

Labour blocks injury pensions for wounded firemen

VOLUNTEER FIREMEN injured in the line of duty are being denied financial help by the Government.

Previously, chief fire officers had discretionary powers to grant injury pensions to wounded volunteers.

Thousands of retained firemen were promised assistance if an injury left them unable to do their normal jobs. But a little-noticed circular issued last year has in effect stripped chief officers of their powers by redefining the test of injury pension entitlement.

The document, coded FPSC

11/2006, said the test should be "whether he is permanently disabled for firefighting and for performing other duties appropriate to the role".

Critics say that if the injured firefighter was still talking, and therefore able to give fire safety talks, he could be deemed insufficiently injured to qualify for the pension.

A spokesman for the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) confirmed that if no "other duties" were available, the firefighter would have to leave without a pension. Former coal

miner Mark Padgett, 38, of Edwinstowe, Notts, was told to leave a fortnight ago after he was attacked by drunken youths during a skip fire in October 2003, and snapped a shoulder tendon.

His injury forced him to quit mining and become a deliveryman, cutting his income by a third.

Mr Padgett was denied an injury pension because he was still able to perform "other duties". He said: "Every bloke at that fire station thought if you got injured on duty you would be looked after. Instead,

I'm being chucked on the scrapheap." Mr Padgett is appealing, assisted by the Fire Brigades Union, while the Chief Fire Officers Association is urging a rethink from Parmjit Dhanda, the Fire Minister.

Frank Swann, Nottinghamshire's chief fire officer, said: "It is very unfair. If my discretionary power was returned, a man who has served his community would get his pension."

A CLG spokesman said: "We are considering the issue of eligibility for pensions. But this has affected only a few cases."

Sunday Telegraph November 11 2007