

DEATHS OF WARWICKSHIRE FIREFIGHTERS HAS TOUCHED THE FIRE SERVICE AROUND THE WORLD



FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack says the deaths of four firefighters in Warwickshire has echoed in fire services around the world. The comments were made as the service and the community prepared for the funeral of Darren Yates-Badley on 7 December.

The funerals of John Averis, Ian Reid and Ashley Stephens have been taking place since 30 November. Matt Wrack and representatives of the Fire Brigades Union have attended all the funerals so far and will attend the funeral of Darren Yates-Badley.

Matt Wrack said: "The deaths of John, Ian, Ashley and Darren in the line of duty has been a terrible blow to their families and colleagues. They are a great loss also to the communities which they served with pride and conviction.

"Their deaths have touched our colleagues in other fire services. Messages of support have come from serving firefighters and their unions from every continent.

"Those firefighters may express their grief and sadness in different languages and with different gestures. What unites us is knowledge of the risks and dangers inherent in firefighting.

"These are the risks and dangers faced by all firefighters in all communities and all countries. Because of this, the deaths in Warwickshire have resonated in fire stations across the world.

"The families of John, Ian, Ashley and Darren are united in their grief and sadness. In the fire service we also think of ourselves as a family and we are also united in that grief and sadness."

Warwickshire Firefighters Families Fund

The Prison Officer Association (POA) has donated £10,000 to the Warwickshire Firefighters Families Fund.

General Secretary Matt Wrack has written to Brian Caton, the General Secretary of the POA to thank them for this very generous donation.

Donations should be sent to:

Warwickshire Firefighters Families Fund:

Bank: Lloyds Bank
Sort Code: 30-00-02
A/C No.: 00581408

Regional Controls: Whitehall need to rethink plans after Edinburgh says no to closures

Whitehall needs to urgently re-think plans to close all 46 emergency fire controls in England and move to one control for each region says the FBU. The call came after an announcement that plans to reduce the number of emergency fire controls in Scotland have been halted.

Scotland will now get all the benefits of an enhanced digital radio system, interoperability between emergency fire controls and other emergency services, modern data terminals in fire appliances and real time updates of the exact position of vehicles much cheaper and much faster than England. In England the regional control project is now running years late, costs are ten times the original estimate of £100 million and it is placing enormous burdens on the fire service.

FBU General secretary Matt Wrack said: "Scotland has looked into the abyss and quite rightly stepped back. They will now get a better and more resilient system which is much cheaper and quicker than that planned for England.

"It makes a real difference when Government takes the time to engage with frontline staff and the fire service before key decisions are made. Whitehall made poor decisions in the face of overwhelming opposition within the fire service at the time.

"The Whitehall obsession with a regionalised structure in England is bleeding the fire service dry of money and personnel. This is an example of public money being

wasted on another IT project of dubious benefit and which diverts money from frontline services.

"Scotland has understood those issues, Whitehall has not. It is not technology and buildings which gives us the resilience to deal with major incidents. It is professional fire crews and emergency control staff which give us that strength and we have never failed the public."

In a written House of Commons answer given on 27 October 2005 on the original estimates of the costs of regional fire controls in England fire minister Jim Fitzpatrick said consultants Mott MacDonald "estimated project costs at £100 million, comprising project management costs, technology costs, accommodation costs and redundancy."

The costs are now officially over £1 billion and rising.

Marlie Farm 1 year on: no Government action on firework container "bombs"

FBU is calling for an overhaul of the regulations that cover the import, manufacture, transport and storage of fireworks in the UK. The move comes on the first anniversary of the deaths of two fire service personnel in an explosion at Marlie Farm in East Sussex on 3rd December 2006.

The Union says the investigation into the Marlie Farm explosion uncovered a number of other incidents involving fireworks where lives had been lost and many people injured. The union warns that emergency services and the public are being put in needless danger because of confused regulation, lack of monitoring and the poor labelling of imported fireworks.

It warns that four major fireworks incidents in the UK and similar incidents in six other countries found: The labelling on imported fireworks is unreliable; regulation is hampered by too many agencies being involved with little co-operation between them; serious concerns that steel freight containers [ISO containers] are inappropriate for the storage or transportation of fireworks; poor information and guidance for emergency services seriously hampered their ability to

prepare and successfully execute their response.

Responsibility for policing and enforcing the regulations involves five government departments: The Home Office, HM Revenue and Customs, Department of trade and industry, Department of work and pensions and Communities and local government.

It is difficult to say exactly how many separate organisations are involved. Even treating HM Revenue and Customs and the HSE as single units leave 46 local fire authorities, 43 local police authorities and 410 local Councils adding up to over 500 agencies responsible for enforcing fireworks regulation.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "In fires containers packed with fireworks can cause the same devastation as some military bombs and artillery shells. Despite the dangers already identified there has been no action from Government, the Health and Safety Executive or the other regulatory agencies.

No effective regulation

"At present there is no effective regulation of fireworks standards, labelling, transportation or storage. Government and its agencies have done nothing to properly address what we have already learned about firework linked explosions at incidents in the UK and other countries.

"Emergency services and the public are being put needlessly at risk by this inaction. The current regime is too complex and isn't working.

"We need one agency in overall control. The regulating agencies need to have a comprehensive programme of inspection and enforcement to achieve an acceptable level of risk."

For more on Marlie Farm and other health and safety matters visit:

www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/healthsafety



Herts crews angry about ill-health pensions and cuts


Herts firefighters are expected this week to vote unanimously in favour of industrial action should one of them have their ill-health pension benefits removed as anger is close to boiling point over the Government's recent changes of guidance on pension benefits in case of injury.

Herts fire crews are also up in arms over the shortage of firefighters in the County, despite Herts County Council agreeing in July last year that this problem would be resolved. While engines fail to mobilise and crews attend incidents short of personnel, Herts County Council has begun to take more firefighters off of frontline duties – something that politicians agreed not to do following last years industrial action. Local firefighter's concerns are further increased by the shortage of experienced personnel available on fire engines in the County. Recently several staff have become disillusioned with the way the Service is being run and have left to join brigades in other counties.

Herts FBU Secretary Tony Smith said, "Every day Herts fire crews are willing to risk their lives to save others but feel they are being let down by senior managers and the Council. Firefighters across the county are extremely angry that our employers have reneged on their agreement that saw an end to our industrial action last year. We are angry that our safety is being jeopardised and we are angry that if we get injured our employers will force us to leave the Service without a pension.

"We won't be looked after if injured"

"Last year, our employers told us that they could be trusted and we believed them. They said they would work with us to improve the Service but their words are ringing hollow.



Instead they continue to erode the frontline emergency response service we can offer to the public and now it seems that they will not look after us if we get injured in the line of duty.

“Yet again it seems it will be left to local fire crews to make a stand to ensure firefighter and public safety and we are prepared to do that. This job is becoming increasingly dangerous and the number of serious incidents we attend is on the increase. In order for us to protect the public we need more firefighters on our fire engines, not less.”

Industrial action was taken last year by firefighters following a raft of cuts proposed by Hertfordshire County Council. Firefighters agreed to return to work after several periods of strike action. The council closed Radlett and Bovingdon Fire Stations, but agreed to make no further cuts to the frontline of the fire service.

A delegation of firefighters attended Harpenden Fire Station at 1pm on Tuesday 4 December 2007 in an effort to highlight their concerns to the chief fire officer.

Norfolk – crews may have to question risk they take in light of pensions guidance

In Norfolk, meanwhile, the FBU has said FBU members in the brigade may be forced to question the risks they take in light of the new Government guidance on ill-health pensions. Norfolk firefighter and FBU chair Peter Graves, said:

“It is highly regarded that firefighters will push themselves to the limits to save a life whether it is at a fire or at a road traffic collision.

“Unfortunately we are now being forced to question our actions before committing ourselves into what could be a harmful or dangerous environment.”

FBU Norfolk has already met with chief fire officer Richard Elliott to raise its concerns, but believe his hands are tied by the government guidelines. It is now lobbying local MPs to support their cause.

Officers are also considering the implications of the Government guidance on

ill-health pensions. Says FBU Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark:

“With the revised CLG guidance the hazard remains the same, but the risk has just increased. The risk now is of no job and no pension.

“Just how reasonable is it for an officer to be expected to ask someone to take a risk, the outcome of which may cost them their income, their job, their home, their family? Just how reasonable is it for a fire and rescue authority to expect its personnel to do this?

“And just how reasonable is it for the fire and rescue authority FRA to expect an officer to instruct personnel to expose themselves to that risk?”

Take one minute to protect yourself and your colleagues

The news from Hertfordshire and Norfolk comes after the Union last week secured an important victory in its campaign for justice for firefighter pensions.

Following a judicial review launched by the Union in relation to the three London members affected by the guidance, the lawyers for the department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Board of Referees conceded an important part of the Union’s case and the three London members pensions should now be restored.

However, the matter is not resolved. Even the three members concerned may still face the same issue again depending upon other decisions. Most importantly, the guidance issued by CLG in September 2006 remains in place at this time.

Members are therefore urged to continue to discuss the issue at branch meetings to consider other forms of pressure that can be brought to bear, and to write to MPs, calling on them to make representations to the Minister to revert the 2006 guidance back to the original 2004 guidance.

Write to your MP!

Write to your MP in just one minute, by visiting the FBU website www.fbu.org.uk and by following the Lobby Your MP link.

More details on the campaign can also be found on the FBU website.

Cuts fightback - Cornwall

Fire crews from Camborne joined their colleagues at Falmouth fire station on Monday 3 December to show solidarity and to demonstrate the strength of feeling about the continuing threat to 24-hour cover at the station.

Representatives of fire crews from across Cornwall met 29 November and formally welcomed a press statement which said the County's Executive are to recommend that Camborne Fire Station should remain crewed 24 hours a day. But crews remain opposed to plans for Camborne and concerned about the lack of detailed information given to Cornwall's fire crews on planned changes to the county's fire service. They have demanded councillors meet them to discuss the details of the proposals.

For more visit: www.fbu.org.uk

Cuts fightback: Devon and Somerset

Devon and Somerset fire crews are warning that a new and more savage cuts package will test the limits of safe working for frontline fire crews. They also accuse managers of treating public opinion with contempt by planning cuts which could be twice as bad as those previously rejected.

There could be as many as 66 frontline firefighter posts lost under the new cuts package, nearly double those threatened under the old package which was overwhelmingly rejected during the last public consultation. The authority has now put the proposals out to consultation for only an 8 week period which straddles the Christmas and New Year break. For more visit: www.fbu.org.uk

Cuts fightback: Kent

Kent FBU members have expressed concern over fire service plans to provide height vehicle (HV) cover to anywhere in Kent in a 30 minute benchmark standard. They say the content of the plan is misleading to members of the public, who are expected to respond by the 18 January 2008.

For more visit: www.fbu.org.uk

GMC – AFA policy slammed

GMC fire crews have slammed the introduction of a new policy which would limit the fire service response to automatic fire alarms in business and commercial premises. No fire crews ever go to an alarm they know to be false although most automatic fire alarms turn out to be wrong.

By Greater Manchester's own figures, at least 60 genuine fires on commercial and business premises – more than one a week – will get a reduced response in the future. These are genuine alarms to real fires and it is these which concern fire crews.

For more visit: www.fbu.org.uk

Firesafer cigarettes: Government calls for early introduction

The Government has committed to see fire safer cigarettes as the standard for all cigarettes bought and sold as quickly as possible in what represents a major victory for the two-year FBU campaign.

Although the European standard setting process is likely to take several years, the government will shortly be consulting on the introduction of an early standard for fire safer – or Reduced Propensity Ignition (RIP) - cigarettes for the UK based on the USA model. Consultees will include the FBU, the Chief Fire Officers' Association, anti-smoking groups and tobacco manufacturers.

The Government's announcement came after the European Union Commission's Committee of the General Product Safety Directive and agreed at a meeting on 29 November 2007 to mandate CEN, the EU's standards making body, to develop a pan-European standard for production of fire safer cigarettes. Once agreed this standard will be the norm for all cigarettes in EU member states.

Speaking after the announcement last week, Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda commented: "We estimate that having fire safer cigarettes as standard in the UK could save up to 120 lives per year. Across Europe this could amount to up to 1,000 lives saved and 11,000 injuries avoided. And fire safer cigarettes would also help in the drive to

reduce the £90million per year cost of fire in the UK.”

The FBU was the first organisation in the fire and rescue service to take up the issue, launching the campaign together with anti-smoking campaigners Action on Smoking and Health, in 2005.

Public sector pay

The Police Federation of England and Wales says it has seen a letter from Home Secretary Jacqui Smith proposing not to backdate a 2.5% pay award to September and has warned police officers may seek the right to strike. The Scottish Government said it would go ahead with the award and backdate it to September.

The Police Federation called the confidential letter's contents "dishonourable", and said it would mean officers receiving a lower-than-inflation pay award, effectively worth 1.9%. Jan Berry, the Police Federation's chair, said:

"This is contemptuous behaviour by the home secretary and has rightly angered the 140,000 police officers in England and Wales who have been waiting patiently for their pay award since 1 September."

"Police officers should either have full industrial rights or independent binding arbitration - currently we have neither," Ms Berry added.

"We're already seeing a change of mood amongst officers who have had enough and this latest blow may well be the final straw. However, it is the tone of the letter from the Home Secretary that will really turn the knife on a morale weary police service. This will come back to haunt her."

Since the late 1970s police pay has been increased by an index, or pay formula, that "has fully taken account of the unique status that officers hold in society – the inability to take any form of industrial action and the numerous restrictions on their private lives," says the Federation.

Last year the Government unilaterally moved away from the index, the matter went to arbitration and police officers were awarded a rise in line with the index.

This year's pay rise was negotiated through the Police Negotiating Board (the arena for negotiating police officers' terms and conditions) but a failure to agree was registered. A rise of 2.325% had been consistently offered but was rejected over the desire to stage it, effectively reducing it in real terms to 1.85% (below the Government's pay ceiling of 2%).

The issue passed through conciliation to binding arbitration; this reported on 29 November 2007, giving a rise of 2.5% backdated to 1st September. Arbitration is binding on both sides of the board and must then be ratified by the Home Secretary.

Ms Berry added: "Despite assurances that there would be full consultation with us before any decision is made, it is clear that the Home Secretary has already decided on a pay review body.

"For 30 years the PNB has worked effectively as a fair negotiating machinery to determine police officers' pay.

"It is this government who has deliberately obstructed PNB ensuring it fails in order to impose a pay review body on the police service.

"They are eroding the structures and practices which have made the British police service the best in the world."

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

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