



12 December 2024

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Kia ora Rodney

Your Official Information Act request, reference: GOV-036431

Thank you for your email of 2 November 2024, to Minister Doocey's office, asking for the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

- 1. We understand that emergency dispatch centres are high-risk environments with several occupational hazards that may not be covered by ACC. These risks include post-traumatic stress injuries, hearing impairments, and sleep disorders, often arising from acoustic shock, high noise levels, and high-stress cultures within these settings. Could you please confirm whether ACC does indeed exclude these conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder, from coverage?*
- 2. Additionally, please provide a breakdown of the number of related claims received and the number of claims declined by ACC over the past year.*
- 3. We also request any advice that ACC has issued to organizations operating these centres within the same period.*
- 4. Furthermore, we seek information on any actions taken by ACC or WorkSafe to mitigate these occupational risks in emergency dispatch centres. Specifically, we would like to understand the advice, policies, and monitoring processes both agencies have implemented to ensure that Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBUs) are actively safeguarding workers in the high-risk environments of police, fire, ambulance, and central dispatch centres (such as Spark).*
- 5. Lastly, please provide minutes or records of any executive or board-level discussions that pertain to decisions regarding the funding of these conditions, the implementation (or lack thereof) of preventative or monitoring programs, and claims related to injuries sustained by emergency dispatch operators.*

On 14 November, Minister Doocey's office transferred your request to ACC for a response. This transfer was made in accordance with section 14 of the Act.

Cover for occupational claims at emergency communication centres

ACC covers injuries due to work-related gradual processes under section 30 of the Accident Compensation Act 2001 (AC Act). Regardless of the client's occupation, the claim must satisfy the criteria in this section in order to have cover for a gradual process injury. ACC can cover a claim for noise induced hearing loss caused by noise exposure within a client's employment if it also meets the hearing loss requirements of the AC Act. As such, ACC would investigate any claim for hearing loss caused by work-related gradual process, including claims by emergency dispatch operators, under sections 20(2)(e), 26(1A), 30 and 61 of the AC Act. Please refer to the publicly available AC Act to read the sections:

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2001/0049/latest/whole.html#DLM100910>.

The AC Act also provides cover for mental injuries related to work if the injury is the consequence of single traumatic incident. ACC considers all claims for mental injuries related to workplace trauma under sections 21B and 28 of the AC Act. Accordingly, emergency dispatch operators are not excluded from receiving cover for mental injuries such as post-traumatic stress disorder. For your reference, please find attached ACC's *Work-Related Mental Injury Policy* which ACC follows to determine cover for this type of claim (staff names

have been removed). Please note that under section 30 of the AC Act cover for a work-related gradual process injury, excludes personal injury related to non-physical stress.

We could not identify work-related claims for these roles

We are unable to identify how many claims were lodged for emergency dispatch operators. Work-related claims only record the business activity of the employer, so we are unable to separate out claims for emergency dispatch operators from any other role within the organisation, including frontline staff. For example, the business activity recorded on the claim for a police dispatch operator would simply be “96310 Police services”. As we cannot identify claims for emergency dispatch operators, we are refusing this part of your request. This decision is made under section 18(g) of the Act.

ACC has issued relevant advice regarding covering work-related mental injuries

In August 2023, ACC changed its *Work-related Mental Injury Policy* to include work-related mental injury cover for a traumatic event that has been experienced directly through a technological medium. This change is reflected in section 5.0 of the current policy. Fire and Emergency New Zealand, Police and Spark New Zealand manage emergency communication centres, and as Accredited Employers (AEs), are responsible for managing claims for their employees. ACC advised all AEs and Third Party Administrators of our new policy approach when it was promulgated.

Further, in October 2024, ACC ran an online refresher training session on work-related mental injury for AEs and in November, our AE forum meetings also gave an overview of ACC’s evolved approach.

Monitoring of emergency communication centres

To a limited extent, ACC indirectly monitors emergency ambulance communication centres via the Ambulance Team. The Ambulance Team – based in Health NZ, but jointly funded by Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora (Health NZ) and ACC – provides strategic leadership for the emergency ambulance sector. The Ambulance Team commissions emergency ambulance services on behalf of Health NZ and ACC. These contracts require the provision of emergency ambulance communication centres. The Ambulance Team working on behalf of ACC has not provided any advice to the providers that operate the ambulance communications centres.

In carrying out its duties, the Ambulance Team receives quarterly reports from the two emergency ambulance service providers that run the emergency ambulance communication centres. Within those quarterly reports are sections on health and safety, and risk. Both providers (Hato Hone St John and Wellington Free Ambulance) report current risks regarding the psychosocial safety of staff in the emergency ambulance communication centres. These risks are managed at the operational level by the providers and monitored by the Ambulance Team on behalf of Health NZ and ACC.

The Ambulance Team is currently reviewing how it monitors health and safety risks and issues from providers, including the risk of psychosocial harm to staff. In addition, ACC ensures that the Ambulance Team is monitoring the Person Conducting Business or Undertaking risk on behalf of ACC. ACC also receives the quarterly reports and can raise health and safety issues identified with the Ambulance Team and providers to influence appropriate management of these issues by the parties.

ACC is not involved in monitoring occupational safety risks at communication centres for other emergency services. If you are interested in how Police or Fire and Emergency New Zealand are monitoring safety risks at their communication centres, you could request that information from them.

ACC’s Board and Executive team have not discussed the issues you have raised

We searched the minutes from meetings held by ACC’s Board and Executive team for references to the matters requested about emergency dispatch operators. From our records, it does not appear that their

meetings commented on these issues. As such, we are refusing your request for this information under section 18(e) of the Act, as the document alleged to contain the information does not exist, or cannot be found.

As this information may be of interest to other members of the public

ACC may publish a copy of this response on ACC's website. All requester data, including your name and contact details, will be removed prior to release. The released response will be made available www.acc.co.nz/resources/#/category/12

If you have any questions about this response, please get in touch

You can email me at GovernmentServices@acc.co.nz.

If you are not happy with this response, you can also contact the Ombudsman via info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phoning 0800 802 602. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Ngā mihi



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Government Engagement