



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

CONFERENCE 2025

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY
STATEMENT**

A SAFETY- FIRST FIRE BRIGADES UNION
(FBU)

Firefighting and working in fire control rooms are arduous professions, long recognised to involve significant health and safety risks to the workforce. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) monograph, Occupational Exposure as a Firefighter (2023) stated, in relation to firefighting that:

“Firefighting duties involve diverse types of fire, emergency, and disaster responses, as well as specialised training events. Firefighters are exposed to a complex mixture of combustion emissions and a wide range of other chemical and physical agents. Firefighters responding to catastrophic events (such as building collapse, release of radioactive material, or chemical spills) may be exposed to agents that are not typically generalizable to the majority of people in the occupation worldwide. Work conditions can also involve night shift work, extreme physical activity, heat exposure, dehydration, and stress. In addition, people employed in the firefighting occupation can work as career or volunteer firefighters; have full-time, part-time, or seasonal employment; or work in a municipal or rural setting.”

The FBU has fought for the safety and health of firefighters and emergency control staff since it was established in 1918.

Conference reaffirms our commitment to a safety-first FBU.

Health and Safety Law

The FBU and the wider trade union movement fought for decades to enshrine protection in health and safety laws. It is now more than fifty years since the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 came into force. Further regulations under the Act, such as the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 and the “Six Pack” of European regulations in 1992, have created a solid legal framework for health and safety at work.

However, these regulations have been opposed and obstructed by some employers and chief fire officers since they were introduced. They have been restricted and enforcement watered down by Westminster governments committed to deregulation.

Conference believes that defending and extending health and safety law is vital. While the law is important, we have to rely on ourselves, our own organisation and on mobilising members to ensure the highest possible safety standards are implemented.

Conference reaffirms the centrality of FBU safety reps, with time off for training and inspection.

Conference urges FBU safety reps to make maximum use of opportunities to participate in safety committees with brigade principal management, in order to tackle health and safety matters directly.

Conference further commits to organising around firefighters’ memorial day and other important health and safety annual events to raise the profile of these matters among the membership.

FBU Safety and Health Priorities

In 2015, the FBU began a high-priority stream of work on contaminants, with a focus on firefighter cancers. The union undertook an international literature review and consulted with academics and firefighters unions across the globe to develop what later became the DECON campaign.

In 2018, the FBU commissioned Professor Anna Stec from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) to undertake a study of firefighter cancers across the UK. In 2019, the FBU ran a pilot study in Lancashire, followed by a national survey and sampling. In 2020, UCLan published the Interim Best Practice Report, *Minimising Firefighters' Exposure to Toxic Fire Effluents*.

In 2021, the FBU publicly launched the DECON campaign, along with a cancers database. During 2022, UCLan researchers published ground breaking, peer-reviewed studies of firefighter cancers in the UK, *The UK Firefighter Contamination Survey*. In 2023, several new peer-reviewed studies, commissioned by the FBU and carried out by UCLan, were published in renowned international peer-reviewed scientific journals, including the *Journal of Occupational Medicine* and the *Lancet Oncology*. Further studies on firefighters who attended the Grenfell Tower fire were published in 2024. The most prominent finding was the need for health monitoring of firefighters.

Mental health is also a key priority for the FBU health and safety work. In 2020, the FBU planned to undertake research with Nottingham Trent University, but this was paused because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2024, the FBU announced that UCLan would lead a significant project on firefighters' mental health. The first stage surveyed fire and rescue services on current levels of mental health provision. Discussions were held with FBU officials on the project. A pilot survey was carried out, ahead of an all members' survey and launch of this campaign in February 2025.

Conference commits the union to making health and safety a central priority.

Conference resolves to:

- mobilise the entire membership in the struggle for safety, health and wellbeing
- demand prevention measures in all aspects of our working lives, so that our members will not in general be made sick or injured by their work
- retrain and reinvigorate, recruit and train a cadre of FBU safety reps
- renew and revive joint safety committees, where FBU safety reps can regularly raise matters of health, safety and wellbeing with our employers and their principal managers
- accelerate our DECON campaign on every fire station, control room, training centre, headquarters and any other fire service premises
- update and publish our best practice guide on contaminants
- continue to demand health monitoring for firefighters to monitor firefighter exposure to contaminants
- give full backing to the union's mental health project, in association with UCLan
- raise the updated FBU best practice workplace facilities guide with employers and authorities to demand and deliver dignity in the workplace

- to demand additional investment from Governments to resource measures required to protect our members Health, Safety and Welfare now and in the future
- organise a health and safety summit, to bring together academics, researchers, practitioners, campaigners and safety reps.