

UNION SEEKS URGENT ACTION ON ATTACKS



Attacks on firefighters rise to 40 a week; crews face diet of shootings, bricks and bottles

The Union has called for "properly resourced, national strategy" to tackle the widespread and growing problem of attacks on firefighters as it unveils new research showing that there are 40 attacks on UK fire and rescue crews every week.

In some parts of the country, FBU members are served a daily diet of bricks, bottles and missiles as they fight fires; in parts of the country ambushes have been set for firefighters.

The attacks include: scaffolding poles being thrown through windscreens of fire engines; crews being attacked with concrete blocks, bricks and bottles; being shot at; spat at; equipment tampered with or stolen; direct physical assaults on fire crews; and equipment being urinated on.

And under-reporting of attacks means that the figure could be as

much as three times higher. Official statistics show that attacks are now running at about 2,000 a year, but the FBU and the brigades contacted during the research acknowledge that there is a serious problem of under-reporting.

Not just inner city problem

Although seen largely as an inner city problem, the research uncovered reports of attacks in the South Wales valleys, Royal Berkshire, small towns in Scotland and sedate Tonbridge Wells.

In launching the new research in Manchester today, FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said:

"The number and ferocity of the attacks appears to be getting worse. A young boy died in Scotland during one attack and it is only a question of time before a firefighter is killed.

Intolerable, inexcusable

"These attacks are inexcusable and must not be tolerated. It can never be part of anyone's job to get a brick or bottle in the head or to be spat at.

"The causes appear complex and we need more than knee-jerk reaction headlines calling for 'crackdowns'. Many attacks are in deprived areas with poor youth facilities and poor housing, where bored young people turn to drugs and alcohol.

"But they happen in many other types of areas which are neither poor nor deprived. There is no quick-fix solution but we need to start with a properly resourced, national strategy rather than it being left to cash-strapped local fire services," Andy Gilchrist said.

Pre-planned ambushes

There is evidence of fires being deliberately started to lure fire crews into pre-planned ambushes. Even if actual physical violence doesn't take place, fire crews still face threats, intimidation and abuse.

Official figures from Northern Ireland reveal that there were 1,200 attacks on crews in the last three years, with serious concerns that the problem is being underplayed. In Scotland, where statistics have only been collated more recently, 388 hostile incidents were recorded in 2004.

In England and Wales, in the nine-month period to the end of January 2005 (based on data from only 18 of 50 brigades) 393 attacks were reported. When statistics are extrapolated to cover all brigades over 12 months, they suggest more than 1,200 attacks.

The level of under-reporting is demonstrated by official statistics from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, showing that there were only nine attacks in the whole of the Greater Manchester area in the nine months to the end of January 2005. Figures collected by the brigade itself indicate attacks running at around 200 a year.

Key points

Key points from the analysis by Labour Research Department:

- **Statistics** - more needs to be done to ensure there is proper collection of standardised statistics on attacks. In some brigades, fire crews are being encouraged to report every single incident, but they will be encouraged even more if they understand how the figures can be used.
- **Co-ordination and evaluation** - different initiatives are being taken around the country, including public awareness campaigns and community-based projects with offenders and potential offenders. These need to be monitored and properly evaluated at national level so that brigades can learn more quickly what works and what doesn't. What may help

in one area may hinder in another.

- **Training** - operational guidance on dynamic risk assessment can be part of the solution but crews need to be properly trained in its application. If incidents cannot be avoided then an appropriate level of training for fire crews should help them deal with the situations.
- **Resources** - training and initiatives with schools and the community need to be maintained over the long term and need dedicated resources.

A summary of the LRD report will be available on the FBU website (www.fbu.org.uk) later this week and the full document will shortly be distributed widely in the Union, to key fire and rescue stakeholders and to Government. There will also be extensive coverage of the research and our campaign to stop the attacks in the next issue of Firefighter magazine.

Opposition hardening to Controls Regionalisation

Councillors at the South East Regional Management Board meeting last Thursday were queuing up to speak in opposition to the Regionalisation (RMB) of Emergency Fire Controls.

"Not one councillor spoke in support," Mark Simmons, FBU regional official told the e-bulletin. "The room was ringing with comments such as, 'very concerned with the whole process', 'nobody wants this

regional call centre, this is being forced upon us.' The meeting was on the verge of formally rejecting the project."

However, instead they opted for sending a letter to ODPM, detailing all their concerns and seeking assurances.

Nevertheless, councillors in the South East are becoming more hostile to the project as the meetings go on. The FBU will be at every RMB meeting, just like the 'bad penny that went go away', said Mark.

The next South East RMB meeting will be held the 13 June.

Control campaign seminar

A one day seminar to assist brigade officials in the Union's Campaign Against the Regionalisation of Emergency Fire Controls is to be held in Eastbourne on 28 April. National representatives of the Union will be attending and giving briefings.

Executive Council Meeting

Pensions, co-responding, New Dimension and a three-day seminar specifically on officer members' issues will be under discussion at the FBU Executive Council meeting in Glasgow on Wednesday.

General Secretary Election

Most members should have started received ballot papers for the election of FBU General Secretary.

If you haven't received your ballot paper by Tuesday April 19 contact the membership department at FBU Head Office: 0208 541 1765.

The ballot closes May 6.

This election is for the most senior position in the FBU and the outcome will have an important impact on all members' future, the future of the Union and the future of the UK fire and rescue service.

Failing to use your vote means handing the destiny of the Union for the next five years - and the direction of the workplace campaigns it fights on your behalf - over to somebody else!

It's Your Union

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Use Your Vote!

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To receive the e-bulletin, other FBU campaign news, information on Union services direct into your email inbox subscribe to our emailing list.

Go to www.fbu.org.uk, type in your email address and click on the "Sign Up" button. That's all it takes.

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.

FBU's Confidential Freephone Stress and Support Line

0800 783 4778

Stressed?
Bullied?
Get help from the Union!

On the Move?

Members are reminded to advise their brigade membership secretary of any change of address. Head Office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.