THE NEW ZEALAND VOLUNTEER FIRE SERVICE IN 3 RURAL COMMUNITIES IN NORTHLAND

KO TE RATONGA AHI ROTO I ËTAHI TAKIWÄ E TORU O TE TAITOKERAU

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Acknowledgements

1.   Executive Summary

This study looked at the role of the rural volunteer fire parties[1] in three relatively isolated rural communities between Whangarei and Russell. The summary that follows presents the key findings from questionnaires and interviews with community members and rural fire volunteers, along with discussions with District Council officials and a New Zealand Fire Service Representative. The key recommendations arising from the study are also highlighted.

Volunteer Profile

A total of fifteen rural fire party volunteers participated in this research. Eighty seven percent of all volunteers self identified as Maori. Rural volunteer fire parties come under the jurisdiction of Local District Council. Forty percent of volunteers were in the 34-39 year age range. One volunteer was from the age range 18-23 years. Seventy three percent of volunteers joined their local service as a result of being invited to do so by whanau already participating as local fire volunteers. Almost half of the volunteers were involved in other local voluntary work in their district. The median length of service as a local rural fire volunteer was approximately 4 years.

Recommendations

- Formulate a culturally appropriate 'mentoring program' to recruit local younger community members as rural fire volunteers
- Separate management and governance roles of local fire units
- Employ a volunteer on a pro rata basis to position of manager for the 3 combined rural fire parties

Community Perceptions of the Rural Fire Unit

Almost all households were aware of the existence of a local volunteer fire unit. Seventy three percent of households felt that the community supported their local volunteer fire unit. Twelve households indicated that they required assistance from their local fire unit with eight of these households feeling that the fire unit's response was adequate. The Fire units' response time and inadequate equipment were two general themes of concern expressed by the community. Fifty-six of household respondents would view a neighbouring volunteer fire unit as belonging to their community also. One community respondent was aware that the local rural fire unit came under the auspices of the Local Council. The roles of the NZ Fire Service and Local Council in fire suppression and fire prevention are not clear, especially at a community level. If communities are to take 'ownership' by increasing their support of local fire units then the different roles by separate stakeholders need to be made clearer to the communities.

Community and Fire Volunteers

All volunteers and 90 percent of household respondents stated that community support of their unit fire unit is important. Fifty three percent of volunteers felt that

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[1] The use of the terms Fire Party, Fire Unit and Fire Service are in reference to Rural Fire Volunteers in our study area, whose service come under the umbrella of their respective local councils. These terms are not used to suggest reference to New Zealand Fire Service Volunteers who are a separate entity, who do not exist in our study communities (see section 3.2).

their respective communities were actually supporting the local fire unit. All Oakura fire volunteers indicated that they received local community support. Eighty six percent of Rawhiti volunteers felt that their local community was not supportive. Financial donations were identified by the community as the most common form of support. There is a perceived lack of support from non-residential homeowners. Ninety three percent of volunteers see the community as responsible for ensuring community support; where as 67 percent of the community see this as a community responsibility. The New Zealand Fire Service is viewed by both volunteers and the community as having a role in ensuring community support. The Oakura rural volunteer fire unit was viewed as the most resourced and competent of the 3 units. It is suggested that a 'best practice' model of volunteering organisations be established so as to develop a resource to assist communities in establishing a rural fire party.

Recommendations

- Develop a resource that informs rural communities on the development of a volunteer rural fire unit. The resource should be inclusive of 'best practice' excerpts of existing examples from volunteer units across a range of organisations including the NZ Fire Service
- As part of a fire prevention program for rural areas, develop a culturally appropriate phase that distinguishes between communal responsibilities for both fire prevention and fire suppression. Local councils and the NZ Fire Service could work collaboratively to ensure success of the program.

Service Provision and Rural Isolation

Both Ngaiotonga and Rawhiti volunteers indicate a lack of regular training. Eighty six percent of Rawhiti volunteers indicated a lack of motivation. Sixty seven percent of all volunteers did not feel their local fire unit was isolated. From the 3 units, Oakura volunteers felt most supported from their Local District Council. Seventy three percent of volunteers felt staff morale was high. The majority of volunteers did not feel that the notion of rural remoteness affected call out accuracy, volunteer training or fire facilities in their area. All volunteer units acknowledged having difficulty with some groups within the community, in particular non-resident homeowners and local community representative groups. Inadequate insurance cover is currently provided for volunteers on the assumption that certain fires will not be attended to by the local rural fire unit.

Recommendations

- Adequate training on a regular basis be implemented and fully funded by local councils which includes regular out of district training
- Training be part of 'capacity building' to allow volunteers to combat all fires (including structural and vehicle fires)
- Local Council to allocate additional resources to assist with the building and strengthening of relationships between the volunteer unit and community subgroups.
- All cover accident insurance for volunteers to be a local council responsibility. Insurance cover is to increase as volunteers' up-skill to vehicle and structural fire training.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

During the 1996 calendar year 31percent of those who died as a result of residential property fires were identified as Maori. This figure rose to 52 percent in 1997 (Thomas, Rayner, & Moroney. 2000).

Given that the Maori population are significantly over represented in fire fatalities, little information has been collected on the local rural volunteer fire units that are based in Maori rural communities.

These local volunteer units are considered an important element in reducing Maori fire fatalities due to their service being localised and part of a community response to a perceived need.

2.2 Previous Research

2.2.1 Fire Research

This project is part of a larger effort to understand and counteract the high incidence of Maori fire fatalities in Aotearoa/ New Zealand.

Several projects have attempted to address these concerns within the Mäori population.

The Nga Tatauranga Injury to Mäori Report highlights the special attention deserved by [Maori] children in relation to death and injury suffered as a result of fire.

> For Tamariki the priorities for death reduction remain motor vehicle traffic crashes, drownings, and deaths to fire and flames. For non-fatal events, falls and thermal injuries are priorities (Quoted in Thomas, Rayner & Moroney, 2000, pg 11).

The Auahi Whakatüpato smoke alarm installation project in the Eastern Bay of Plenty is one such project. Between November 1997 and September 1999, 4453 households in the study area were visited and offered free installation of smoke alarms. Ninety seven percent of households had at least one functioning alarm at the end of the installation programme. A follow up survey of 500 randomly selected households where alarms had been installed was conducted in April and May 2000. The response rate was 87 percent (437 households) from which 72 percent had at least one functioning smoke alarm. One recommendation from this study was that future smoke alarm installation programmes include planned checking of alarms to detect and remedy problems, and ensure changing of batteries at appropriate intervals (Duncanson, Lawerence, Simpson, & Woodward, 2000).

Another study seeking to address this issue, titled 'Determining Effective Fire Safety Strategies for Mäori', was conducted in the Bay- Waikato Fire Region (Thomas et al. 2000). Three hundred face-to-face interviews with Mäori in the region were conducted. The interviews were to assess the level of awareness of fire safety behaviour, examine how Mäori would respond in an emergency, understand the life style variables that may contribute to the higher incidence of fire fatalities among Mäori, assess communication options and determine how to best reach at risk Mäori.

This study design also differentiated between *urban* and *rural* Mäori responses as units of analysis in their data presentation.

Results included a preference by both rural (82 percent) and urban (83 percent) participants for the marae as the best place to discuss important issues surrounding fire safety. Most (90 percent) said they relied on word of mouth to be kept informed of what was happening in their area.

Forty three percent (128 respondents) had a smoke alarm installed with significantly more urban (50 percent) than rural (33 percent) participants reported having a smoke alarm in their residence.

Incidences of fire fatalities do not occur randomly but occur more frequently, per 100,000 private dwellings, in certain geographical areas (Duncanson, Woodward, & Reid, 2000b). Recent research developments into fire safety have also included identifying communities and populations most at risk of fire fatality by examining the levels of fatal fire instances against socio-economic status. Cropp (1997) found that in New Zealand, deaths resulting from fire between 1995 and 1977 were more likely to occur in rental accommodation and in the 'cheapest' houses within suburbs considered 'lowest valued'. The median mesh block income for addresses in which these fatal fires occurred was found to be at least 8 percent lower than the New Zealand average personal income.

Duncanson (et al. 2000a) found a clear gradient with increasing rates of fatal fire incidents with increasing material and social deprivation, as measured by NZDep96. The study also established that for the period between July 1993 and June 1998, the rate of fatal fire incidents for private dwellings in the most deprived 10 percent of mesh blocks was 4.5 times the rate for private dwellings in the least deprived 10 percent of mesh blocks.

2.2.2 Volunteer Research

Barnett (1996) states that many definitions of volunteering are closely linked to definitions of 'formal volunteering' through an organisation. Barnett suggests that the ability of policy makers and others to influence volunteering is somewhat limited to volunteer definitions from the 'formal' sector. In this respect also, policy makers can avoid taking into account much broader definitions of the term volunteering. Barnett (1996: 6) defines volunteering as:

> The performance of an action by someone of their own free will, without remuneration, which provides a service to the community.

Other discussions of the term voluntary have indicated that relationships and activity are based on the 'freedom to choose' whether to join a voluntary movement or not. Voluntary activity can be paid or unpaid, with the essential characteristic not being the element of pay or reward, but the notion of freedom to participate (Ministry of Social Policy, 2001: 35).

The term 'volunteering' is culturally based as well as a class concept (Davis Smith, 1992). It is suggested that the concept of volunteerism does not sit comfortably with Maori values which has resulted in an under reporting of the Maori voluntary contribution in official census data and other research (Ministry of Social Policy, 2001; Wilson, 2001).

Some authors have suggested that for Maori the concepts of 'community' and 'voluntary work' needs to be described according to its value- ähuatanga- as a measure of worthiness based on the following principles:

tika	-	that which is right and proper
pono	-	having integrity
aroha	-	having compassion
manaakitanga	-	the implementation of aroha, caring for each other. (see Barnett, 1996; Ministry of Social Policy, 2001).

The Time Use Survey 1998-99 and the 1996 Census data show Maori were more likely to do unpaid work both within and outside their home than non-Maori. Approximately 51.2 percent of the Maori population were involved in unpaid work outside the household in 1996 (Statistics New Zealand, 1998).

Time Use Survey results show that Maori are more likely to participate in formal unpaid work outside the home that is work coordinated through an organised group (Statistics New Zealand, 2001).

2.3   Project Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of this project is to gather information that will facilitate the further development of an effective fire service in rural communities in New Zealand.

Specifically the objectives of the study are to:

- Provide a profile of fire service volunteers in each of the communities in the study area

- Gauge the level of community competency toward the local fire provision and

- Document the challenges that hinder effective fire provision

- Document the challenges that hinder effective fire service provision associated with rural isolation

2.4   Project Structure

This is thought to be the first study of its kind in that the focus is on the rural fire volunteer organisations that are most likely to provide an initial response to remote localised fire emergencies within communities with a predominately Maori resident population. It is felt that these volunteer services perform a specific function that complements existing [more traditional] fire safety promotions[2] and will provide beneficial insights into an organisation at the 'coal face' of reducing fire fatalities in the rural context.

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[2] Such as smoke alarm installation in private dwellings

3.   Research Method

3.1   Study Communities

The project provides a case study analysis of volunteer fire service provision in 3 rural communities in Northland: Oakura, Ngaiotonga/ Bland Bay, and Rawhiti. These communities are situated on the northern east coast of the North Island (see map of study area). The city of Whangarei is approximately 40 minutes drive away from the study area of Oakura with Ngaiotonga and Rawhiti being approximately 30-40 minutes drive from the township of Russell (Bay of Islands).

These communities are chosen due to their rural isolation and close proximity to each other in travelling distances (Oakura and Rawhiti each being 15-20 minutes travel from Ngaiotonga). Each community has a predominately Maori resident population. As a result, most volunteers are Maori and the service they provide would in most instances be the first response team to arrive at a local fire emergency. The closest other fire services are based in the townships of Russell (for Rawhiti and Ngaiotonga) and Hikurangi for Oakura.

Study Areas
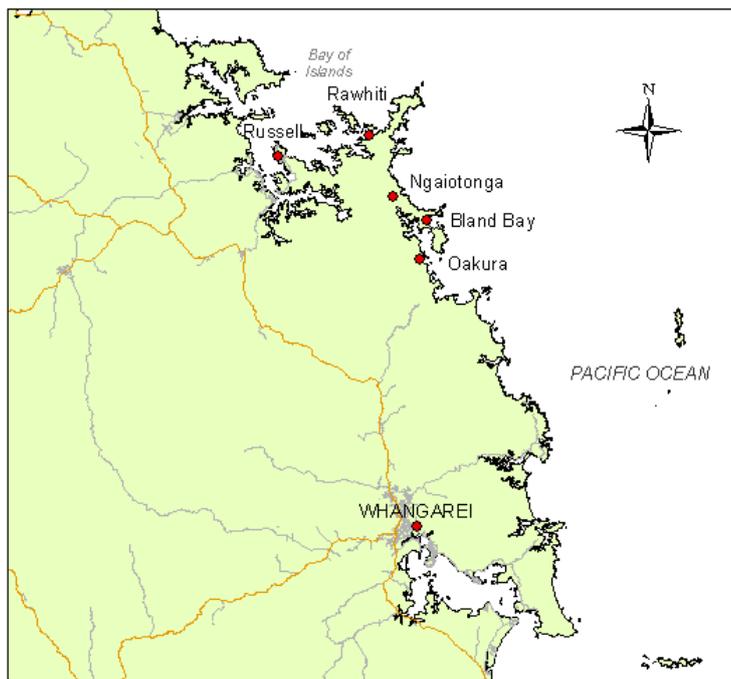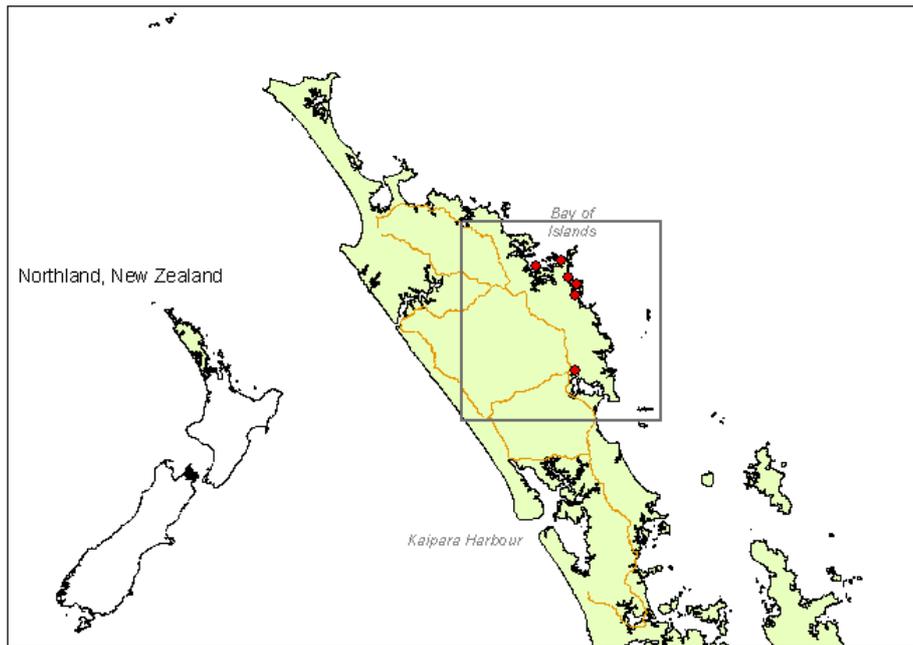
3.1.1 Community Profiles

As is common with most rural areas, the three communities in our study are adversely affected by rural economic recession resulting in high rates of unemployment and other socio economic downturns. Crampton (et al., 2000) used data from the 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings to create the NZDep96 Index of Deprivation. Nine deprivation variables reflecting eight types of deprivation[3] were used in the

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[3] Communication, income, employment, transport, support, qualifications, owned home and living space.

construction of the index. The three communities in our study area are represented as level 10 (most deprived) on the NZDep96 index.

For a fine grain analysis, socio-economic data from the 1996 Census was extracted from the Supermap3[4] program by mesh block for each of our study areas[5].

The 1996 Census revealed our study areas have a usual resident population of 654 with a total of 258 private dwellings. Sixty four percent of the total resident population identified as having Maori ethnicity. Sixty nine percent of the total resident population are 15 years and over. The median household income is $17,490 with the average personal income of $11,275. Sixty-six households indicate having no phone with 51 households having no vehicle. A total of 180 individuals were receiving some form of government benefit[6]. This total represents 40 percent of the total usual resident population aged 15 years and over. Fifty-four people identified as wage and salary earners from within our study areas. The average age across our study communities was 34 years.

3.1.2 Rural Volunteer Fire Services in the Study Communities

The Whangaruru Rural Volunteer Fire Service is situated in the Oakura area. The Whangaruru service has been established the longest out of the 3 rural services that took part in the study. Fire suppression equipment, including a fire engine and a smoke chaser vehicle are kept in a fire station structure in Oakura. The building also features an informal lounge area for the use of volunteers.

The Ngaiotonga/ Bland Bay Rural Volunteer Fire Service is in self-imposed recess due to reported difficulties in maintaining volunteers and difficulties experienced previously from within the volunteer group. At the height of their activity, the Ngaiotonga/ Bland Bay service had the use of a [older] fire engine and a smoke chaser vehicle. A trailerised system consisting of a water pump and associated fire hoses is still housed in Ngaiotonga at the residence of a volunteer and is available for use should an emergency arise.

The Rawhiti Volunteer Rural Fire Service is situated at the end of the Rawhiti road in a purpose built double garage-like structure. Fire suppression equipment housed in this structure includes a smoke chaser vehicle and associated water pump and hoses.

To assist with ease of geographical distinction between the three volunteer services, we have continued to refer to their locality/ community names (Oakura, Ngaiotonga and Rawhiti volunteer fire services) as opposed to their official titles[7].

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[4] Statistics New Zealand
[5] Including immediate neighbouring communities, that also responded to our household questionnaire
[6] Unemployment, DPB, sickness, invalid's, other
[7] This was due in part to advice from a kaumatua who stated that the name Whangaruru (used by the Oakura service), could in fact apply also to the Ngaiotonga/ Bland Bay service.

3.2   Data Collection

Most of the data were collected during the months of May to September 2001. This necessitated several trips to the study region.

Initial project discussions with the Northern Region of the New Zealand Fire Service alerted us to the fact that the three volunteer services we had chosen to include in the research were in fact supported at the local council level, not through the New Zealand Fire Service as first assumed. This information required us to establish contact with both the Whangarei and Far North District Councils.

3.2.1 Volunteer Questionnaires

The project researcher met with the volunteers from each of the three communities and explained the aim and objectives of the project. Volunteers present were given a participant information sheet, which explained the project in more depth. Consent forms were also issued and upon signing these, the volunteers then filled in the appropriate questionnaire.

We note that not all volunteers participated in the research. Volunteer participants included in the research were those that turned up on the day. It was explained to the researcher that Oakura and Rawhiti each had 8 volunteers in total. Thirteen of these participated in the research.

3.2.2 Community Household Questionnaires

A total of 84 household questionnaires were [hand] distributed to usual resident households with accessible mailboxes in each of the three study areas. Excluded were a large number of residents without mailboxes and those who had their mail delivered to the local store in Oakura. The rationale for exclusion was based primarily on travelling distances involved in trying to access every household in the geographical area. Both locals who assisted the researcher provided background knowledge in ensuring care was taken to include only usual resident households in the study. Time and associated costs were also factors that prevented all households being canvassed. The researcher could only visit the study area for short periods at a time. Hand delivering questionnaires to all houses would have necessitated a substantial time and resource commitment.

The return rate for household questionnaires was 62 percent (52 questionnaires). Care was taken to ensure that Volunteer respondents/ households did not also complete the community questionnaire. This distinction was to ensure that volunteer and community views remained separate, particularly on views solicited by the same or similar questions.

Two local community members were engaged to assistant with this portion of the project in both Rawhiti and Oakura. Community surveys were delivered to the households of resident populations within each of the three study areas. A self addressed envelope to the James Henare Māori Research Centre was included along with a Participant Information Sheet and contact details of the researcher and Centre Director. The household members completing the survey were encouraged to either post back the completed survey or have the local assistant call for the survey in the sealed envelope.

3.2.3 Local Council Interviews

The Oakura and Ngaiotonga/ Bland Bay rural fire volunteer services are ultimately responsible to the Whangarei District Council. The Rawhiti service reports to the Far North District Council.

Initial contact was made in person with representatives from both Councils who had responsibility for rural fire services. The Whangarei representative left his position soon after our first meeting at which time the Council then tendered for services to manage their rural fire parties. During this period of restructuring, several attempts to make contact with the appropriate person in the Whangarei Council failed.

In contrast the representative from the Far North District Council was able to meet with me on two separate occasions. We had informal discussions about their relationship with the Rawhiti volunteer fire service and what challenges are perceived in their support of Rawhiti and other rural fire services.

3.2.4 Key Informant Interviews

These interviews were conducted in one to one settings with volunteers and community members who had needed the assistance of their local volunteer fire service during an emergency. These interviews were recorded either by audiotaping or note taking.

3.3 Research Participants

Data from the following providers inform this research
- 52 community (household) questionnaires
- 15 volunteer questionnaires
- 4 key informant interviews with locals who have used the volunteer service in emergencies
- 4 key informant interviews with senior members of local rural volunteer fire units
- 2 key informant interviews with council representatives who were responsible for the rural volunteer units in our study area

3.4 Ethics Approval

Ethics approval for the project was granted from the Human Subjects Ethics Committee at the University of Auckland.

3.5   Analysis of Data

3.5.1 Quantitative Data

All quantitative data that informs this research comes from both the community household and volunteer questionnaires. A code template was developed for both sets of data (volunteers and community) and corresponding data was loaded into this template within the SPSS-statistical package for the social sciences. Care was taken to maintain the 3 communities as separate variables within the statistical package. In this respect each of the 3 communities can become a separate unit of analysis along with their corresponding data. It was felt from the outset that analysing data at both a collective (ie 3 communities combined) and at the individual community levels were to be two important features of the analysis programme.

All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.   In some instances participants were given the option to provide more than one answer and as a result some answers will add up to more than 100%.

3.5.2 Qualitative Data

This data set is informed by the respondent's comments in both the community and volunteers questionnaires along with the transcriptions of the key informant interviews.

For both the questionnaires, the comments provided were post coded and indicated as such on the SPSS program. This allowed the researchers to extract comments as they related to specific questions within both questionnaires.

The key informant interviews paralleled the questionnaire(s) format on specific themes and corresponding responses were post coded and merged with the questionnaire comments.

Audio taped and notes recorded key informant interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions were read and re-read from which common themes were grouped together and form the basis of the qualitative section of this report. Written comments by participants from both the community and volunteer surveys were also extracted and analysed within the qualitative section.

4. Results

4.1 Profile of Volunteers

Summary

- 15 rural fire volunteers participated in research
- age range of volunteers were from 18- 54 (plus) years
- 40 percent of volunteers are in the 34-39 year age range
- Rawhiti had youngest volunteers
- 13 volunteers (87 percent) self identified as Maori
- the median length of time as a local fire volunteer is approximately 4 years
- seven volunteers were also involved with other local voluntary work
- 73 percent of volunteers were approached by whanau to join rural volunteer fire unit
- 4 volunteers are female

A total of 15 volunteers from the three communities responded to our questionnaire.

Figure 1 provides a gender and community break down of volunteer numbers.

Fig. 1. Number[8] of Volunteers by Gender in each of the 3 Communities (n=15)
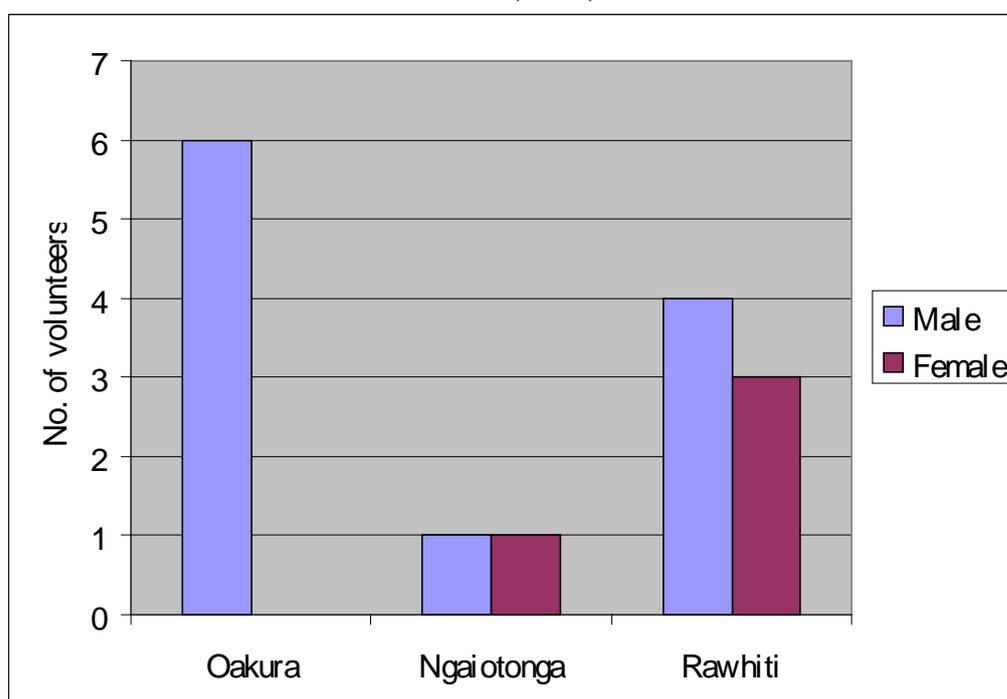
The Oakura volunteer rural fire unit had 6 participants respond to the study questionnaire, with 2 from the Ngaiotonga service and 7 associated with the Rawhiti volunteer fire service. A total of 4 female volunteers participated, with 1 from Ngaiotonga and the other 3 from Rawhiti.

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[8] The numbers indicated are those that were present at our visit and responded to the questionnaire. These are not the total number of volunteers in each area. However these respondents attended fire training on a regular basis and were considered the core of the volunteer units.

4.2   Age of Volunteers

Volunteers were also asked to indicate their age. Exact ages were not solicited, however they were asked to indicate their age within the ranges available in the questionnaire. Table 1 provides the age range (years) of volunteers according to community.

Table 1. Age range (years) of volunteers in the study communities (n=15)

Communities	Age (years) of Volunteers					
	18-23	24-28	29-33	34-39	46-53	54 plus-
Oakura				4	1	1
Ngaiotonga				1		1
Rawhiti	1	2	1	1	1	1

There were 6 age ranges given which spanned from 18 to 54(plus) years.
Table 1 indicates that the Rawhiti service has a number of younger volunteers in comparison to Oakura and Ngaiotonga.

Six (40 percent) of respondents were within the 34-39 year old range, with three respondents (20 percent) in the 54 plus range.

4.3   Ethnicity of Rural Fire Volunteers

Figure 2 below provides a summary of volunteer ethnicity. Thirteen volunteers self-identified as Mäori. One volunteer identified as Pakeha and one other as Tongan.

All volunteers in Rawhiti and Ngaiotonga identified as Maori.

Fig. 2. Ethnicity of volunteers according to community
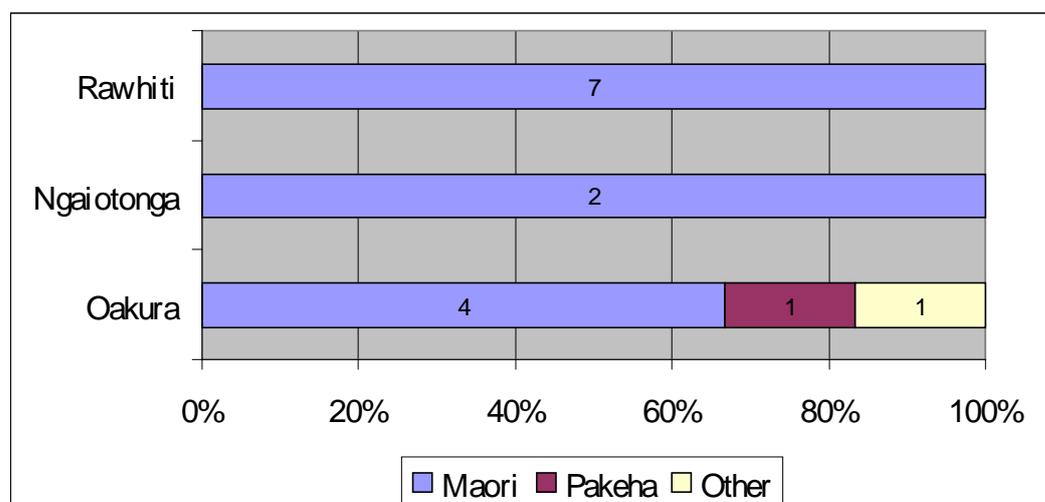
4.4   Length of service as a fire volunteer

Volunteers were asked to indicate the length of time they had been a volunteer in their local fire unit. Length of service time across the 3 communities ranged from 11 years to 1 year. The median length of service across the 3 services (Oakura, Ngaiotonga and Rawhiti) was approximately 4 years. Length of service averages (years/ months) for individual services were as follows:

- Ngaiotonga: 6.4
- Rawhiti: 5.2
- Oakura: 4.4

A total of 3 volunteers (2 in Rawhiti and 1 at Oakura) indicated that they had been a volunteer fireperson previously at another locality.

4.5   Rural fire volunteers involved in other voluntary work

Almost half (7) of participating fire volunteers are also currently involved in other voluntary work. These other voluntary activities ranged from work at local kohanga reo, youth sports club and children's rugby. Table 2 provides a community break down of rural fire volunteers involved with other voluntary work.

Table 2.   Number of fire Volunteers involved in other voluntary work According to community.   (n=15)

		Are you currently involved in other voluntary work		
		Yes	No	Not Known
Communities	Oakura	3	3	
	Ngaiotonga	1		1
	Rawhiti	3	4	

4.6   Reasons why volunteers join the local rural fire unit

Volunteers were also asked what encouraged them to join their local volunteer fire service. Table 3 below provides a summary of why people volunteered according to the three study communities. Three people joined the Oakura service for a *new experience*. Eleven respondents volunteered after been approached by whanau members already involved in the service, including one volunteer joining after helping the local unit attend a local scrub fire.

Table 3. Reasons given why volunteers joined their local Fire Service (n=15)

Community	Joined service for new experience	Approached by whanau already in service	Not Known
Oakura	3	3	
Ngaiotonga		2	
Rawhiti		6	1

5. Community Perceptions of their local Volunteer Fire Service

Summary

- 52 households participated in study
- almost all households were aware of local volunteer fire provision in their local district
- 73 percent of households felt that the community supports their local fire unit
- A total of 12 households surveyed required the assistance of their local rural fire unit between 1993- March 2001
- 8 households who required assistance felt that the fire unit response was adequate
- concerns expressed by households who required assistance included inadequate response time and lack of adequate equipment
- 56 percent of respondents would view a neighbouring fire service as belonging to their community also

A total of 52 households responded to the community questionnaire. Households were invited to complete the questionnaire based on their perception of the closest rural volunteer fire service[9].

5.1   Number of Community responses according to area

Fig 3. Total Number of Responses according to community   (n=52)
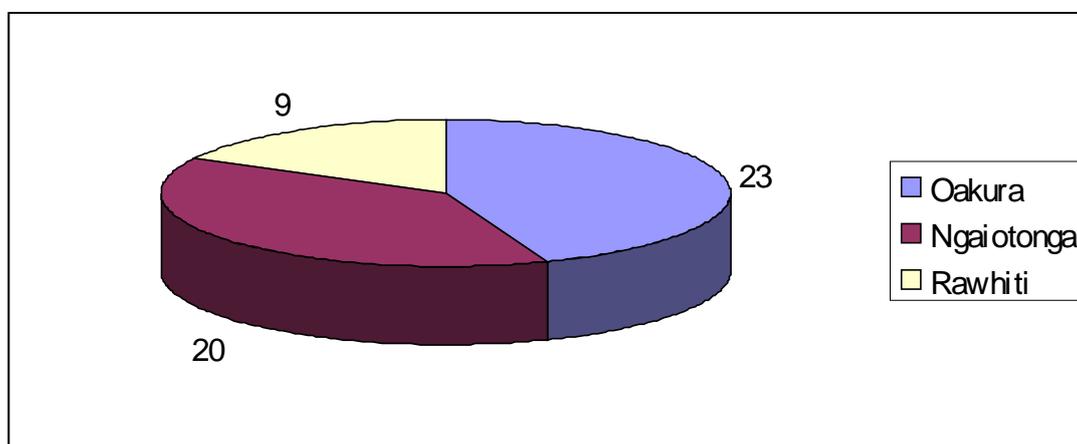
A total of 84 questionnaires were distributed to the three communities (36 to Oakura, 29 to Ngaiotonga and 19 in Rawhiti). A response rate of 62 percent was achieved for completed community household questionnaires. The Oakura community provided 23 responses to the Community Questionnaire, with 20 from Ngaiotonga and 9 from Rawhiti. No reason for the low response rate from Rawhiti could be given. One community questionnaire was completed in te reo Mäori (Mäori language).

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[9] The rural fire service situated within their community.

5.2 Community awareness of local rural fire service provision

Almost all community respondents were aware of the provision of a local volunteer fire service.

The only exception was in the Ngaiotonga area[10] where 1 household respondent was not aware that a local service was still based in Ngaiotonga.

Figure 4 provides the number of community respondents who are aware of a local volunteer fire service in their community.

Fig. 4. Community aware of local volunteer fire provision (n=52)
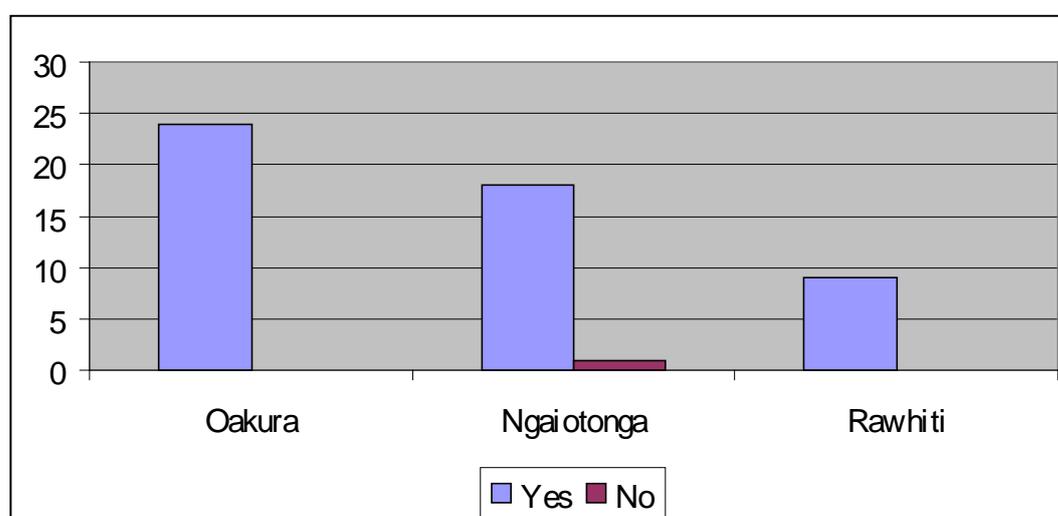
5.3 Community support of local service

Thirty-eight (73 percent) of household respondents felt that the community in general supported the local fire service as shown in Table 4. A total of 6 (12 percent) respondents indicated that the community did not support the local fire service with four such responses from Oakura. A total of six 'no responses' were recorded from Ngaiotonga.

Table 4.   Does the community support the local rural fire service? (n=52)

		Yes	No	No Response	Total
Communities	Oakura	18	4	1	23
	Ngaiotonga	13	1	6	20
	Rawhiti	7	1	1	9
	Total	**38**	**6**	**8**	**52**

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[10] This could be due in part to the Ngaiotonga volunteer rural fire party being in recess, although they still officially exist and have fire-fighting material reportedly readied for emergencies.

5.4 Households who required the services from their local volunteer fire unit

A total of 12 household questionnaires from the 3 communities indicated that their local rural volunteer fire service assisted them in an emergency (figure 5). A total of 7 households in the Oakura area required the assistance of their local rural fire service, with 3 in Ngaiotonga/ Bland Bay and 2 in Rawhiti.

The years in which assistance was given ranged from 1993 through to March 2001.

Fig.5. Number of community respondents who required the use of their local fire service
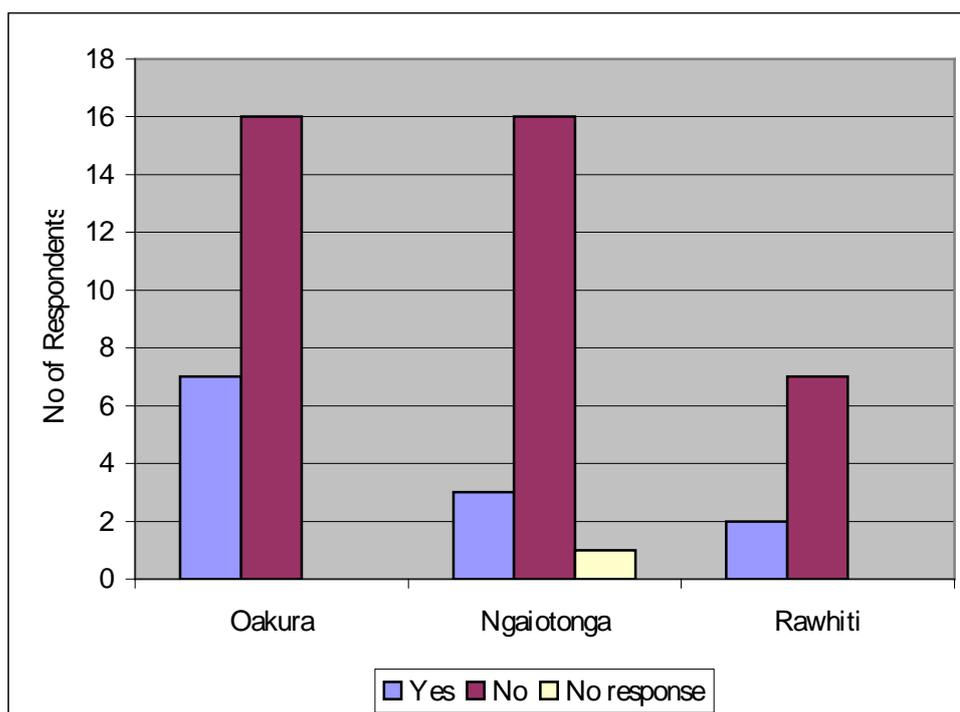
The types of emergencies, which required help from the local service included vehicle fires, road accidents, rubbish/ grass fires, power lines down on road, a diving accident and a bush fire.

Eight respondents felt that the emergency response by the local unit was adequate. Corresponding comments included:

> ...the response time was good and all volunteers involved were very professional and helpful (car accident, 2001)

> ...service arrived in a matter of minutes [and] stayed until power was shut down (power lines down on road, 1998)

> they were helpful in organising the ambulance service and rescue helicopter landing (diving accident, 1999)

> response was efficient, courteous and fast (grass fire, 2001)

Other respondents spoke of their concern with the time it took for the service to respond. Their comments included:

…eventually they came [the vehicle was burnt out] (vehicle fire, 1993)

…service was adequate but they took 30 minutes to get here (rubbish fire, 1999)

Another respondent told their story based on experiencing a car fire:

No one held a full licence to drive the [fire] truck so the [chaser] van arrived with no extinguishes or water pump. My car burnt out and it was a waste of time them arriving at all. (vehicle fire, 2000)

5.5 Neighbouring communities and rural fire services

Community households were asked if they would view a volunteer fire service in a neighbouring community as belonging to their community also. With the 3 communities neighbouring each other, the notion of 'sharing' a rural volunteer fire service was a suggested possibility. This was particularly relevant to Ngaiotonga's situation in that the local service was in recess. On a number of occasions Oakura had attended Ngaiotonga emergencies both when the Ngaiotonga service was functioning and since then.

Community responses are detailed in Figure 6.

Fig. 6. Would you view a neighbouring fire service as also *belonging* to your community?
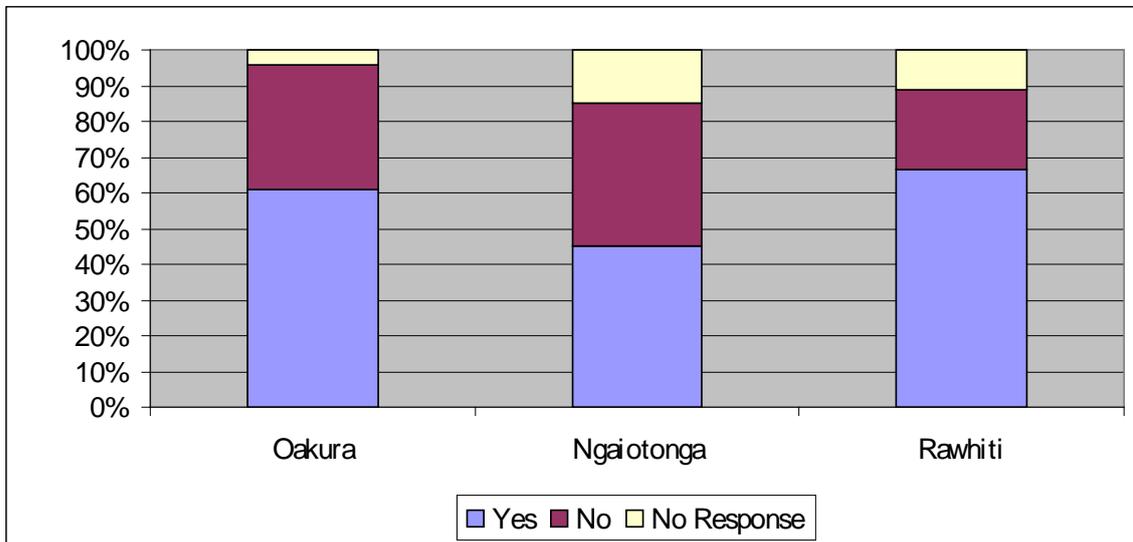
From the community questionnaires, a total of 29 households (56 percent) indicated that they would view a neighbouring service as belonging to their community also. A further 18 households (35 percent) stated they would not view a neighbouring service as belonging [also] to their community.

The general themes derived from the reasons given as to why a neighbouring service would not be viewed as belonging to neighbouring areas, was the issue of distance and associated response time. Most respondents in this category felt that the time it

would take volunteers to reach a fire emergency in a neighbouring community would be unacceptable. Comments to this effect are listed below.

> no we need one [fire service] here so as to be ready for emergencies…not have to wait for Oakura to come to the rescue (Ngaiotonga household)

> it would take too long…time is very important when lives are to be saved. Each community needs their own service and then we help each other…have to watch out because if the community agrees to share [a service] then it's a good excuse for whoever not to provide funds to start our own…I say start our own first then reach out (Oakura resident)

> we all want to help each other regardless of which place we live. We are all related and need the support of each other at our marae and other functions. But we feel safer when the fire equipment is here not miles away and even then the wrong directions might be given and we all burn waiting to be saved. Already there have been deaths this year here in the north with fire and living in caravans and old buildings. Three minutes and its all burnt, then you still wait for 20 minutes or half an hour for the fire crew…(Rawhiti resident)

6.   Community and Volunteers

Summary

- All volunteers stated that community support is important for their fire unit
- 90 percent of household respondents felt community support of their local fire unit is important
- 53 percent of volunteers felt that their local communities supported their respective rural fire units
- all Oakura fire volunteers felt that their local community supports them
- 86 percent of Rawhiti volunteers did not feel that they are supported by their local community
- 73 percent of all community respondents felt that their respective communities were supportive of local fire units
- financial donations was identified by the community as the most likely method of support
- perceived lack of support from non resident home owners
- community members are not aware that their local council is immediately responsible for their local rural fire unit
- 93 percent of volunteers see community as responsible for ensuring community support where as 67 percent of community respondents see ensuring community support as a community responsibility
- The New Zealand Fire service are viewed by both volunteers and local community as having a role in ensuring community support for their local unit

Following are a number of cross tabulations between both Communities and Volunteer data sets. Such cross tabulations are considered useful in establishing areas of match/ mismatch between volunteers and their communities in areas that are viewed as essential to the continuation of an effective rural volunteer fire service.

6.1   Is community support important?

Both volunteers and community households were asked if they considered community support important for their local rural volunteer fire service? Tables 5 and 6 show volunteer and community responses.

Table 5. Is community support important? (Volunteers)   (n=15)

Communities	Volunteers who said YES
Oakura	6
Ngaiotonga	2
Rawhiti	7
TOTAL	**15**

All volunteers indicated that community support is important to the service they provide.

Ninety percent of community respondents felt that community support is important for their local service.

Table 6. Is community support important? (Community)
(n=52)

Communities	Yes	No	No Response	TOTAL
Oakura	22	0	1	23
Ngaiotonga	17	1	2	20
Rawhiti	8	1	0	9
TOTAL	**47**	**2**	**3**	**52**

6.2 Does the community support their local fire service?

Both Volunteers and Households were asked if they '…felt that the Community supports the local volunteer fire service.'

Tables 7 and 8 indicate the Volunteers and Community response to this question.

Table 7. Do you feel that the community supports the local fire service
(Volunteers)   (n=15)

	Do you feel that the community supports the service		Total
	Yes	No	
Oakura	6	0	6
Ngaiotonga	1	1	2
Rawhiti	1	6	7
Total	**8**	**7**	**15**

Table 8. Does the community support the local fire service (Community
Households)   (n=52)

	Does the community support the service			Total
	Yes	No	No Response	
Oakura	18	4	1	23
Ngaiotonga	13	1	6	20
Rawhiti	7	1	1	9
Total	**38**	**6**	**8**	**52**

A total of 38 (73 percent) of all community responses stated they felt that the community supported their local fire service with 6 (12 percent) stating that they felt the community was not supporting the local service.

For the Volunteers, eight (53 percent) felt that support from the community was apparent. Seven (46 percent) volunteers felt that community support was not happening. All of the Oakura volunteers felt their community supported them. Almost all the Rawhiti volunteers (6) indicated that the community was not supporting them. In contrast 7 (78 percent) of the community questionnaires from Rawhiti indicated there was community support for their local service.

Volunteer Comments

Accompanying comments from the volunteers on if they felt the community was supporting their service were varied. Some respondents provided comments on 'what ways' the community supports them. These included fundraising events such as lotto draws.

One volunteer stated the following

> …when we have different fundraisers some of the community help out…they also help out on some of the call outs (Rawhiti volunteer)

Another volunteer spoke about the community in general supporting the service, then added…

> maybe...but some [community members] don't understand…there is a reluctance to support something that [they] are not in charge of (Ngaiotonga volunteer)

Comments also revolved around the community's lack of support. These included:

> [the] community give minimal support although they may think otherwise. A couple of lotto tickets is something but no where near enough. [As] usual when an emergency happens the whole valley is in praise then after that its back to normal (Oakura volunteer)

> there is a lack of communication [between community and volunteer service] (Ngaiotonga volunteer)

> Really we are here for them but this is not always known, [they] think we [volunteers] are a closed shop so it becomes a us and them type attitude…which doesn't help us or them (Rawhiti volunteer)

The following comment indicates one of the challenges inherit in the local community. During the time these questionnaires were conducted, all communities in the study had held a number of hui on local primary health provision. This had been a concern for a number of months and community leaders were keen to explore their options to try and have a health service provided.

> [The] community is busy doing other things. As you know we just completed a hui on health services which we want for the communities, especially a GP service. So we are busy seeking options and trying to help in this area…an area of great need for all (Oakura volunteer)

> Fire is important to us also…but how much can a very small community provide to all the different interests…there are many [interests] we need to explore such as fire, health, first aid, sea rescue, GP services, home help and the list goes on…these are all important but there just are not enough people to go around to take all these different roles…(Oakura volunteer)

Another challenge, as indicated above, is the lack of human resource in the communities. As the underlying comment suggests, it is usually up to whanau to establish local enterprises such as a local volunteer fire service. Many of these whanau are also in leadership positions within other community structures and are left

with little time (and energy) to develop other local services. Local leadership is a concern in our 3 communities.

> Always the same members/ whanau helping. [There] is no other help…the younger ones do the mahi (work) as a volunteer, but others are needed to help run the background activities and set the foundation. It's the same people doing the fire fighting and also trying to run the outfit…more younger people are needed to take a responsible role and sometimes the older ones have to realise that they should train the young ones, not keep their positions to themselves (Rawhiti volunteer)

Community Comments

The following comments are provided by community households to the question 'Do you feel that the community supports the local fire service'

As with the volunteer comments, some households noted the activities by which they support their local service. These included comments such as:

> We support by giving money (Oakura respondent)

> ..support some by giving them a ride to training (Rawhiti household)

> money and fundraising (Oakura)

> we know its there (service) and buy the raffles, but not everyone becomes physically involved (Ngaiotonga)

> I'm sure the community supports them, how much funding they receive from the community is unknown to me (Oakura)

In general terms, many of the household responses of support were based around the activity of fund raising. Some also 'felt' that the community supported the volunteers without stating the mechanisms of 'how' this support is carried out. Comments to this effect included:

> I'm sure the community supports the fire volunteers.(Oakura household)

> of course [the community supports the service], I couldn't imagine why we wouldn't (Oakura household)

> …some of the community are not clear in the support we need for the service (Oakura)
> if not we should be (Ngaiotonga)

> anything local is always supported (Rawhiti)

One comment (below) indicated the non-support of the community was based on *process* rather than the divisions existing between volunteers and the community. This respondent felt that by starting fires without a permit was one outward sign of the community not supporting the local service.
> …some of the community don't adhere to a fire ban season…too proud to ask for a [fire] permit (Oakura comment)

Another example given (by a household) of the community not supporting the local fire service touches on the dynamics that exist between the resident and non-resident population. Their comments read as follows:

> …a lot of absentee holiday residents [in the area], and they forget about the fire service (Rawhiti comment).

6.2   Who is perceived as responsible for ensuring continued support for local rural fire service?

Both Volunteers and Community Households were asked who they perceive as being responsible for ensuring continued community support of the local fire service. The identified stake holders to ensure continued support of a local rural fire service included volunteers, community, the New Zealand Fire Service[11] and local council.

Both the volunteer and community respondents could choose more than one option in answering this question.

Figures 7 and 8 provide responses from both the Volunteers and Community

Fig.7. The <u>Volunteers' views</u> on the stakeholders they consider to be responsible for ensuring Community Support for their local rural fire service.   (n=15)
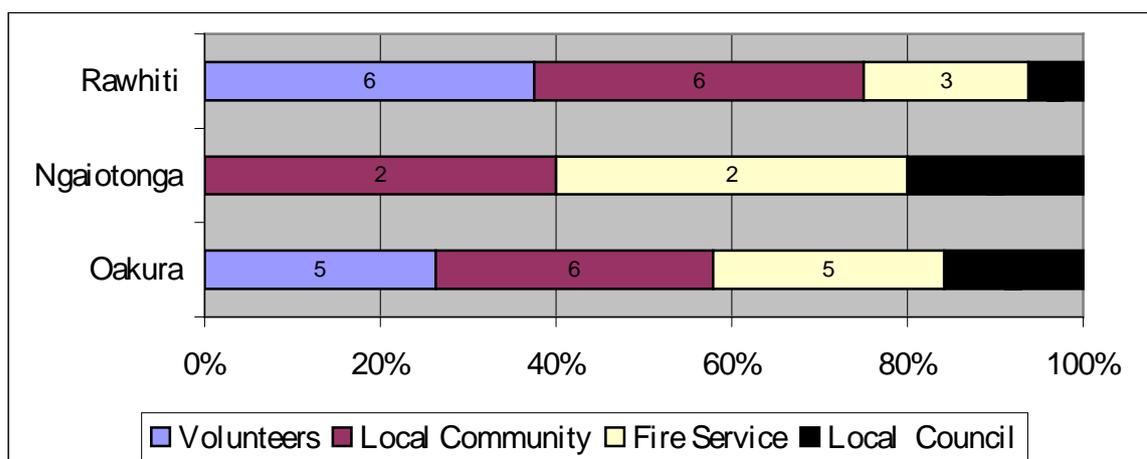
The majority of volunteers from Oakura and Rawhiti see both volunteers and their respective communities responsible for ensuring community support of their local fire service. Ngaiotonga volunteers view that responsibility as not being theirs, but more the local communities and the New Zealand Fire Service. Eighty three percent of the Oakura volunteer respondents also viewed the New Zealand Fire Service as having responsibility in this area.

Fifty percent of Oakura volunteers also implicated the local council's input into ensuring continued support as opposed to one volunteer indicating such from both the Rawhiti and Ngaiotonga service.

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[11] We acknowledge that local council are immediately responsible for rural volunteer fire units, however at the suggestion of one of the volunteer units in our study area we included the NZ Fire Service as an option.

Fig.8. The <u>Community's view</u> on the stakeholders they consider to be responsible for ensuring community support for their local rural fire service.
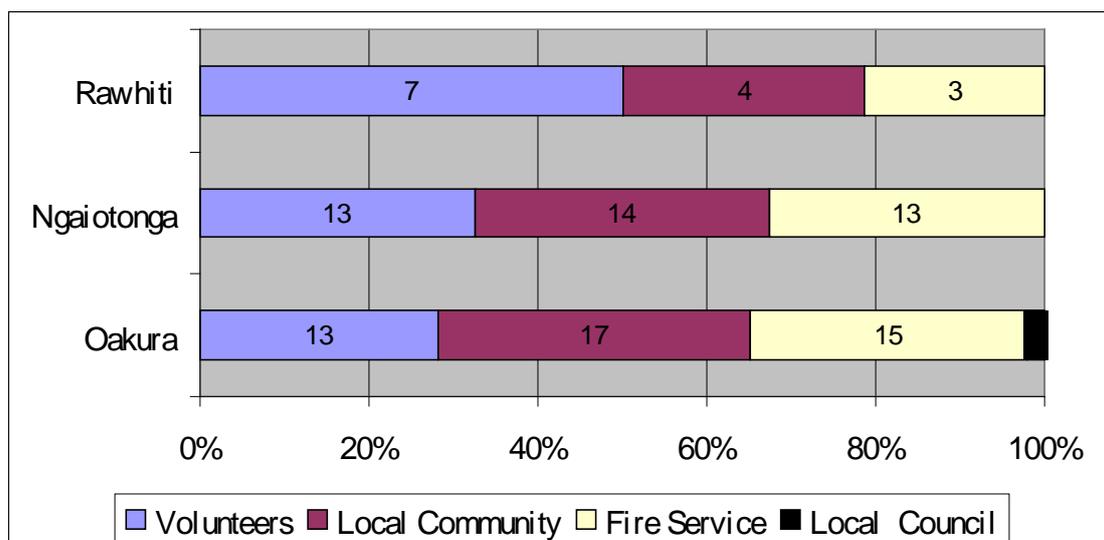


Community responses were most apparent in the categories of volunteers, community and the New Zealand Fire Service. One respondent, from Oakura, chose local council as an option. The lack of community responses to the Local Council option suggests that almost all community households surveyed are not aware of the involvement of local councils in the operational and management of their local rural volunteer fire units.

Both community and volunteer responses are further represented as comparative percentages in Figure 9 below. Data presented here suggest that volunteers are more likely to be aware of the communities of local council involvement in the local fire units. The Rawhiti community see a greater involvement of volunteers ensuring community support, then that held by the volunteers themselves. Strikingly, the Ngaiotonga volunteers do not see ensuring community support as a volunteer concern where as just over 30 percent of Ngaiotonga community responses indicated ensuring community support is a volunteer activity. Both community and volunteer figures for Oakura were almost similar in suggesting community and volunteers as responsible for ensuring community support.

Fig.9. Combined responses Community (Com.) and Volunteers (Vol.) on responsibility for ensuring community support for the rural fire unit.
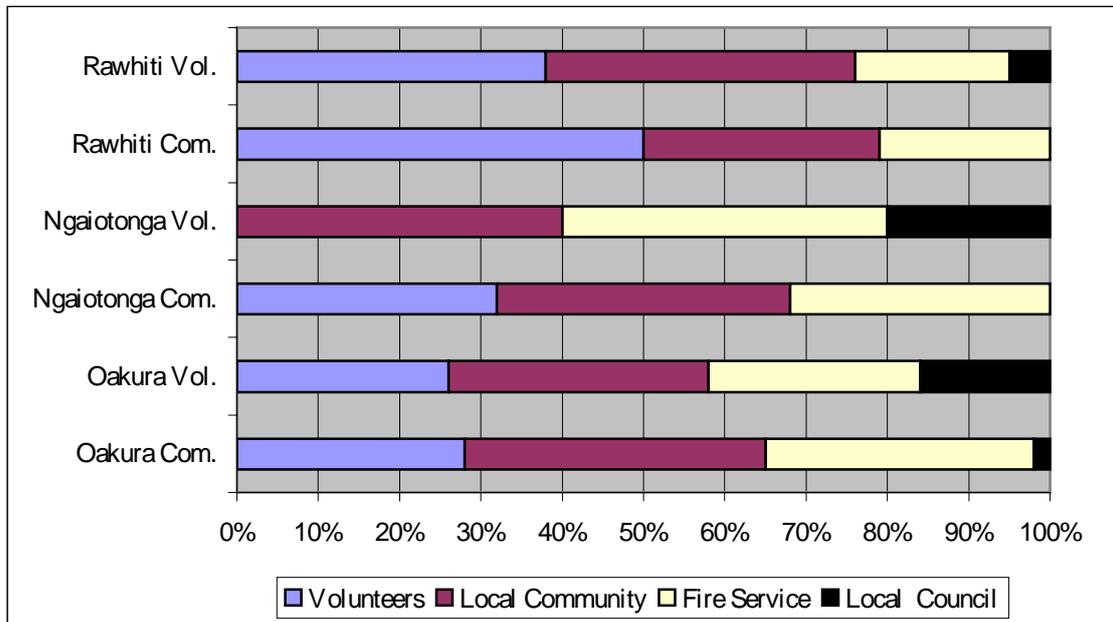
However, most notable is that 93 percent of all Volunteers felt that the responsibility of ensuring community support came within the domain of the community, in comparison with 67 percent of the Community respondents indicating the same. This issue is discussed at length in Section 8.2

7.   Service Provision and Rural Isolation

Summary

- the Oakura volunteer is the most comprehensive of the 3 services in the study area
- Ngaiotonga and Rawhiti volunteers indicated a lack of regular training
- Rawhiti indicated a lack of motivation amongst volunteers
- Oakura volunteers felt most supported from their local council
- 67 percent of volunteers felt their local fire service was not isolated due to rural remoteness
- 73 percent of volunteers felt staff morale was high

7.1   Training Issues for Volunteers

Volunteers were asked to choose[12] from a list of identified training issues, which factors currently affect their local volunteer unit. Table 9 provides a summary of their choices.

Table 9.   Training Issues Faced by Volunteers
(n=15)

Community	Lack of Facilities	Lack of adequate resources	Irregular training	Lack of Training	Lack of motivation
Oakura		1	1		
Ngaiotonga	1	1	2	1	1
Rawhiti	1	1	7	1	6

The Oakura unit was considered the most comprehensive of the 3 services surveyed. They generally were better equipped and had training on a regular basis. Ngaiotonga and Rawhiti had a more *ad hoc* approach to training and lacked the facilities and equipment, which Oakura had. Ngaiotonga was the least equipped and lacked a physical facility. Oakura and Rawhiti both had a designated building to house equipment.

The Oakura volunteers in general felt that their service was not lacking in the areas identified above. Both Ngaiotonga volunteers and 7 (78 percent) Rawhiti volunteers felt they had irregular training. Six (67 percent) Rawhiti volunteers also indicated they lacked motivation.

7.2   Relationship with local council

Both the Oakura and Ngaiotonga Rural Volunteer Fire Services came under the supervision of the Whangarei District Council with the Far North District Council having responsibility for the Rawhiti service.

A total of 10 volunteers felt that Local Council was supportive of their particular service. Figure 10 provides community breakdown of responses by volunteers.

[12] Volunteers could choose more then one option from the list

Comments included:

> we have a great relationship with council and they try and get things done for us…(Oakura volunteer)

> …still a long way to go on both sides (council and volunteers), however we work together…(Rawhiti volunteer)

> …there are a lot of houses going up in the area and fire service is now growing in importance. Council realise this and we try and work in with them. Generally they assist us and provide uniforms and fire equipment…(Oakura volunteer)

Fig.10.   Does local council support the rural fire service in your area?
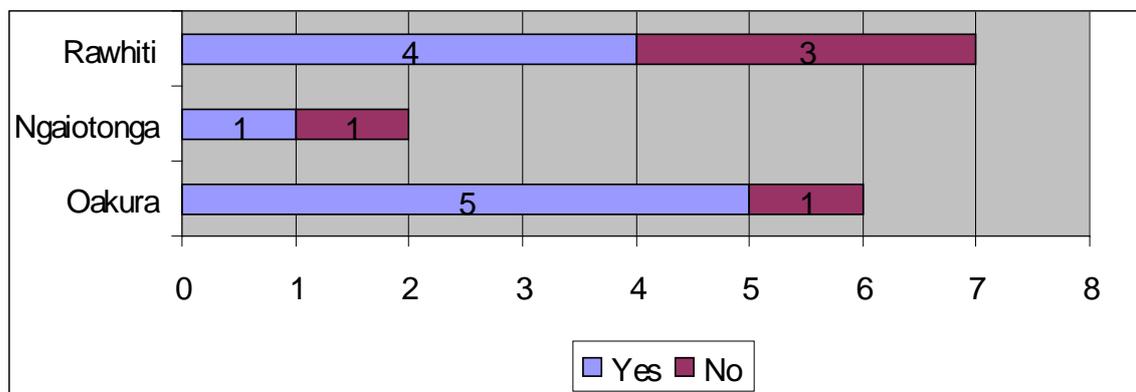
Reasons given by volunteers as to why they felt the Local Council were not supportive included:

> We hardly see them [Council]…we are stuck way out here and they don't come out here much (Rawhiti volunteer)

> It takes ages for something to get done [approved] (Rawhiti volunteer)

> …they do help but not enough (Ngaiotonga volunteer)

> We have a good relationship with council and they try and support us but it is pretty much up to us and sometimes that can be a challenge, especially if we need more material and advice…(Oakura volunteer)

7.3   Rural Remoteness

Volunteers were asked if they felt that the local service is isolated due to rural remoteness (Table 10).

Ten volunteers felt that their respective service was not isolated due to the notion of rural remoteness. Comments from those that did feel their service was isolated felt this was related to issues surrounding distance (physical isolation).

Table 10.   Is the local service isolated?

Community	Isolated? Yes	Isolated? No.
Oakura	3	3
Ngaiotonga	2	0
Rawhiti	0	7

Volunteers were also asked to comment on a series of issues generally associated with rural remoteness. Their responses are detailed below in Table 11.

Almost all volunteers (80 percent) felt that rural remoteness did not affect having adequate facilities. In particular all volunteers from Rawhiti and 5 volunteers from Oakura service felt their facilities were adequate in relation to the *notion* of rural remoteness.

Twelve volunteers felt that rural remoteness does not affect training with a further 10 indicating that rural remoteness does not affect call out accuracy.

Table 11.   Number of Volunteers who commented on the Effects of Rural Remoteness

Community	Does rural remoteness affect training?		Does rural remoteness affect callout accuracy?		Does rural remoteness affect adequate facilities?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Oakura	2	4	3	3	1	5
Ngaiotonga	1	1	1	1	2	
Rawhiti	0	7	1	6	0	7

7.4   Volunteer Morale

A total of eleven volunteers felt that staff morale was high in their respective fire units. Both volunteers in Ngaiotonga felt that this was not the case in their local unit. Table 12 provides a summary of responses according to communities.

Table 12. Number of responses to issue of volunteer staff morale (n=15)

		Is staff morale high?	
		Yes	No
Communities	Oakura	5	1
	Ngaiotonga	0	2
	Rawhiti	6	1

8.   Discussion

8.1   Profile of Volunteers

Eighty seven percent of the volunteers that participated in this research self identified as Maori. We believe that some general statements may be concluded from the demographic data supplied, which adds to the limited existing discourse on Maori volunteerism (Wilson, C. 2001: 22), and to volunteering in general terms.

Firstly, the results show that 73% of volunteers joined their respective rural fire units at the invitation of whanau members already participating in the units as volunteers.

The Rawhiti service consisted of all 4 of the youngest volunteers participating in the research. Whether the younger volunteers in Rawhiti joined at the invitation of a peer already involved as a volunteer is not evident in our results. These results have implications for recruitment of Maori volunteers. While the rural context places difficulty on attracting volunteers through lack of numbers in the selection pool, a mentoring program could be established that targets more youth to join rural fire units. This program could be implemented within the existing rural fire unit structure by identifying likely 'mentors' who actively seek the recruitment of younger volunteers. While we acknowledge that the 1996 Census indicates the average age of our study population to be 34 years, we feel it is important to include the participation of younger volunteers for the following reasons:

- Offers stability to a diminishing pool of volunteers
- Perceptions held by the younger population are changed. They see its 'cool' to be a volunteer
- Provides an opportunity for younger community members to participate at a community level

Secondly, almost half of volunteers in the study indicated they were also involved in other voluntary work. Consistent with small communities, there is a constant struggle to fill voluntary roles within each of our three study communities. This complexity is further enhanced when locals are involved in more than one local voluntary role, especially if the volunteer is in leadership positions across more than one organisation. The lack of adequate human resources will continue to be a problem in small rural communities.

The separation of management and governance roles is critical to an effective volunteer service (New Zealand Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations, 2001). Currently the chief fire officer in each of the 3 units carries the responsibly of both management and governance.

We suggest a local person be employed to fulfil the role of Manager for all three of the rural fire units in the study area. Combined funding for such a role could be sourced from a number of stakeholders including the Local Council, Community Employment Group (CEG; Department of Labour) and Insurance Industry interests.

This role could be pro rata based on time fulfilling the responsibility, however we certainly conclude that the role should be left to a volunteer to fill. Responsibilities of a Manager would include liasing between the rural fire units and the local council representative, seeking internal/ external funding, arranging volunteer training, liasing with community and external businesses and being an advocate for the rural volunteer

fire units. Having a local resident employed as manager will assist the rural fire volunteers by the following:

- Provide clear distinctions between management and governance roles
- Relieve local fire chiefs of management roles
- Provide local income
- Provide weight to a positive image of the local fire unit by organising the local management infrastructure
- Providing a public face of the unit both locally and externally
- Rising the public profile, resulting in increased community confidence

Recommendations

- Instigate a culturally appropriate 'mentoring program' to recruit younger community members
- Employ a local resident as manager to assume management responsibilities for the combined three rural volunteer units

8.2 Community competency toward local rural fire unit

Discussion

While all three-study communities share a similar geographical and socio economic climate, it is important to acknowledge communal differences in public attitudes to their respective rural fire voluntary service. Profiles of the 3 services are considered important in public perception. The Oakura service was the most resourced and as mentioned previously, had been in operation the longest out of the three units. The Oakura unit's physical presence is also apparent with the designated large building that houses their equipment. In contrast Ngaiotonga is currently in recess and has no public visibility through either a building or person presence. The Rawhiti unit is situated somewhere between these two extremes.

Community support was greater for the Oakura volunteer unit than for Rawhiti and Ngaiotonga. All Oakura volunteers felt that their local community supports them. All volunteers stated that community support is important with 90% of community respondents indicating the same. Fifty three percent of all volunteers felt that their communities were in fact supporting them with 73% of all community respondents agreeing that community support was evident.

Assuming that Oakura is the most successful unit in our study area, then accordingly there would be 'success properties' that could be transferable from Oakura that could aid in the successful development of rural fire services in other rural areas including Ngaiotonga or Rawhiti. It is uncertain whether these transferable success properties are imbedded in the community; local fire unit, local council or a combination of all organisations. Properties of this nature need to be explored in their context and developed into a resource for further use by other communities. Transferable success properties would assist in providing a firm infrastructure for a rural fire service thereby facilitating community confidence.

There is a significant mismatch between who is perceived as responsible for ensuring community support. Ninety three percent of all volunteers see 'community' as responsible for ensuring community support as opposed to 67% of community

respondents indicating the same. This mismatch needs to be addressed. While community and volunteer respondents acknowledge the value of community support, there needs to be an extension of boundaries in the *types* of support. For example financial donations were the most indicated form of support on the questionnaires from the community households. There were also comments that *assumed* support was given without stating concrete examples of *what form* this support took. In today's climate of community support, financial donations play a large part in *certain* voluntary organisations, however in small rural communities the notion of community support ideally extends beyond the boundary of financial donations, especially in the context that rural fire units are established as a result of a perceived community need. Ownership of the voluntary unit needs to inform and validate both continued community support through more than the common avenue of monetary donations. This concept sits within the wider sphere of the notion of shared community responsibilities.

The Fire Service is increasingly placing greater emphasis on the community to accept responsibility for preventative fire attitudes and behaviour (CM Research, 2000). CM researchers found that almost all people acknowledge that it is a community responsibility to prevent the risk of fires and that the community was largely seen as responsible also for making sure people knew how to put out fires. They also acknowledge that in moving from fire prevention to fire suppression, the perceived role of the Fire Service increases (pg. 59). Of interest also is their statement that

> Aucklanders and rural households have a greater belief that fire engines will **not** arrive in time to save lives (pg 55).

Ownership of both fire prevention and *suppression* in the context of the present study is a reality due to the volunteer rural fire units being an extension of the community and associated travelling distances from the nearest Fire Stations (Hikurangi and Russell). However while the popular media espouses community responsibility for fire prevention (which of course is very important), there are few (if any) avenues that encourage active engagement by way of communal ownership of volunteer rural fire units.

One reason for this lack of promotion may be attributed to the different organisations responsible for their separate volunteer fire sectors, namely Local Councils and the New Zealand Fire Service. Our rural volunteer units came directly under the auspices of the Whangarei and Far North District Councils, yet the community questionnaire results indicate that this information is not known within the community. Our study results show that the New Zealand Fire Service is viewed by both volunteers and local community as having a role in ensuring community support for their rural volunteer units. The NZ Fire Service does not have an immediate role in fire suppression in the geographical area of our study communities. They will assist through their voluntary units in Russell and Hikurangi when occasion warrants, but the suppression responsibility is firmly with local council. This separation of fire *prevention* and fire *suppression* by two separate organisations in our study area is not widely known. A community cannot take ownership of something they are not aware of. Efforts need to be made that first informs the public of the dynamics within the relationships between all stake holders and then sets out the parameters by which these relationships exist at a local level. The Local Councils need to take the lead in ensuring this happens within our study communities.

Recommendations

- Develop a resource that informs rural communities on the development of a volunteer rural fire unit. The resource should be inclusive of 'best practice' excepts of existing examples from volunteer units across a range of organisations including the NZ Fire Service
- As part of a fire prevention program for rural areas develop a culturally appropriate phase that distinguishes between communal responsibilities for both fire prevention and fire suppression. Local councils and the NZ Fire Service could work collaboratively to ensure success of the program.

8.3   Challenges of Service Provision

Discussion

This section represents discussions on the challenges that hinder effective service provision including challenges to service provision in relation to the notion of rural isolation. The two previous discussion and recommendation sections are also inter-connected with challenges of service provision.

Study results show that some members of the public who required the assistance of their local rural fire unit had concerns with response time and adequate equipment[13]. The majority of respondents in this category were satisfied with the service they received.

A lack of regular training was indicated by the Ngaiotonga and Rawhiti volunteers. Volunteer training comes with a financial cost for volunteers in rural areas (Ministry of Social Development, 2002). Due to travel distances and high levels of unemployment, volunteers may not be in a financial position to attend scheduled training. Previous volunteers of the Ngaiotonga service stated this concern as being a major challenge in fulfilling their roles as volunteers.

Lack of volunteer motivation can result in part through irregular training opportunities.

Structural relationship factors can also impinge upon the effectiveness of a service.

One such relationship is that of the Local District Council. Seventy five percent of all volunteers felt that their respective Local Councils were supportive of their service. At an individual area level, approximately half of the volunteers from each of the services indicated satisfaction with council support. Both parties admit that this relationship could be strengthened. As already mentioned the Whangarei District Council has set about contracting out the management of its rural fire parties. Such a move was considered the first of its kind (personal communication with the Whangarei District Council, 2001).

Another functional relationship is with the community, especially community representative groups. All three services spoke of the difficulty of dealing with sectorial groups at various stages. The Ngaiotonga service ran into reported difficulty previously when signalling to the community a suggestion on land allocation to erect a purpose built building to house fire equipment. Apparently the communal ratepayers association took exception to a proposed building site on surrounding council land.

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[13] Please note area variations of these responses in section 5.4.

Both Oakura and Rawhiti experienced difficulty in this area also prior to their buildings going up, however no community groups were named by either service as having opposed their development.

With coastal land a premium there is an increase of non-resident holiday homes in all three areas. Common to all three services is the concern with non-resident populations in relation to the effectiveness of local fire provision. It seems no resident or non-resident wants a building erected near their homes for the purpose of housing fire utensils. One comment made was that such a building would be used as a '*marae*' and attract '*riotous living*'. Another community member noted that non resident home owners…

> think they own the whole valley and try and make decisions according to them only. They forget that they just come here for holidays and we have to live here.

Given that Maori comprise the majority of volunteers in this study, any change in community attitudes would have to include informing the relevant population sections and the various community groups that are not traditionally groups associated to or integrated with the local Maori population. Again local council could take a lead role in this action since they are aware of the dynamics of communal representative groups and have the resources to make informed contact. In this respect all populace groups are kept informed and they themselves can make informed decisions that [hopefully] support each other.

Another challenge not raised by the volunteers, but initiated from discussion with the Far North Council Representative, is the issue of volunteer insurance. At present rural volunteers are not insured to attend structural fires. When made aware of this matter, volunteers responded that if a structural fire was taking effect in the community, they would not hesitate to save lives and that units had attended structural fires in the past.

Lack of clarity on issues relating to health and safety legislation, accident compensation, liability and insurance for volunteers is apparent (Ministry of Social Development, 2002). Key legislation in each of the applicable Acts need to be explored and recommendations conceptualised from that of the position of a rural fire volunteer. At present there are portions of various relevant Acts that provide protection to volunteers, but only under certain situations[14]. It seems unrealistic to assume that a rural volunteer fire unit will not attend a local emergency because of work place or other legislation.

Recommendations

- Adequate training on a regular basis be implemented and fully funded by local councils which includes regular out of district training
- Training be part of up-skilling to allow volunteers to combat all fires (including structural and vehicle fires)
- Local Council to allocate additional resources to assist with the building and strengthening of relationships between the volunteer unit and community subgroups.

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[14] For example the Health and Safety in Employment Act (1992)

- All cover accident insurance for volunteers to be a local council responsibility. Insurance cover is to increase as volunteers' up-skill to vehicle and structural fire training.

8.4   Rural Isolation

The majority of volunteers did not feel that their units were isolated or affected by the notion of rural remoteness. Those who felt that their units were isolated commented on the effects of distance and physical isolation.

Address call out accuracy was however mentioned by a number of community respondents and is generally a concern in most rural areas nationally.

A mail survey of consisting of 3000 responses from rural delivery locations found that just over 14 percent of respondents stated they had contacted 111 Emergency Services at least once in the last two years. Of these respondents who contacted 111, almost 1 in 5 had encountered problems associated with the operator having a lack of local address knowledge and length of time it took for the 111 call to be answered by the operator (Atkins, 2000: 28).

Another survey by Rural Women New Zealand reported that 7 percent of emergency 111 users experienced some difficultly with the 111 system (Rural Women New Zealand, 2000). Difficulties reported included central dispatch not being familiar with local area, extreme weather cutting power lines and confusion when two emergencies occur in the same area at once.

Atkins also states that mobile phone coverage is a significant issue for the rural community with 41 percent of survey respondents reporting very significant problems with associated comments based predominately around the lack of mobile coverage issues (pg 29).

Atkins states that the 'digital divide' between rural and urban areas is largely attributable to telecommunications infrastructure differences. This divide has direct implications for rural volunteer fire members.

One volunteer participant in our study remarked that if an emergency call comes from a local, then we know where the emergency site is, however if the call comes from the Communications Centre then it is a 'guessing game' to interpret the directions given.

Recommendations

- Further research is conducted into how better to ensure call out accuracy and response times for emergency calls for rural volunteer fire units.

9. Conclusion

This project has looked at rural volunteer fire services in three relatively isolated communities on Northland's east coast. It has examined the social and administrative structure within which they operate, as well as issues affecting rural fire services generally. Ways in which these services might be strengthened have been explored, and a number of specific recommendations have been made.

One crucial element for success of any movement is the identification of all stakeholders. The study shows that members of the communities themselves do not have a clear idea of where the responsibility for establishing and supporting their rural volunteer fire units lies. The District Councils are ultimately responsible for informing communities of their involvement with what is essentially a Council sponsored movement in response to a perceived community need. The concept of 'ownership' by the community cannot proceed without knowing who the stakeholders are, and how they feature in the establishment support and operations of a local rural volunteer fire brigade. Two immediate problems are the tension that exists between resident and absentee property owners, and the construction of fire fighting bases in their neighbourhoods. The Councils, as third parties with a more objective interest in the topic, could play a valuable role in facilitating the change of attitudes needed for the rural volunteer fire services to function effectively with full community support.

Generally the public are aware of fire prevention methods via the sponsorship of the New Zealand Fire Service. However the study suggests that there is a lack of knowledge within the community on who is ultimately responsible for fire suppression. This suggests that the image and public profiles of both rural fire volunteers and the service they provide are undervalued. This profile needs to be lifted and more adequate support and recognition provided through the provision of an infrastructure that caters for recruitment of younger volunteers, regular training and adequate insurance coverage of volunteers.

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