

# EMERGENCY WORKERS BILL AT LORDS



**The Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Bill, backed by the FBU, has received its second reading in the House of Lords**

The Bill seeks to extend the protection for emergency workers which has recently come into force in Scotland. The Bill seeks to make it a specific offence to obstruct or hinder emergency workers such as firefighters.

This Bill will close gaps in the law in relation to ambulance workers where no current offence of obstruction exists. It will also make it clearer and easier to prosecute for obstructing or hindering emergency workers, such as fire crews, dealing with emergencies. We also understand there will be clearer sentencing guidelines for those convicted of attacks on emergency workers although these - clearly - do not form part of the Bill.

The Bill received its second reading in the Lords on Friday 13 October after receiving its

Commons third reading at the House of Commons 14 July. It originated as a Private Members Bill tabled by Labour MP Alan Williams.

The Bill has the full support of firefighters across the UK and secured cross-party support in the Commons. The union and its parliamentary support group have worked closely with Mr Williams in building support for the Bill.

## FBU campaign success

The Bill followed the publication, in April 2005, of research carried out for the FBU by the Labour Research Department which found that attacks on UK fire crews were running at 40 a week with the problem getting worse. The research, the first of its kind in the UK, found that under-reporting suggested the figure could be as high as 120 attacks a week.

Under the parliamentary timetable, Royal Assent - making the bill law - is expected to be given before the end of the year.

## **National Officer Election**

National Officer John McGhee has been re-elected.

The results of the election are:

John McGhee: 10,935

Bob Blackburn: 10,234

Spoilt Papers 1,897

## **Buncefield - calls for immediate improvements in safety at fuel depots**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has announced that the joint task group set up after the Buncefield fuel depot fire has called for the industry to take immediate measures to increase safety at major petroleum storage facilities.

The call for these measures come in response to findings contained in the Buncefield Major Incident Investigation Board's (MIIB) initial report published in July.

These recommendations relate to:

- \* Pipeline transfers;
- \* Tank overfill prevention - operating safety margins and level alarms;
- \* Fire safe shut-off valves and remotely operated shut off valves;
- \* Containment - bunds and other measures; and
- \* Shift handover.

The joint Industry and COMAH Competent Authority (CA) Task Group are also reviewing the

emerging outcomes from the safety and environmental reviews of fuel depots carried out by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Environment Agency (EA) and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) earlier this year. The CA will report their findings later this year. These may well include the need for industry to take further measures.

### Immediate action

The Task Group recommends and the CA requires sites that have bulk tanks storing petroleum that could be overfilled leading to a significant vapour cloud to take immediate action. These sites will now have to implement the recommendations by the deadlines set out in the report. Industry representatives have agreed to complete them and the CA will be monitoring industry progress closely to ensure the enhanced safety standards are introduced on time.

Under the CA's direction, the Task Group set out to undertake a comprehensive and thorough review of facilities like Buncefield to ensure they operate correctly. The actions detailed above are the first results of this work. The Task Group will make final recommendations to industry aimed at enhancing safety and environmental standards by July 2007.

## **Merseyside dispute**

The FBU and Merseyside fire and rescue authority have reached an agreement in principle. Detailed

negotiations are currently taking place. The trade dispute is still live but the Union is hopeful that full and final settlement will be reached.

## **Cumbria - cuts fightback**

Kendal firefighters and local FBU reps descended on 10 Downing Street on Tuesday 10 October to hand in a petition with 4,000 signatures from members of the public opposing proposed cuts to fire cover by Cumbria fire and rescue authority.

Accompanying them to Tony Blair's residence was Westmorland and Lonsdale MP Tim Farron, who is highly critical of the changes and has helped finance local petitioning.

Kendal firefighters have doorstepped 12,000 local residents in recent weeks, seeking their support for their campaign against cuts.

The cuts include downgrading cover from Kendal fire station between 10pm and 10am, during the time when the most dangerous fires take place. As a result of these proposed changes, response times may increase from a current 5.5 minutes to up to 15 minutes.

A 12-week consultation period ended on 11 October 2006 but in recognition of the strength of opposition, Cumbria's deputy chief fire officer has stated that he will be accepting comments on the proposals after that date. The FBU's petition remains also live. The fire authority is due to decide on

changes to fire cover in early November.

## **"Crisis" in police pay as Treasury policy bites**


Treasury pay policy of seeking to keep increases low and in line with its inflation target of 2 or 2.25 per cent appears to be having an impact on public sector pay in a number of areas.

Take the police. 170,000 officers throughout the UK are still waiting for a pay rise they should have received in September because the Government is failing to honour a 27 year pay deal, according to the Police Federation of England and Wales.

The Government is demanding that the police accept increases below those due under their pay formula, which indicates an annual rise of 3 per cent. The rise was due on September 1.

The Police Federation of England and Wales has launched a campaign on the issue and is seeking views from its members on what it describes as a "pay crisis". Police do not have the right to strike and the issue is at ACAS.

"Due to government intervention, we have now been forced to go to an independent industrial panel [ACAS] who will decide next week if our long standing pay arrangements should be honoured," said the Police Federation of England and Wales Vice-Chairman, Alan Gordon.



The Federation has warned that Operation Safeguard - where from 12 October police cells throughout the country are being used to house prisoners - may fail. "If the police pay deal is not honoured there's every chance that hundreds of prisoners may not be properly guarded or the public may be at risk of increased levels of crime.'

---

**FBU freephone legal  
advice line**

**0808 100 6061**

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

---

*Get the e-bulletin and other FBU  
campaign news by email. Visit  
[www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk), type in you email  
address and "Sign Up".*