

Thursday, 13 December 2007

EMERGENCY WORKERS BETTER PROTECTED FROM TODAY

Substantially tougher penalties for offences committed against a range of emergency workers, including those in hospital emergency units, ambulance and fire crews, come into force from today.

Attorney-General Michael Atkinson says under the new laws offences committed against emergency workers can be considered by a court to be aggravated **therefore increasing the potential penalty by up to 50%**.

Such protection has already been given to police and law enforcement officers.

Mr Atkinson says that the range of offences covered is broad and includes violent offences such as assaults, acts endangering life, recklessly or intentionally causing harm through to crimes such as theft.

“As has been demonstrated by the fires in Kangaroo Island this week, emergency workers are often called upon to act in unpredictable and dangerous circumstances, at short notice and often at risk to their own health and safety,” Mr Atkinson says.

“The last thing that such workers should need to fear is being a victim of crime as they perform their duties,” Mr Atkinson says.

The changes will cover workers in the:

- Hospital emergency departments, including doctors, nurses, other medical professionals, support staff and volunteers;
- South Australian Ambulance Service;
- St John Ambulance Australia South Australia Incorporated;
- Metropolitan Fire Service, Country Fire Service and State Emergency Service;
- Surf Life Saving South Australia;
- Volunteer Marine Rescue S.A.;
- The provider of a service that is incidental or related to the service provided by one of these emergency service providers and essential to it (other than police and law enforcement officers, against whom offences already aggravated under s5AA (1) c of the *Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935*).

For the offence against an on-duty emergency worker to be considered aggravated by a court the alleged offender must:

- Know of the worker’s occupation; and
- Know the worker was involved in that occupation at the time of the offence.