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VOLUNTEER WORK-LIFE BALANCE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMERGENCY SERVICE AGENCIES

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OVERVIEW

This project examined the competing demands between volunteer work and family life, and the implications of such conflicts for emergency service volunteers and their partners. The research comprised (a) interviews with the managers of volunteers and (b) a survey of couples in which one partner was a volunteer. Results identified various impacts on family from volunteering, including household duties left to other family members and negative changes in behaviour after distressing incidents. It also indicated that conflicts between volunteering and family could result in adverse outcomes for volunteers, their partners and families. Effort must now be directed towards strategies that agencies *can use* to better support volunteers and their

RECOMMENDATIONS

1)   Provide information (e.g., about demands on families) to the partners of volunteers; such as through volunteer induction packages for families, and by including partners in training and induction procedures.
2)   Develop local networks of families and help and materially assist these communities to devise their own support systems.
3)   Encourage initiatives by the *managers* of volunteers or Regional personnel. Locally-based managers can identify volunteers who are overloaded with volunteering and work and family responsibilities, and assist them to achieve better work-life balance; for example, by providing a short-term leave of absence (and organising others to fill-in for their absence) or temporary shift to less demanding roles to address changing family demands.

CONCLUSIONS

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some senior personnel in emergency service agencies believe that volunteers' work-family difficulties are 'their own business'. They are reluctant to consider strategies for addressing these issues, despite evidence that such efforts could enhance retention. Although this research suggests strategies that agencies can and should use to support the families of volunteers, changes in organisational culture cannot come from *outside* agencies. It will be necessary for organisations to be alert to emerging work-family issues and proactively address these.