

Report of Hazelwood Hand Injury

Background:

On Thursday 20th February LFF Stephen Cooke sustained a small cut on a finger whilst on night shift deployment to Hazelwood Open Cut Fire. On Saturday 22 February he was feeling unwell and spoke to his wife, who is a nurse, of his condition. Due to his condition continuing he was transported to Sunshine Hospital by his wife on Sunday 23rd February after attending for his dayshift at FS49

Whilst on deployment at Hazelwood LFF Cooke removed his glove to check his Carbon Monoxide monitor. As he was putting his glove back on he felt something prick his little finger. The injury resembled a paper cut and he continued working. LFF Cooke returned from Hazelwood on Friday 21st February at 10:30am and went home. His finger began to swell up on Saturday 22nd February.

On Sunday 23rd February, LFF Cooke reported for his first day shift at FS49 C. His finger at this stage was red and swollen and he became progressively more ill throughout the day, exhibiting flu like symptoms. He was admitted to hospital that evening after dayshift.

Medical Treatment

LFF Cooke had an operation on his finger Sunday evening 23rd February to drain an infection which had spread from his finger to his armpit. He has subsequently had a second operation on Monday 24th February to further drain the infection from his body. Stephen underwent series of further operations over the next week to ensure that all the infection was identified and removed. Stephen has reported that his medical team are confident that the results of the operation are positive.

Stephen returned home on Saturday 1 March

Actions

The MFB were informed of LFF Cooke's condition on Monday 24 February by the Western District OH&S rep Oliver Cassar. Oliver Cassar reported that Stephen was suffering from infection in his hand to A/Command Adam Gullo.

A/Commander Gullo visited the Sunshine Hospital and spoke to LFF Cooke's wife and offered any assistance that the family may require from the MFB. Adam Gullo requested that SO Fergusson complete a MFB safe report on LFF Cooke's behalf. Adam Gullo in turn contacted A/ACFO Swift and emailed senior MFB operational staff.

A/ACFO Swift contacted LFF Cooke on Tuesday 25 February and spoke to him about his condition and repeated the offer for assistance if required. On 26 February Swift visited the Sunshine Hospital to speak to Stephen but Stephen was taken to out of his ward to move around the hospital grounds. In response to a note left in his ward Stephen rang Swift and his condition and way forward was discussed. Swift has been in phone contact with Stephen on a couple of occasions. Swift has informed that Stephen that the priority is his health and in particular his recovery. Stephen has been reassured that there are a number of pathways that can be taken on his journey back to full health and return to work.

Swift contacted the BMO and informed her of the situation and asked of the possibility of the infection being caused by the deployment at Hazelwood. The BMO commented to A/ACFO Swift that it was difficult to identify the cause but the in her experience the open cut did not present any increased risk of infection.

Swift contacted the Traralgon ICC to inform the control team of the situation. The ICC staff identified that the advice on washing hands and taking care of all cuts would be more heavily emphasised in the site briefings.

Swift contacted, on February 24, the MFB SCC Agency Commander, David Bruce, who in turn contacted the other MFB deputy Chief Officers. The UFU was informed on the situation on the 25 February but were also informed by Oliver Cassar on February 24, to the best of the author's knowledge.

David Bruce contacted Stephen and on Thursday 27 February spoke to his wife and offered any support that was required.