



Minister for Housing and Local Government
Honorable Maciu K Nalumisa

Written Question 171/2024 - 2 September 2024

Parliament

Government Buildings

SUVA

Written Question: Hon. Ioane Naivalurua to ask the Minister for Housing and Local Government – Can the Minister inform Parliament on –

- (a) the total number of fires from July 2021 to July 2024;**
- (b) the total number of casualties from July 2021 to July 2024;**
- (c) the causes of fire reported during the same period.**

Mr. Speaker Sir, Pursuant to Standing Order 45(3), I submit the following written responses to the question by Hon. Naivalurua.

Mr. Speaker Sir, for the period 31 July 2021 to 31 July 2024, the National Fire Authority had attended to a total of 472 structural fires around the country.

Financial Year	Reported structural fires
2021/2022	102
2022/2023	171
2023/2024	199

Mr. Speaker Sir, whilst we pray that there are no fatalities during fire emergencies, it is with great sadness that we reveal that lives have been lost during the past fire emergencies.

Year	Casualties
2021	6 (including 1 child)
2022	6 (including 2 children)
2023	6 (including 1 child)
2024	3

Mr. Speaker Sir, we wish to convey our sincere condolences to all the families who have lost loved ones in past years. We can always rebuild our homes, but we cannot bring back the life of a person lost during a devastating fire.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Coalition Government is leaving no stones unturned in empowering the National Fire Authority (NFA) in its service delivery and quest in ensuring Fire safety. The Coalition Government has given priority to the institution. The people's government knows the safety of all Fijians is

paramount and will ensure that Fire safety and delivery of emergency services is enhanced to build resilient communities and effective emergency services.

Mr. Speaker Sir, for the period July 2021 to July 2024, the 3 main causes of fire have been **Electrical, Arson/Suspicious and Unattended Cooking**. In their efforts to minimise electrical fires, the NFA has been relentless in advocating for safer electrical materials to be installed in our homes. The attitude of buying cheaper electrical materials to install in homes has been very costly at the end for homeowners who have lost everything in a fire.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the NFA is working through its strategies addressing its key outputs, envisioning to create a lasting impact on the community by reducing the likelihood of fire-related incidents and fatalities, preserving property, and fostering a culture of safety. In doing so, the NFA has stepped up its awareness campaigns by conducting House to House visits, School visits as well as Community Awareness programmes. From January 2021 to July 2024, Mr. Speaker Sir, the NFA has conducted a total of 31,037 house to house visits, 1,170 school visits and 983 community awareness programmes. A total number of 388,033 people have been reached through the 3 modes of awareness stated above.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in addition to these modes of awareness, the NFA has also implemented its Integrated Community Fire Wardens and Emergency Response Framework. Under this framework, the NFA operations staff teach specific members of a community on fire safety prevention, first aid,

evacuation procedures and how to be first responders to any fire and rescue emergency in their respective communities.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Community Fire Wardens are provided two weeks of rigid training in basic firefighting and emergency skills, such as initial response assessment, first aid, evacuation procedures etc., the catalyst for such a community programme is simple. These trained Community Fire Wardens will implement an initial response as first responders in case of a fire emergency in their communities. This is embedded upon the fact that practicing of any change needs to start at home.

Since its implementation in 2021, to date **Mr. Speaker Sir**, the NFA has rolled out its Integrated Community Fire Wardens and Emergency Response Framework to 107 communities and has since commissioned 1,842 Fire Wardens. Under the NFA's 5 Year Strategic Plan, each of the 21 stations across the nation must implement the framework to 4 communities annually within its operational area. We wish to thank all the communities who have put their hands up to be part of this framework and for all the commissioned community fire wardens who are now diligently monitoring their respective villages and settlements to engage in fire safety practices in their homes and within their surroundings.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Coalition Government understands the role that the National Fire Authority plays in keeping the community safe and endeavors to fully support the NFA in fulfilling its roles as an emergency service provider.

Mr. Speaker Sir, perhaps a highlight of the role of NFA will provide an understanding of why this Coalition Government is committed to the enhancement of the NFA. From July 2021 to July 2024, the NFA attended a total number of 11,349 emergency calls.

These emergency calls include structural fires, small fires, rubbish fires, bush fires, car fires, road accident rescues, and ambulance responses. From 2021 to July 2024, **Mr. Speaker Sir,** NFA attended 536 small fires, 3,959 non property fires (rubbish fires and bush fires) 492 road accident rescues, 206 vehicle fires and 1,635 ambulance responses. These attendances are all in the scope of the NFA's roles and capabilities. Emergency calls for special services, private fire alarm attendance, swift water rescue and ship and boat fires make up the rest of the emergency calls received by the NFA for the period July 2021 to July 2024.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the National Fire Authority is responding to all emergency calls inside the legislated fire boundaries and outside the boundaries. During the period being questioned, NFA noted that a high percentage of emergency calls were from outside the boundaries. The legislation is only applicable inside the boundaries, which means that property owners outside the boundaries are not paying any form of fire levy.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the NFA is now working with the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources to review the current boundaries and extend where necessary to be better placed with resources to address the Fire and Emergency calls within its ambit of operations. With the project almost completed, a submission will be submitted for Cabinet's endorsement.

Mr. Speaker Sir, fires in commercial and industrial structures are at a minimum. This is owing to the regulatory framework that empowers the NFA to vet building plans and conduct inspection on commercial and industrial premises to ensure compliance with the National Building Code and fire safety related standards. From 2021 to date, the NFA Structural Fire Safety Department has vetted 1,226 building plans.

In the same period, they have inspected a total number of 14,862 business premises across Fiji. With limited resources and a heavy workload, the NFA stays committed to ensuring that structures and premises visited by the public are fire safe for occupation.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in ensuring that the NFA continues to provide this essential service for the nation of Fiji, the Coalition Government, is the first Government that has given the NFA the budget required under financial provisions of the National Fire Service Act 1994, that is, 25% of its annual budget. In doing so, it has provided the funding for its operations, the sum of \$6.1m. I am also happy to announce that this is the biggest budget ever received by NFA from any government.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this funding will assist the authority in meeting the expenses for communication and ICT upgrade, fire station expenses, motor vehicle repairs and maintenance, procurement of firefighting equipment, staff recruitment, procurement of uniforms and personal protective equipment and personal emoluments. The funding will also assist in commissioning the community fire wardens as per their strategic plans.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Coalition Government is devoted to NFA's quest to be not only the best in the region but internationally recognised in its sphere of operational excellence. The aspect of ensuring good and robust human capital becomes vital. In doing so, it realises that its firefighters are exposed daily to health and physical risks. The authority has ensured not only a well calculated insurance and medical care for its employees, but it has gone beyond that scope to maintain that their families have some assurance in the times of life after their delivery of services has ceased.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Authority has been able to provide its operations staff a 20% increase in wages and salaries. Perhaps, it may be worth noting, that the last increment was in 2017 for NFA employees. This increase was made possible by the Coalition Government. The strategy is to recognise the hard work done by the authority and its employees and provide a just reward for their commitment and unwavering support to the authority's operational plan.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Coalition Government has embarked onto ensuring staff empowerment, technical training, and development for our Firefighters. NFA has embarked on strategic alliances that can leverage excellence in service delivery, knowledge sharing and harnessing technical superiority.

Mr. Speaker Sir, NFA has now an MOU on the 17 April 2024 with the Queensland Fire & Emergency services, based in Brisbane, Australia.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this MOU, which is part of the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Partnership, will be the impetus of a 5-year collaboration between the two agencies. It will focus on training, technical support, fire data analysis, mentorship, and equipment exchange. The NFA was also supported in being a part of the inaugural World Fire Congress that was held in Washington D.C. USA. This event culminated with the signing of a Charter by the 58 Fire and emergency service organisations represented from around the world. With that, NFA has set a platform for global collaboration.

Mr. Speaker Sir, with NFA's 5 Strategic Goal being "NFA Transformation", NFA recently launched its new uniforms symbolizing the transition from the old to the new in line with their 5 Year Strategic Development Plan.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we stand together with National Fire Authority in ensuring Fire Safety and efficient delivery of Emergency Services for all the Fijians.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker Sir,** for allowing me to respond to this question.