all done under huge pressure to save lives and property – and often without enough sleep. All this needs a great deal of physical and mental stamina.

This means they'll often need to catch up. They might need an extra nap here and there, or they might head to bed early if they've had a call-out the night before.

They might also be more tired and irritable than usual, given what they've been doing – so try not to take it personally if they are.

As well as the physical challenges, some situations can put extra pressure on your volunteer. Some emergency call-outs involve extraordinarily difficult circumstances, particularly when severe injury or loss of life is involved. And because it's your volunteer's job to support your local community, they may find themselves attending a call-out that involves someone they know.

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We serve and support Manaakitanga

We work towards strengthening and developing, by being both proactive and responsive to the needs of others, including our teams and communities.



How you can provide support if things get tough

Me pēhea koe e āwhina atu ai mehemea ka pāngia ngā taumahatanga

Everyone's different, and may need to be supported in different ways. Some volunteers will come home and share the details of what they've been doing, including things they've found stressful or traumatic, while others might bottle it up.

You're not expected to play the role of a counsellor. The best thing you can do, in the first instance, is listen if they want to talk and acknowledge their feelings.

There won't be anything you can say to 'put things right' if a call-out hasn't had a positive outcome, but you can remind your volunteer that they did everything they could possibly have done – and that everyone in the community appreciates their efforts.

“How can my family prepare themselves for me coming home tired and stressed?”

Worried they're not coping?

Kei te māharahara i te uaua o ngā mahi ki a rātou?

Being a Fire and Emergency New Zealand volunteer can be mentally and physically stressful, and sometimes any volunteer can struggle to cope.

It's important to keep an eye out for signs of anxiety or depression, and seek help if you see them.

Signs of anxiety are to be expected. If they don't last long, they're part of a normal stress response – but if they continue for some length of time, they could be a sign that your volunteer needs a bit of extra help.

Signs and symptoms of anxiety can include:

- worrying more than usual
- seeming tired or irritable, even if there hasn't been a late night
- trouble sleeping at night
- muscle tension or restlessness.

Signs of depression can include:

- difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- dramatic changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- anger, sadness or frustration, particularly after a call-out
- losing interest in things they used to enjoy
- feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness or guilt.

If your volunteer is going through any of these, get in touch with their Chief Fire Officer or Controller and let them know that you're worried. They'll be able to step in and make sure your volunteer firefighter gets the help they need.

We are better together Whanaungatanga

We seek opportunities to connect and build inclusive relationships with others - our team members, different parts of our organisation, our partners and our communities. We bring people together, celebrate difference and provide a safe environment for all to thrive.





Who to contact to support your volunteer firefighter

Te tangata tika hei tautoko i tō kaipatu ahi tūao

There are a number of places you or your volunteer firefighter can turn to if they're having trouble dealing with the more difficult aspects of the job.

Their GP

Usually the first port of call for most people if they're having a tough time, either physically or mentally.

Their Chief Fire Officer or Controller

They will be able to connect your firefighter to the support systems that are available.

Fire and Emergency Support

Specially trained colleagues can be contacted directly through the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Communication Centre or through the Regional Safety, Health and Wellbeing Advisor.

Northern Communication Centre

09 486 7948

Central Communication Centre

04 801 0812

Southern Communication Centre

03 341 0266

EAP Services (counselling)

Confidential advice and counselling are available to all personnel and their immediate families at no cost. You can call our employee assistance programmes for work, family or personal concerns.

Vitae Services:

0508 664 981

vitae.co.nz



Professional psychological support

Clinical psychologists and other health professionals are also available through your Welfare Officer/Wellbeing Advisor (directly or via our communications centres). If there is an urgent need, please contact your GP on call, ambulance service, or local hospital emergency department, who can refer you to the Crisis Assessment and Treatment Teams (CATT) services in your area.

Managing your own worry and fear

Te whakataui i ō ake māharahara, i te matakū rānei

A member of your family has volunteered to undertake some of the most dangerous tasks in your community – who wouldn't be worried about that? It's totally normal to be concerned for the safety of your loved one.

This is especially true when an emergency requires their complete focus and attention – which means they won't be free to let you know that they're OK. This can make it extra tough for family members left at home.

But it's important to remember that your volunteer is fully trained to deal with the situations they'll find themselves in. And that training isn't just focused on saving lives and resolving crises – it's focused on keeping themselves safe, too.

There can be other sources of stress, too. As a partner, feelings may spring up as your partner spends a great deal of time with their brigade and develops a passion for the job, which takes time away from your relationship and family.

If you do find yourself worrying and it's affecting your ability to go about your day, there are a few things you can try:

- Focus on the outcome of what your volunteer is achieving. Try to think about the victim and their family, who need help. This isn't always easy, as the situation may inconvenience you, especially when you have your own family to look after.
- Get support from other volunteer families. When someone in your family volunteers for Fire and Emergency New Zealand, you become part of an extended family.
- Other volunteer families know about the worries and inconvenience, which makes the community that surrounds your volunteer's brigade a great place to turn if you need advice or support.
- Write it down. At the back of this booklet, you'll find a Cons and Pros checklist designed to help manage your feelings of worry and frustration. Sometimes it helps to write it down – just complete a set of boxes each time you're frustrated by a call-out. For more information, turn to page 25.

The Safe Person Concept

Te ariā tangata haumarū

The Safe Person Concept underpins everything people who work for Fire and Emergency New Zealand do.

It's about thinking and acting safely while carrying out their duties as a firefighter, and is designed to help them make the right decision in any situation.

Fire and Emergency New Zealand volunteers are trained to understand that it is NEVER OK to enter a situation where the risk level is very high. And your volunteer won't ever risk their safety for lives or property that are obviously not able to be saved. They'll only go into risky situations in a highly calculated manner, to protect saveable lives or property – calculating and reducing the risk as they go.

All of this means that when they're on a call-out, your volunteer isn't just focused on saving lives or property – they're also focused on making sure they get home safe to their family.

When your volunteer is on a call-out, keep the Safe Person Concept in mind. Remember that:

- They're well trained to keep themselves safe, even as they're doing what they can to help other people.
- Even though they're out helping the community, their number one priority is still getting home safe at the end of the call-out.



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Meet the pager

Te tūtaki i te mihini tuku karere

Your volunteer carries a pager that receives alerts to tell them when they need to respond to an emergency.

It's a sound you'll come to know well, and it can go off anywhere at any time – be it halfway through dinner, when you just sat down to watch a movie, while you're at the supermarket or in the middle of the night.

This can be frustrating, but try to remember that the pager going off means help is on the way for someone in your community, because it means they're in desperate need of help. However annoying it can be when the pager goes off and your volunteer leaps up and races out the door, that sound means someone's in serious trouble and your volunteer is one of the few people who is trained to help them out. They could even be on their way to save someone's life.

We are currently rolling out our new Availability and Messaging System (AMS) across the country. It will provide accurate, real-time information about the availability of volunteers to respond to incidents. AMS also provides the option for your volunteer to add a courtesy contact number to notify you or a member of your whānau when they have responded to an incident. This gives you the information you may need to make informed decisions about other commitments such as work and childcare, which your volunteer may now not be able to attend to.

Schedule page breaks

While it might be a new permanent member of the family, you can still tell the pager to be quiet once in a while. By talking to your volunteer firefighter and their Chief Fire Officer or Controller, you should be able to agree to some regular downtime when you can guarantee you won't be hearing the sound of the pager. This leaves you free for a date night, a family outing or just some peace and quiet together.

And if something important is interrupted by the pager, it doesn't mean the moment is lost – consider having an agreement with your volunteer that any conversation that gets cut short will be finished later, once you're both in a position to pick it up again.

“I don't have too many worries when she goes out. I know the crew that she is working with and that they are all capable. I have full trust in them.”

Ways to connect with other families Ngā mahi whakawhanaungatanga

No one understands what it's like to have a Fire and Emergency New Zealand volunteer in the family as well as other families who are in the same situation. Because of this, many people find the time they get to spend around other volunteer families to be really worthwhile.

There are lots of ways to connect with other volunteer families – here are just a few of the most common:

- Attend or organise a monthly brigade BBQ or potluck.
- Celebrate brigade birthdays together.
- Organise a brigade Christmas party for the kids.
- Attend or arrange a training night for new families, where they can meet the brigade and have a look around the station.
- Start a brigade Facebook page to connect partners with other partners, and keep everyone up to date about future family events.

We strive to improve Auahatanga

We meet the needs of our partners and communities by looking to the future and continuously finding ways to make things better. We are flexible and adaptable. We embrace change, acknowledge what's gone before and learn from experiments that help us adapt to future needs.



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“My son gets a real kick out of me being a volunteer firefighter. He was stoked when I invited his friends down to the station to take a closer look at what we do, and our trucks.”

Get the kids involved

Whakamahia ngā tamariki

Most kids already understand that firefighters play a vital role in the community. Here are a few ways you can get your children involved in the volunteer life:

- Introduce them to the pager, and make sure you let them know what it means – that when it goes off, it's the sound of someone calling for help.
- Take them on a tour of the fire station and appliances.
- Take them through what happens when someone calls 111, and the role your volunteer plays in that process.
- Explain the training your volunteer has had, making sure to emphasise that the training isn't just to help them save lives – it's also to help them keep themselves safe.
- Think of a routine way to say goodbye to your volunteer when they have to race out the door – and a way to welcome them home when they return.



Families with more than one Fire and Emergency New Zealand volunteer

Ngā whānau kua whai nui ake i te kotahi kaitinei ahi

Some families have a long history with Fire and Emergency New Zealand – they may have had parents or even grandparents who volunteered, which makes firefighting part of a family tradition.

You may find you become invested in the brigade just as deeply as you do volunteer, and decide you want to volunteer yourself. This can raise concerns about working together in a dangerous situation, and how you see this working both practically and emotionally – working alongside a loved one on a call-out can also mean seeing them in danger. It can create practical challenges, such as who'll look after the kids if you're both on a call-out.

Volunteering as a parent sets an example for your children that promotes selflessness – which means they may decide to volunteer themselves when they're old enough, continuing the tradition into the next generation.

You may need to think about how you would feel if your children decided to volunteer themselves.



Write it down Tuhia ki tō rae

The Cons and Pros checklist was developed as a tool to help you put your volunteer's work for Fire and Emergency New Zealand and the stress it can place on your family life in perspective.

Sometimes it helps to write down what's good and bad about a situation, and over time it can create a picture of how your concerns relate to your volunteer's achievements.

How to use it

If your volunteer is on a call-out and you're worried, frustrated or otherwise stressed, complete a box in the Cons column by jotting down exactly how you feel and why.

Afterwards, when your volunteer gets home, complete the Pros box next to it by writing down what your volunteer achieved – who they helped and what support they provided.

Over time, you'll start to see a picture emerging – one that places your worries and frustrations in the context of the greater good your volunteer is serving. This can help you focus on why your volunteer has made this commitment – and why the stresses that come with it are worth it.

Date

Cons

Pros

Date

Cons

Pros

Date

Cons

Pros

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Volunteerism is fundamental to our country's ability to provide effective and affordable services and build strong, resilient communities

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Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government