

MUTINY IN MERSEYSIDE AS HEALTH & SAFETY JEOPARDISED



FBU members sent home for following standard operating procedures

On Thursday January 11, a relief crew of four firefighters was ordered back to their station at Low Hill by a senior manager in Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

The crew had not completed their duties in cooling acetylene cylinders but, following the senior manager's order to them to move the acetylene cylinders, they had asked him for further guidance.

The cylinders had only been cooled by firefighters for approximately 17 hours. The crew had their brigade standard operating procedure with them on the appliance. It clearly stated that acetylene cylinders should be cooled from a minimum of 24 hours.

Members' consultation on CPD.

Branches are currently meeting to discuss the employers' proposals on Continuous Professional Development payments. Full details of the issue are available from the front page of the FBU website www.fbu.org.uk and from a special edition of "Firefighter" sent to home addresses.

Officials, including the General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary, have attended meetings around the country to report on the negotiations and the proposals.

Make sure you attend your branch meeting to hear a report and please make your views known.

The crew did try to show this to the senior manager. But he would not allow them to seek further guidance or raise their health and safety concerns. (CONTINUED OVERLEAF)

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He simply pointed his finger and shouted at the four firefighters and ordered them back to their station.

On return to the station a MF&RS area manager sent them home from the station an hour and a half before the end of their shift stating that they had disobeyed orders.

Dangerous, unlawful order

The fact that the orders were unlawful - they directly contravened safety guidelines - and were dangerous - any shock to the cylinders could have caused a massive explosion - was never mentioned.

FBU members across Merseyside have rallied round in support of the four firefighters. They did not disobey an order. They simply asked for more advice. In doing so, they did nothing more than abide by brigade SOPs.

FBU members thrown off station

An emergency branch meeting was called for Monday 15 January. But the off-duty FBU members and one brigade official were thrown out of the station by the station manager. He refused to allow the branch meeting to go ahead. (It went ahead anyway). The on-duty watch were ordered out to do CFS.

Says brigade secretary, Les Skarratts:

"We are appalled at the situation.

It should not have happened. This is just one example of the bad feeling and pettiness that is rife within the fire service at the minute.

"The incident has caused deep resentment, anger and upset. It is the first time I can ever remember a crew being ordered off a fire ground for trying to get advice and remain within instructions."

Adds brigade chair, Mark Dunne:

"Merseyside members realise just how important this issue is and also that it could happen to any firefighter at any time in Merseyside.

200-metre exclusion zone


The gas cylinder was at the site of a major warehouse fire in Rock Ferry which drove nearly 900 people out of their homes. Police imposed a 200-metre exclusion zone.

The FBU has now made an official complaint to the Merseyside Fire Authority and the fire service's joint secretary, assistant chief officer Bill Evans.

Authority member and Liverpool Lib-Dem councillor Eddie Clein said: "We will take the complaint seriously, but we have to hear what the officer concerned has to say.

"But we certainly would not countenance any kind of action that would place our firefighters in any kind of danger."

This new development in MFR&S comes after the National Joint Council



(NJC) decided it would take a role in fresh negotiations this month after relations between the two sides have remained at critical levels.

The FBU has lodged 30 complaints about the conduct of managers and officers.

The union says it filed the complaints after the service refused to drop 19 disciplinary actions against firefighters who took part in the recent strike.

The Union says fire chiefs breached the return to work settlement by going ahead with the disciplinary cases.

Fire service and gay friendly employers

The UK fire and rescue service has once again put in a poor showing in Stonewall's ranking of the UK's top 100 gay-friendly employers. Stonewall, which campaigns for equality and justice for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, puts London Fire Brigade (LFB) at No. 28 and West Yorkshire at No. 73 for the 2007 ranking.

The top employer is IBM. In second place is last year's winner, Staffordshire Police. The Greater London Authority and Manchester City Council tie for third place.

Employers were ranked according to criteria ranging from implementation of an effective equality policy to demonstrating how they engage with their lesbian and gay staff and customers and service users. The index assesses

actual practice, such as recruitment and mentoring activity, as well as just policy.

Stonewall's Diversity Champions good practice programme currently has 254 members among employers from across Britain covering almost four million employees. Fifteen fire and rescue authorities are members - including LFB and West Yorkshire.

Says Stewart Brown, FBU executive council member for gay and lesbian members:

"The Index has gone from strength to strength in terms of highlighting good practice with employers and their LGB staff. The UK fire and rescue service clearly has a long way to go and must make fundamental changes if it wants a good position in the 2008 index. The FBU will continue to push this, both locally and nationally."

Smokers and fires

Fire Minister Angela Smith has given a stark warning to smokers that households with a smoker living in them are nearly 35 per cent more likely to have a fire than non-smoking homes. The statement came at the start of a £1 million advertising campaign funded by Communities and Local Government to highlight the consequences of 'careless' smoking.

According to statistics gathered from 2000-2005 by the Department for Communities and Local Government, smoking is biggest cause of fire-related deaths in the home. Nearly a third of all

households have a smoker living in them. There are an average of 132 deaths, 1,600 injuries and 4,300 fires per year in accidental home fires caused by smoking materials.

The average damage caused by a house fire costs £25,500, compared to the £4.89 average cost of a packet of cigarettes.

Annual Conference

FBU reps/officials are reminded that the closing date for amendments to Resolutions and amendments to EC's proposed changes to Rules is 2pm, 5 March.

New control staff EC member

Sharon Eames has been elected as the Executive Council member for Emergency Fire Control Staff. She defeated Val Salmon.

She says:

"I would like to say how proud I am to be elected into the role of EC member for Emergency Fire Control Staff.

"Because of the very challenging times ahead I have hit the ground running!

"There is considerable work to be done and I look forward to working on your behalf and with you in the months and years to come."

The Union wishes to put on record a big thanks to Val Salmon for all her hard work over many years on behalf of control staff.

In the news

Firework storage safety threat

Fireworks are being kept across Brighton and Hove in storage containers which can "go off like bombs", it has been claimed.

A concerned councillor has called for an investigation into three sites licensed to store fireworks in and around the city - at Moulsecoomb Way, Hollingbury Hollingbury and Devil's Dyke.

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service's Brian Wembridge and Geoff Wicker both died at Festival Fireworks UK near Ringmer in East Sussex on December 3 following an explosion.

Source: The Brighton Argus

Unite Against Fascism / Love Music Hate Racism Stop the BNP National Conference

7th February / 9.30am - 5pm
TUC Conference Centre. Great
Russell St. London. WC1B 3LS

Unite Against Fascism, with support from Love Music Hate Racism are organising a national conference to look at the impact of increasing BNP support, to discuss strategies that have been successful in stopping the BNP and to bring together the broad opposition that is needed to halt the rise of fascism including support from trade unions, Muslim, Jewish and other faith communities, Black,

Asian, Lesbian, Gay and Disabled communities and students.

You can register for the conference online:

<http://www.uaf.org.uk/tempCONFREG>.

No Trident - Troops Out of Iraq

National Demo 24th February

CND, Stop the War, and the British Muslim Initiative are jointly organising a national demonstration in Central London on Saturday 24th February. The demo comes ahead of the parliamentary votes on Trident replacement in March. Show the government how great the popular opposition is, both to its policies of nuclear weapons, and war and occupation in Iraq.

It appears that after a Defence Debate on 25th January, the final debate and vote on Trident replacement will be in early March. In the run-up to this date, MPs must feel the maximum pressure from constituents wishing them to oppose Trident replacement - they certainly will from party whips trying to force them to vote with the party line.

Lobby Your MP

Whilst CND would like all MPs to oppose Trident replacement, it appreciates that not all will agree. But many will wish to raise concerns, perhaps over the timing or the process reached to take such a decision.

Discover and feed back any such views to Ben Foley at CND (campaigns@cnduk.org or 020 7700 2393). These individuals may make up the most significant part of opposition to the Government's plans in the final Commons vote.

Also, urge Your MP to Sign a new Early Day Motion, [EDM 579](#), put forward by Jon Trickett MP. It calls on the government to "extend the period of consultation to enable all political parties and other organisations with a legitimate interest to undertake full discussion and consultation which will enable them to present their views and make representations to Honourable members before a debate and vote."

Visit www.cnduk.org for a lobby pack to help guide you through the steps of lobbying your MP and for more info on the national demo, including leaflets, transport and how you can help.

FBU freephone legal advice line

0808 100 6061

For advice on personal injury, family law, wills conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU rep.

To receive the e-bulletin and other news from the FBU direct into your email inbox go to www.fbu.org.uk and subscribe.