

FIREFIGHTING VEHICLES — AUTOMATED VEHICLE LOCATION SYSTEM UNITS

774. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I read with interest that recently the minister launched the first of the automated vehicle location system units to be installed in over 700 fire appliances. Can he please advise the house how this system will increase safety for firefighters in my electorate and across the state?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Swan Hills for the question and I thank him for his interest in and continued support for the volunteer firefighters in his electorate. I have said on numerous occasions that this government is committed to making whatever changes it can that will make a practical difference to our ability to combat fire going into what will obviously be another fire season with a lot of challenges. Key to many of the recommendations and areas for improvement outlined in Mr Ferguson's report was the installation of automatic vehicle location systems—GPS tracking, if you will—in fire trucks. That is why I am very pleased to update the house that last week we installed the first units in the first of the state's fire truck fleet. We expect to have a minimum of 700 trucks installed with AVL, or GPS tracking, by December—the majority of the trucks across the state. We will obviously concentrate on installing them in the trucks in the higher risk areas as a priority—no doubt the south west and around the area of the member for Swan Hills' electorate and the Perth hills, because it is important that we concentrate on those areas first. On top of that, we will also have portable units for vehicles such as loaders, bulldozers, council vehicles and farmers' vehicles that, for whatever reason, have to go inside a fire area, so we will be able to keep track of them.

As part of our crew protection upgrades, GPS tracking and AVL, it provides a number of benefits. The first is protection for the crews. There will be a duress button, even in the portable ones, so that if a fire truck or whatever it is that has the device installed in it gets into trouble, crew members can press a button and the incident control team will know that they are in trouble and exactly where they are. These devices transmit not just over the 3G network, which does not always work in regional Western Australia—we appreciate that—so, if that fails, they will default to the satellite network, which has a footprint that covers the entire state. So, firstly, it provides added crew protection. We will know exactly where a crew is if they get into trouble. Secondly, it ticks the box for asset coordination. If we can imagine being the incident controller, they will know exactly where all their fire trucks are and where all their crews are at any given time. They will be able to have a real-time picture painted in front of them as to where they are, concentrated. They will know better where the fire front is at any given time, in real time. That will provide a force multiplier, if you will. It will provide a much better opportunity for them to concentrate resources exactly where they are needed on a fireground.

It will better manage crew fatigue and catering. One of the ongoing complaints that we see come out every fire season is that there was not enough food for the firefighters, or someone spent too long on the fireground without being relieved. We will know exactly where they are. In fact, we can geo-fence a certain geographical area and we will know when a fire truck goes into that area and when it comes out, and it will send off alerts in front of that.

Lastly, it will allow us to better coordinate all our assets. It will make the community safer. It will give us a significant advantage in being able to utilise all the fire trucks across the state in a much safer manner and a much more coordinated manner. We are committed to not just crew protection, but better use of resources, and we are getting on with the job. As I said, the majority of fire trucks will have these installed by December.