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To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

Covid-19 and Breathing Apparatus safety testing

We have been made aware that some brigades have introduced changes to the testing of risk critical equipment due to the current Covid-19 crisis. This is a serious issue and cannot be allowed to continue unchallenged.

The matter of Covid-19 is extremely important but the health, safety and the welfare of members is also vital, including during the Covid-19 pandemic.

FBU Brigade officials are being alerted to the seriousness of this issue and will be raising this where there has been any deviation or changes to the previously agreed testing or cleaning regime of any risk critical equipment.

Health and safety regulations are clear that any proposed changes to such testing and cleaning strategies must be raised with the FBU appointed H&S representative. In a number of cases it appears that this change has been implemented without any involvement of the FBU. This is completely unacceptable.

An example of this relates to the acceptance test of a Breathing Apparatus set.

A number of Fire and Rescue Services are proposing that the daily acceptance test of a BA set will not include donning the facemask to carry out the positive/negative pressure test but will instead rely upon a subsequent pre entry test. Some have also suggested that the schedule of testing is relaxed from daily to weekly.

The acceptance test is, by design, carried out under controlled conditions and it is vital that this safety check is not undermined.

The pre entry test, which is also an important part of the safe working procedure, is often completed when the requirement to act in an emergency situation is paramount and firefighters are working in extreme timescales where every second could count. For this reason, the long-established approach to testing is both necessary and sensible and should not be downgraded.

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The completion of the full acceptance test has always been deemed of such importance that there are cases of individuals being disciplined by their employer for not undertaking it. Now it appears that some FRSs are unilaterally seeking to downgrade long-established safety procedures.

One apparent reason behind this change is to avoid cross infection of wearers during the Covid-19 crisis. However this appears to be a case of removing one risk and simply replacing it with another. There are other safer options for minimising cross infection that do not include increasing the risk in other areas. These include:

- Ensuring a thorough clean of the mask with a suitable cleaning solution as part of the acceptance test. This has been identified as suitable for post incident cleaning arrangement, so it is logical that it is suitable to clean the mask as part of the acceptance test.
- Providing individual BA facemasks. This is also a control measure that does not remove a key part of the acceptance test. The FBU is already looking at this option. This is something that is being raised by the FBU as a longer-term solution.

There have been unconfirmed reports that this change is necessary because there is a potential lack of the appropriate cleaning solution. This has not been confirmed but if it is the case, it demonstrates a complete failure in pre planning by a number of brigades. Whatever the cause, the downgrading of safety processes is not acceptable and undermines the safety of firefighters.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', written in a cursive style.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

MW/sll