



Even a quick trawl of media reports suggests a rapidly rising number of attacks on firefighters, and, increasingly, a number of planned ambushes.

Some reports suggest that some parts of the country are “almost no-go areas”. In parts of the UK the attacks are coming almost on a daily basis. Some are so frequent that crews do not even bother to report them. These are only a selection from local news reports.

ASHINGTON, Northumberland, 18 November 2004 5.30 pm: Firefighters come under attack from brick throwing youths as they tackle a rubbish fire which may have been started deliberately by the youths in order to lure firefighters into an ambush, say reports.

‘The police have been called for support but most of the time they are so busy themselves that they have no one to spare unless we tell them that our lives are in danger’

attacks is difficult as few brigades systematically collect figures. This is not a problem that is only faced by the fire service. Large number of employers are in the same boat according to Linda Shanahan, FBU brigade secretary from Fife.

Linda chairs a steering group set up by the Scottish Executive (similar to the United Kingdom Cabinet) on the protection of workers serving the public.

“It has been difficult to get an accurate picture on the number of assaults happening to any group of workers,” she says. “Research is scarce, but that’s what we need before the scale of the problem can be identified.

“We found that only the British Transport Police were actively encouraging staff to report all incidents. Although most workers, including those in the fire service, have a number of anecdotal examples, you need the hard figures before you can get a true picture of the scale of the problem before moving towards a strategic solution.

“In Scotland brigades introduced reporting procedures in April 2003. With credible statistics we can then work out training needs and what needs to be done for all those workers who face violence at work.”

And publicity about the issues can create problems. “We have always been a bit wary of publicising incidents of