

**CLEVELAND, June 2002:** firefighters attacked with bricks and stones as they tackled a fire in derelict council houses.

**SOUTH WALES:** Trelewis, near Merthyr Tydil, 23 October 2003: firefighter needs emergency treatment after being hit on the head with a brick while attending a rubbish fire. In another incident on Methyr's Galon Estate fire crews were lured into the area and faced road blocks and a hail of bricks and stones. South Wales: October 2004: a series of attacks in Aberfan, Gilfach Goch after fires started to lure crews in. Crews attacked with stones and bricks.



**WEST MIDLANDS:** Walsall, Jan 17, 2005: firefighters attacked as they tackled a building fire by youths as young as 12 throwing bricks, stones and bottles. One firefighter hit with a brick. Police who were called to help also attacked.

**HALIFAX, West Yorkshire** September 2004: authority says 30 firefighters attacked in previous 5 months. Attacks have included stone and brick throwing youths.

**COVENTRY 24** October 2004: Fire crews in Coventry were attacked by a stone and brick throwing teenage gang while they dealt with a fire

brigade to put a workable strategy in place while continuing to lobby politicians for sustainable funding for the initiative. Advertising campaigns will coincide with the brigade beginning the engagement process with the youngsters.

Jim Barbour points out that the Northern Ireland experience is different to the rest of the UK. "On one hand we have the type of hooligan attack familiar in other areas, on the other we have politically motivated violence. In recent weeks there have been 23 incendiary attacks on commercial premises and it is not unknown for firefighters to be the target of pipe bombs.

"Initiatives such as the LIFE scheme cannot address these issues. We in the FBU will continue to explore and support any scheme aimed at driving down the incidence of attacks on our members, but we find it frustrating that despite the acknowledged upsurge of attacks, the Fire authority is seeking to review payment of the Northern Ireland allowance."

One of the central questions always asked about attacks is 'Why do the youngsters do it?' To get there you have to get beyond the first natural instinct which may be that they need a bloody good hiding.

Despite efforts, the Firefighter could find no one in the service who thought that would actually work. But directly engaging with youngsters in carefully targeted areas does work.

"Engaging with youngsters and understanding why they do it helps us tackle the problem," says Joe Heron of the FBU Northern Ireland. "Talking to them, it is clear

that the biggest problem is boredom.

"They also know there is little we can do about it and that we will always come back when we get the next call. They also know the fire service will react immediately and we will arrive, which can't always be said of other emergency services. But the engagement process is vital. It can and does impact on the youngsters.

"What they do is stupid, but the youngsters themselves are not stupid. We say: 'Look, what if you bricked a machine and it's wrecked and later you're home in bed and your house is on fire, who's going to get you out? If you stop bricking us, we'll get there quicker. To their credit most of them will go away and think about it."

And it is that direct engagement which is seen to be vital. "The reality is we can't stop them from throwing bricks at us," says Peter Craig.

"The only people that can do that are the communities themselves. It's getting the message across that when we are heading for a 999 call we want to get there as fast as we can and as safely as we can.

"If machines are getting wrecked there's always going to be that suspicion, an element of doubt if you are called to an area where you know there have been problems. You might go that little bit slower. You might go that little bit more cautiously and we know with what we do that can mean the difference between getting someone out alive or not.

"Yes, we are the targets. But ultimately it's the communities and those that live in them that are the real victims."

**COUNTY DURHAM 23** September 2001: A 23-year-old man was jailed for three-and-a-half years on Monday for biting off part of a firefighter's ear as the officer tackled a car fire.

**LOTHIAN AND BORDERS:** Musselburgh November 2004: A FIREFIGHTER was shot with an airgun and other crew members were stoned after being ambushed by teenage gang.