

FireFighter

Trades Union Magazine of the Year

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

January/February 2010

AFTER THE FLOODS

Why are we still waiting for the kit?

Lack of equipment and training in the spotlight
See p16

DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS?

What's in store if the Tories win
See p13

MAKING THEM PAY

How we won pension fight
See p10



Happy New Year – Challenges ahead



I would like to take this opportunity to wish a very Happy New Year to all FBU members and to your friends and families. Once again it is likely to be a year with many challenges for our service and our union.

Our Union – it's about real people

Shortly before Christmas I had a drink with an old friend who has retired from the service. He has remained a Retired and Out of Trade member of the union and was able to follow our recent campaign on pension commutations. As a result

of the advice and support from the FBU he received a substantial back payment plus interest on the commuted part of his pension. This matter is covered in this month's *Firefighter*. I know that hundreds of members have so far received this back pay but it is important for us to remember campaigns like this are not just about total numbers or total amounts of money paid out by the authorities. Each case affects an individual firefighter and an individual family. This campaign, securing substantial amounts of money for a large number of members, has been a resounding success so far. The Executive Council has agreed to continue to advise

other members not so far covered about how to follow up the case and advice on this will be issued soon.

Floods...again

The major flooding in November has again highlighted the key role of our members in such circumstances. Firefighters were once again at the heart of the operations to save life and to make our communities as safe as possible. Yet scandalously we are having to highlight exactly the same issues as we did in 2005 and 2007 following earlier major floods. Our members have raised their concerns about a lack of adequate

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equipment such as dry-suits and boats. This is a national scandal – 18 months after the government's Pitt Review into the 2007 flood. Firefighters have always demonstrated that they are willing to put themselves on the front line to protect the public in such circumstances but we are entitled to demand the best resources and equipment. The concerns raised by members in Cumbria, and in Scotland and elsewhere, will be raised with politicians locally and nationally as we continue to push for adequate resources to do the job safely and professionally.

New Year – New government?

We will face a general election very soon. The next couple of issue of our magazine will look at some of the key questions facing us as the election approaches. The

blunt reality is that there is little hope on offer from any of the three main parties. All three are committed to making major cuts to public services and to raising taxes from working people to pay for the poorer services that will result. All three are committed to attacking public sector pay, jobs and conditions and the Fire and Rescue Service will not be exempt. And all this results from the failures of the unregulated banking sector and the billions of our money used to bail it out.

FBU members will rightly and justifiably be angry over the treatment of firefighters during the strikes of 2002/3 and at the subsequent direction of government policy in relation to our service. However, it is clear from recent statements from the Tories that there is nothing on offer from them for

firefighters or for working people in general. Some of this is addressed in this month's magazine. The truth is that whoever is in power we will need to be prepared to continue campaigning and fighting to defend ourselves.

There is, nevertheless, one group of MPs who fully deserve our support. The FBU Parliamentary Group is made up of MPs who work closely with the union on fire service matters and issues of interest to FBU members. They have assisted us on all the key issues we have faced over the past years: pensions, pay, jobs, floods, regional controls... On all of these crucial issues their support has been invaluable and members in the relevant constituencies are urged to give them support.

Matt Wrack



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Floods are back: Firefighters and RNLI personnel rescue Pat Edwards, 81, from her home in the centre of Cockermouth

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

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County on the march against cuts

CUTS FIGHTBACK

Fire crews joined residents, councillors and MPs from the three main political parties in a march and rally opposing massive fire service cuts in Warwickshire in December. Senior officers plan to cut a third of all appliances, close a quarter of all stations and axe 100 firefighters working retained duty.

The march to County Hall in Warwick was the high point of a campaign that has stunned the officers who are presenting the cuts as an "improvement plan".

Stations at Studley, Bidford, Brinklow, Fenny Compton, Kenilworth, Warwick and Bedworth are proposed for closure. Appliances crewed by fire fighters working retained duty would also be removed from Coleshill and Atherstone stations.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack told the rally: "Local fire crews know what these cuts will mean and the impact they will have on communities. No one improves the fire service by cutting it and we will continue to

lead the campaign against closures."

Warwickshire FBU brigade secretary Mark Rattray said: "Local meetings have been so packed with residents voicing opposition they have had to put on extra meetings. There is no question that senior officers proposing the plans have been stunned by the public response.

"No one has fallen for the line that these major cuts can be called a service improvement plan. If they go ahead we could see towns and villages being left without any effective emergency rescue cover."

FBU regional secretary Chris Downes said: "Local firefighters, residents and politicians from all three main parties have been as one on this issue. We believe that the people of Warwickshire should not suffer cuts to frontline services.

"Anyone who thought these cuts would sail through because of public or firefighter apathy has been put straight. This march and rally showed the level of opposition to these cuts and our campaign goes on into next year when we aim to stage a major rally."

CLOSURES DEFERRED

A decision on closure of Moira and Syston fire stations in Leicestershire has been deferred following a local campaign.

Other planned changes include new station buildings in Castle Donington and Birstall. Up to 14 firefighters would be transferred to Melton. There would be cuts at Hinckley and a retained appliance would be removed from Loughborough.

Fire authority councillors voted to defer a decision, saying they did not have enough information or time to consider the evidence. It has been referred to a scrutiny committee.

Leicestershire FBU and local campaigners welcomed the move, but said their campaign would continue. FBU brigade secretary Tom Neal said: "The campaign goes on, the decision has only been put back, it has not been shelved.

"The FBU has no problem about looking at how to make the service better and deliver improvements to the local community. But you don't do that by removing emergency cover from where it is needed."

Merseyside crews set for action short of a strike

MERSEYSIDE

Merseyside fire crews were awaiting the result of a ballot for industrial action short of a strike over plans to cut frontline services as *Firefighter* went to press. A “yes” vote could result in industrial action from early January.

The cuts would mean the loss of up to



Les Skarratts: New cuts will mean even fewer firefighters spread more thinly taking longer to get to incidents

104 frontline firefighter posts, including 36 frontline posts moved to non-operational work. The fire authority has also extended the use of the controversial staffing system to Eccleston fire station which will mean longer response times, extended working hours and the loss of firefighter posts. The FBU says this breaks an agreement to seek

the involvement of ACAS.

A separate agreement has been reached over the sacking of Kevin Hughes, a Merseyside FBU official.

The FBU thought that, as a consequence of the agreement, that the four fire appliances removed from fire stations across Merseyside (Crosby, Liverpool City Centre, Old Swan and Wallasey), supposedly for training purposes in case of strike action, would have been returned with immediate effect. Despite the lifting of any strike threat, the appliances remain off the run, a move that has caused fury among fire authority councillors.

Fire authority councillor Jack Colbert said: “What we are facing here is a budget cut, but using the former threat of strike action as an excuse to lose our second engine. We have been hoodwinked.”

Les Skarratts, Merseyside FBU brigade secretary, said: “These cuts have already had a real impact on the number of frontline firefighters to crew fire engines and attend 999 emergencies. This new set of planned cuts will mean even fewer firefighters spread more thinly taking longer to get to incidents.”

Talks snub ‘irresponsible’

ESSEX

Essex fire crews say the refusal of managers to accept help to resolve their dispute over cuts is “totally irresponsible”. The union wrote formally to the authority requesting the use of the national joint secretaries, drawn from the national fire service employers and Union.

The fire authority did not even discuss the request at its last meeting and the move was dismissed by the chief officer.

Essex FBU said cuts were already beginning to bite with the chief officer revealing there are frontline firefighter shortages. The Union warned the shortages would worsen if more planned cuts go ahead.

Essex fire crews extended their industrial action from 7 December to include a ban on new individual secondary contracts and on new additional work agreements that do not conform to national conditions of service.

Essex FBU brigade secretary Keith Flynn said: “We already have shortages of frontline firefighters with more cuts to come which will make matters worse. There have been

significant problems with appliances taking nearly 30 minutes to get to one major fire.

“The removal of specialist crews has meant not all the appliances have been available when we needed them and where we needed them. There are senior officers leaving, industrial relations are deteriorating and we have reached deadlock in the talks. These are not minor issues raised by Essex fire crews and we expect more than an abusive rant from the chief officer in response.

“It is perfectly normal for external assistance to be sought in these circumstances – which is what we are doing. It is totally irresponsible for that request to be dismissed in the manner it has been.”

The cuts have led to a controversial decision to downgrade the way special appliances like rescue tenders and aerial (high reach) appliances are crewed.

Similar plans affecting Leigh, Southend, Basildon and Grays fire stations are to be implemented soon, but exactly when is yet to be announced. The union has also objected to other changes that it says local managers are trying to impose rather than negotiate.

Sounding off!

BRENDAN BARBER

TUC general secretary

Strong public sector can help lift us out of recession

Any cuts in public spending would prolong the UK's economic agony, limit the country's ability to haul itself out of recession, reduce key services at a time when they are most in need and lead to thousands of job losses.

Widespread cuts in budgets would see workers losing their jobs in the private as well as the public sector. For every £1 of public money invested in public services through direct employment and through procurement of supplies and services, a further 64p is generated in the local economy.

The recession and rising unemployment are a major source of increasing poverty – 70 per cent of non-working families are poor compared to only 5 per cent of working



Brendan Barber: We need the public sector more than ever in a recession

families. Public services are essential to preventing these social costs.

A 10 per cent cut in spending levels would see around 200,000 public sector workers lose their jobs. As around 29 per cent of public sector expenditure goes into the private sector, this would mean a loss of around £16.8 billion in investment – a move that would also lead to many private sector job losses.

Public spending is a key election battleground. Immediate and sweeping cuts would be disastrous for the economy, for workers and for the users of public services.

We need the public sector more than ever in a recession. Sharp cuts in public spending would not only hit the most vulnerable in society, but would also hamper the chances of growth, increase the incidence of long-term unemployment and cause widespread job losses in both the public and private sectors.

Unemployment is now increasing at a slower rate than many were predicting. But long-term unemployment is likely to continue rising sharply for many months to come. Cutting back on public spending would put thousands of workers at risk of permanent worklessness, risking a repeat of the enormous social and economic costs of the 1980s.

In brief

◆ Lancashire fire crews have reluctantly agreed that two stations with relatively low levels of activity will transfer to a 'day crewing' type shift system named day crewing plus. This will result in the loss of 28 firefighter posts in 2010, and the likely loss of a further 56 in 2011/2012. After consultation proposals to replace a fire engine at Blackpool with a smaller more limited vehicle have been shelved. Lancashire has had one of the lowest government grant settlements for eight consecutive years which the FBU believe has directly led to these losses. Steve Harman, Lancashire FBU brigade secretary said: "We are extremely concerned about the level of funding. There is no slack left in the system. We are going to start losing fire engines if it carries on like this."

◆ More than 9,000 people have signed a petition against plans to axe a fire engine from Ascot Drive fire station in Derby, cutting the number of appliances at the station to one. As well as the loss of an appliance, up to 24 firefighters would be moved. Matlock, Swadlincote and Glossop stations would be changed to 24-hour shift stations, creating 18 posts.

◆ Surrey fire service is facing its "worst crisis" because of a funding squeeze. Spelthorne fire station is already earmarked for closure, but there may be more cuts to come. "It is horrendous, a diabolical situation", said Richard Jones, FBU brigade secretary. "We have already heard the council wants to make 20 per cent cuts across all services and we are waiting to hear how much of that will come from the fire brigade. I am expecting the service to get absolutely cut to shreds in the next few months. In nine years I have never known a worse situation than this."

FBU 12TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S SCHOOL

Wortley Hall near Sheffield

9-11 April 2010

Look out for application forms being sent to all women members' home addresses

Save the date and if you have any queries please contact your women's rep

www.nwcfbu.co.uk nwc@fbu.org.uk

Crews welcome fireworks manslaughter jail terms

MARLIE FARM DEATHS

The Fire Brigades Union welcomed the sentences on the men found guilty of the manslaughter of two firefighters. Martin and Nathan Winter were convicted of "gross negligence" manslaughter at Lewes Crown Court, East Sussex.

Firefighter Geoff Wicker and former firefighter Brian Wembridge died in an explosion at Festival Fireworks near Lewes in December 2006. Martin Winter got seven years, his son Nathan five.

Matt Wrack, FBU General Secretary said: "We lost two firefighters at Marlie Farm and it was sheer luck it was not 22. Martin and Nathan Winter acted with utter disregard for the lives of others."

The union said regulations covering the storage and transport of fireworks were not properly monitored or enforced and that fire services outside East Sussex had not learned the lessons of the tragedy in terms of their knowledge of what fireworks are stored on which sites and in what way.



Brian Wembridge (left) and Geoff Wicker died when fireworks exploded



There were also major gaps in the way fire services trained crews to deal with the risks of fireworks explosions.

Steve Huggins, East Sussex FBU brigade secretary, said: "Our thoughts are with the crews of East Sussex and the families of Brian and Geoff."

"This tragedy happened in East Sussex, but it could happen again in this county or elsewhere tomorrow."

"Nationally the monitoring and enforcement of fireworks regulations is patchy at best and non-existent at worse. There is very little co-ordination between the agencies that are meant to be

responsible for the regulations.

"We have major concerns with the use of shipping containers for the storage of fireworks. Containers are used across the country by people in the firework industry and supermarkets."

"The training gaps identified at the trial are not only in East Sussex but across the fire service three years after this tragedy."

"It is important to ensure that all the lessons are properly learned, so no one else is killed in similar circumstances."

➔ More details in the next edition of *Firefighter*

Fire damage hits record high

FIRE TRENDS

The cost of fire damage has hit record levels, research by the Association of British Insurers shows. In the first six months of 2009 insurers paid out £639 million – £3.6 million a day – for fire damage. This is the highest half-yearly figure ever, and follows on from last year's record high levels.

ABI's Nick Starling said: "The challenging economic climate is having a significant impact. Numbers of fires may have been falling, but the increase in large-scale fires is increasingly putting lives at risk."

The ABI's analysis of fire trends showed:

◆ Fire damage claims in the first half of 2009 cost £639 million – £3.6 million each day. This follows on from the £1.3 billion fire losses in 2008, a 16% rise on 2007 and the most expensive year ever.

◆ Between 2002 and 2008 the cost of the average

fire claim for both commercial and domestic fires doubled, to £21,000 and £8,000 respectively.

◆ Arson, which tends to increase during a recession, accounts for half of all commercial fires. Socially deprived areas and schools are especially vulnerable: arson rates are 30 times higher in poorer areas. Twenty schools a week suffer an arson attack, disrupting the education of 90,000 schoolchildren, causing damage costing £65 million.

◆ More open plan buildings, which allow more rapid spread of fire, and the increase in out of town developments, where fires can go for longer unnoticed, are among factors contributing to the doubling of fire costs since 2002.

The ABI identifies reviewing the case for making sprinklers mandatory in all new buildings, and a zero tolerance approach to arson as two key areas of work.

MPs to investigate FireControl

FIRECONTROL

MPs have launched a top-level inquiry into the FireControl project. The House of Commons Select Committee for Communities and Local Government, which oversees the work of the department, will take written evidence in the New Year.

The project, which was meant to be operational by the end of 2007, had an original price tag of £100 million when it was first proposed in 2003. It was repeatedly said to be using “tried and tested” technology.

It is now running at least five years late, costs are now at least eight times the original estimate and it has been beset by technology problems which remain unresolved.

The committee, made up of MPs from a range of political parties, expects to report

‘Cash-strapped fire services are seeing where the money has been wasted. Kit that fire crews actually need for use, in floods for example, is scarce, and now we know why’

by March, but has no power to stop the project.

The National Audit Office is also carrying out an inquiry into the project. It is not expected to report until the end of 2010, well after the general election.

Recent parliamentary answers show that the cost of the little-used regional control centre (RCC) buildings had soared to £73.2 million by the end of November 2009. There are no more than three people, excluding security staff, employed in each RCC, according to parliamentary answers.

The estimated costs to date of the project in each region was set out by Fire Minister Shahid Malik in a parliamentary answer. These costs do not include those relating to London’s new “regional” control.

REGION	TOTAL BY REGION (£)
South West	13,300,000
South East	9,300,000
East of England	6,400,000
West Midlands	9,700,000
East Midlands	11,600,000
Yorkshire & Humber	5,200,000
North West	7,400,000
North East	10,300,000
Total	73,200,000

At national level the costs of civil servants, temporary, agency and seconded staff working on the project are also soaring



South West control staff Kelly Vincent, Helen Dickinson, Val Hampshire and Rosie Tully (front) who displays a redundancy notice received in spring 2008 as a result of the project

and had reached £32.7 million by the end of November 2009. These costs are estimated to rise to £55.1 million by the end of 2013.

The following costs were also given in a table in a recent parliamentary answer.

	COSTS TO NOV 2009 £ MILLION	DEC 2009 TO FY 2013 £ MILLION	TOTAL £ MILLION
Civil servant/ agency/temporary	24.2	14.3	38.5
Secondment	7	3.3	10.3
Travel and subsistence	1.5	4.8	6.3
Total	32.7	22.4	55.1

In addition, consultants’ fees to the end of October 2009 stand at £43 million. These are expected to rise to just under £50 million by the end of 2012.

The costs alone show that at least £148 million has already been spent on largely empty RCC buildings, civil servants and consultants: one and a half times the original overall estimate of the cost of the entire project.

Sharon Riley, FBU Executive Committee member for control, said: “When we look at these figures alone it is clear that something has gone badly wrong from the very beginning. This money would have been far better spent on supplying what fire services actually need and want in their controls and for use at incidents.

“The fact is that cash-strapped fire services are now seeing where the money has been wasted – civil servants, largely empty buildings and consultants’ fees. Kit that frontline fire crews actually need for use, in floods for example, is scarce on the ground, and now we know why.

“The FBU will put evidence to the inquiry. We’re confident that others who are also sceptical will do likewise.”

We need more firefighters, not less

PETER MARSHALL, NATIONAL SECRETARY, UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA

On Saturday 7 February last year 173 people died and over 500 were injured as Australia's worst bush fires swept through the State of Victoria. It has become known as Black Saturday.

In mid-September last year, with the start of the bushfire season just 43 days away, more than 1,000 Metropolitan Fire Brigade and Country Fire Authority firefighters marched through Melbourne's streets demanding action to fix Victoria's under-resourced fire services.

Calling for "more firefighters, not less", they demanded the state government immediately act to boost CFA firefighter resources - and the MFB to stop its attempts to change shift and other firefighter work

arrangements that protect the public.

Earlier, in April, an independent board of reference ruled that 24 CFA stations should be upgraded. That ruling covers the state's growth centres which include outer suburban Melbourne and regional towns and localities.

By September, despite the fire season being just six weeks away, nothing had been done to employ the required number of firefighters and allocate additional resources to these locations. Instead we had the blame game.

So we did what you do and marched to the Parliament in Melbourne to protest against state government and CFA inaction since the Black Saturday bushfire tragedy.

Our message was simple - the government has not done one thing, the government has blamed the CFA, the CFA blames the government.

While that little game went on, 24 communities have less than a 50 per cent chance of getting a fire appliance if they need one. State Premier John Brumby had by then named Victoria's 52 danger hot spots for the coming fire season.

The fire stations that need extra firefighters now cover 34 of these 52 hot spots. We know like you do that less firefighters equals communities at risk.

We don't want that and we will campaign very, very hard to make sure it doesn't happen. The branch's Firecrisis campaign



website (<http://firecrisis.com>) was also launched at the rally.

We also had an international first with a recorded video message from your general secretary Matt Wrack broadcast at our rally. He confirmed those who run fire services, from politicians to the senior officers, are never that original in their attacks or lack of action, no matter which continent they are based.

And from Australia we watch what is happening in the UK. We're appalled at the ongoing attacks and, in particular, plans for regionalised fire controls.

Attempts to cut frontline resources leave us astonished. It's never a good time to sacrifice community safety for the sake of budget savings.

Shift systems and crewing levels go to the heart of firefighter and community safety. It is short-sighted to go for change or cuts without thinking through all the effects.

In Australia we don't need to know all of the details of what your Government is trying to force through with their regional emergency control agenda. They are trying to fragment the service.

The fire service thrives on professionalism and teamwork. To attack your emergency controls in this way will do great damage and that is obvious to anyone who is or has ever been operational anywhere in the world.

In this age of climate change and extreme weather events, short-sighted attempts to

reduce jobs and cut investment are absurd. We're aware of the major floods which have hit the UK in recent years and know you're still crying out for proper equipment, training and resources.

I'm sure you've heard many times recently why the recent floods which have hit you are the worst there has ever been and how unusual they are in nature and intensity. It's the excuses of those who want to justify why they've taken little or no action since last time.

It's all familiar to us in Australia. Your communities deserve better, so do ours.

Stay strong in your fights and campaigns. Know that our hearts and minds are with you. 





PENSIONS **MAKING** **THEM** **PAY**

Nick Ginty who retired in August 2006 after 32 years service took part in the campaign by writing to the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) using a proforma letter provided on the Union's website. "I didn't count on getting anything," he says, "but I got a substantial increase in the lump sum that had already been paid to me. This could not have been achieved without a Union with expertise that is always at the service of its members."

Fifty-seven-year-old Mr Ginty, who has two daughters and two grandsons, has been a lay union official in London, so "I know how hard it is to work things correctly to get the right results". The extra money was especially welcome this year as one of his daughters is getting married – to another firefighter – which means extra expense; and the credit crunch led to him being made redundant from the part-time job he took after retirement.

The credit crunch also meant that the lump sum he already had, which he invested carefully, was diminishing in value.

Jack Imrie of Chelmsford, Essex, retired a

A campaign by the FBU has improved lump-sum pension payments for hundreds of retired firefighters

few months later than Mr Ginty, in April 2007. He was 55 and had put in 29 years. He took a quarter of his pension as a lump sum. He says he felt at the time that the lump sum was not as big as it should have been, but did not realise there was anything that could be done about it until he heard that the FBU was looking at the issue. Then, like Mr Ginty, he wrote to CLG, using the FBU standard letter.

But he did not realise the Union had won its campaign until the extra money appeared in his bank account. "It was a lot of money and I had no idea it was coming. We're lucky to have a Union which can devote itself to welfare and health and safety issues," he says.

"The FBU is really good on welfare issues like this and can concentrate on the stuff that

affects individuals. The FBU will devote time and money to an issue like this. You don't pay a lot for your union, it's pretty good value. This was something that had to be sorted and they sorted it."

The problem arose after Mr Ginty, Mr Imrie and hundreds of other recently retired firefighters decided to exercise their right to take up to 25 per cent of their pension pot as a lump sum payment.

This is known as "commuting" part of the pension, and the amount of the lump sum is calculated by the Government Actuary's Department (GAD).

The amount you get when you commute your pension depends on the amount you might be predicted to receive if you had taken the money as pension. So it is based on a calculation of life expectancy and other factors, such as predicted movement of interest rates.

As life expectancy over the population as a whole increases, so commutation rates should increase.

When Mr Ginty and Mr Imrie retired, the GAD had not revised the tables from which



Nick Ginty: 'I didn't count on getting anything'

the lump sum for each individual is calculated since 1998. The reason for this was a 1989 decision by the Thatcher government that the GAD should have a different sort of relationship with other government departments, treating them as its clients. This meant that it would only revise the figures for firefighters when the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) asked it to.

New figures were worked out in 2006, but CLG only applied them to those who retired after 1 October 2007. The problem was, though, that life expectancy had been steadily rising. The Union made the case that taking it back to October 2007, when it was the first revision since 1998, was not radical enough. CLG chose this date because the cost of bringing in people who had retired earlier was likely to be significant.

Police officers suffered from a very similar problem. The GAD did not update their commutation calculations either, because the Home Office did not ask it to. The Police Federation took the case to judicial review and in March 2009 Mrs Justice Cox found in favour of the Police Federation.

The figures, she said, must be backdated. The fact that it was expensive to do so was not the point: "Affordability and public sector implications are in my judgement irrelevant." The Police Federation got its backdating.

It pointed out that the figures were ready on 1 December 2006, and the judge agreed that the figures should be backdated until then. Retired police officers who commuted part of their pension, and retired between 1 December 2006 and 1 October 2007, started receiving additional sums of money to reflect the new figures.

The FBU, which had been watching the police case carefully, pointed out that the principle applied also to firefighters. While the Police Federation case was before the courts in August 2008 the FBU launched its Fairer Commutation Campaign and asked retired members to download a model grievance from the Union's website with which to raise the matter with CLG. More than 5,000 members did so. The campaign was launched following the announcement in May 2008 of new and improved "gender neutral" commutation factors. The union centrally raised the issue with CLG and the GAD.

But the FBU wanted an earlier date than the one awarded to the Police Federation. The FBU discovered that the GAD had written to CLG in August 2006 highlighting new factors in the calculation. This had been done 15 months before the 1 October 2007 retrospective application date which the CLG had proposed. So CLG was aware that the calculations had changed. On that basis, the FBU demanded that payments should be made to those who had retired at any time during that 15-month period. On that basis, August 2006 should be the cut-off and those retiring on or after then should be entitled to an addition to the lump sum. They are also entitled to interest on the

money since they should have had it when they first retired.

The date eventually decided upon was 22 August 2006, since that was the actual date on which the GAD had written to the CLG. For Nick Ginty, it could not be better – he retired exactly a week after that. But other members will have missed out, having retired a short while before 22 August 2006. The FBU is now taking legal advice on whether it can claim backdating to 2001.

In a circular, CLG told fire authorities: "The additional amounts must be paid to members as soon as can be arranged. The costs will be reimbursed to authorities by CLG. Interest must be paid on all additional amounts since they are being made more than three months after the entitlement arose." It added that if any affected firefighters have died, the money will be paid to their estate.

And that is why firefighters like Nick Ginty and Jack Imrie, who retired between 22 August 2006 and 1 October 2007 and commuted part of their pension, are seeing additional sums of money arrive in their bank accounts to reflect new actuarial calculations.

"This is a real and substantial achievement which will make a difference to the lives of many members" says Sean Starbuck, the national official who deals with pensions. "The FBU does not stop looking after firefighters just because they have retired."



Jack Imrie: 'The FBU sorted it'

ILLUSTRATION: PETER TILL

'This is a real achievement. The FBU does not stop looking after firefighters just because they have retired'





DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS

Labour, the Lib Dems and the Tories are all making clear they will cut public spending if they are elected to lead the UK Government in what is set to be a general election on 6 May. The Tories are in pole position at this stage, so what would be in store if they were elected?

Let's remember we have a global crisis created by the unquenched greed of top bankers chasing their bonuses. They're still fighting to keep their bonus culture, £2 billion at the Royal Bank of Scotland alone.

The banks and bankers don't want to pay for their mess. So they have changed the banking crisis into a public sector spending crisis.

Think hospitals, schools, care services, transport, police, the fire service. Every other public service will be in the firing line, and there will be frontline cuts – forget the spin and rhetoric.

The Tories say they are “honest and open” about the fact they will make massive cuts in public spending. They are just a little coy in public about exactly what will get cut.

Tory-leaning think tank Reform is less shy, calling for the axe to fall on one million public sector jobs.

They argue that “the public deficit cannot be reduced sufficiently without tackling the front line”.

The Tory party itself is open in its demand for a public sector pay freeze, an old Tory solution but with added bite. And the party will start looking at public sector pensions – and that means yours.

There are also nods, winks and hints of a clampdown on time off for trade union duties. These are the local reps who help you with any problems at work.

There are bigger hints of a “lighter touch” health and safety regime. It's not great now, but what there is will be under increased pressure.



“They would attack us in terms of jobs and services, as well as

attacking our rights as a way of

restricting our ability to defend ourselves”

A Conservative government could devastate the fire service and launch a blistering attack on the Fire Brigades Union and its members, believes FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack. Commenting after Stewart Jackson, the Tory shadow minister for communities and local government, told fire service managers that cuts were inevitable, the union’s general secretary warned: “They would attack us in terms of jobs and services, as well as attacking our rights as a way of restricting our ability to defend ourselves – that’s the agenda we face.”

Trade union hackles were raised after Conservative leader David Cameron dismissed health and safety fears in a speech to the Policy Exchange in December.

Vowing to reform the UK’s “over-the-top” health and safety culture, Cameron said: “It would be impossible for firemen to tackle fires without a degree of risk, which is why employers should be required to be clear about the attendant risks of the job so when people sign up they know precisely what the work entails.”

Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC, immediately accused Cameron of promoting “half-truths and myths”. He urged the Conservative leader not to undermine the cross-party consensus on health and safety legislation.

“Cameron’s comments are unacceptable,” said Matt Wrack. “Our members take risks as a matter of course, but those risks should be minimised by employers who should provide the training, resources, equipment and procedures to deal with the hazards we face at work.”

Stewart Jackson’s speech at the fire service’s Managing Strategic Performance conference in November is of concern. While acknowledging that fire remains one of the major threats to UK communities and tipping his hat to the “selfless commitment of firemen and women”, Jackson managed to undermine himself even before he finished his speech.

He said: “I want to talk about a critical area where further progress will be the focus of a future Conservative Government: namely efficiency. We are all aware of the huge debt crisis we currently face in Britain.

“We need a credible plan to get the £175 billion annual deficit under control and this means taking tough choices in public spending.

“It is absolutely clear that public services across the board will have to do more with less.” This is a not-very-well-disguised threat to cut investment.

“Our concern is that we’ve already had significant cuts to front-line emergency fire and rescue services over a number of years,” said Matt Wrack, “and that’s going to be exacerbated under a Tory government, which will increase the risk for members of the public and for firefighters.

“More cuts will mean fewer firefighters riding engines and fewer engines turning up to incidents, which means there’s a bigger risk.

“Not only does our own safety become compromised, but so does our ability to intervene and protect people’s lives and property. A poorer service all round is a very real fear.”

What will the cuts mean?

Jackson almost admitted as much when he said: “Everyone serving our communities must accept this reality because budgets will get tighter yet the demands and expectations made of them will continue to grow.”

So what will the cuts mean to the fire service in practice? Well, no-one seems to know.

The Conservatives say they will look at saving money by scrapping any non-operational regional control centres. But expect them



Tory-leaning think tank Reform has called for the axe to fall on one million public sector jobs. They say: ‘The public deficit cannot be reduced sufficiently without tackling the frontline.’



to face heavy lobbying from civil servants and others with claims that too much has been spent already to scrap FireControl.

They will get rid of fire service regional management boards, encouraging fire and rescue authorities to “cluster in operationally optimal groupings”. Whatever that means.

The FBU argues that cuts are not necessary but, if they are to be made, then frontline services should be the last to be considered. This is where Labour has shot itself in the foot.

Since 1997, fire brigades have witnessed a 40 per cent increase in senior managers and corporate personnel at the same time as a 3.5 per cent decrease in the number of wholetime firefighters. There remains a chronic shortage of firefighters working retained duty.

Jackson admitted he was worried by the FBU’s strength and reaction of members to attacks. “With the prospect of fire strikes by union barons,” Jackson warned, “urgent action is needed to put proper contingency plans in place because as things stand, the country is woefully under-prepared.”

FBU officials recognise the coded reference to Operation Fireguard, a privatised strike-breaking operation which has seen the Conservative-controlled London fire authority sign a deal worth £12m over seven years to provide fire cover during possible industrial action.

But what is of more concern to the union – and to the wider community – is Jackson’s statement: “All fire services – no matter their size, structural make-up or location – must aspire to give, and deliver value for taxpayers’ money.” In the world of political smoke and mirrors and spin, that usually means cuts by another name.

Tory shadow fire minister Stewart Jackson: ‘We need a credible plan to get the £175 billion annual deficit under control and this means taking tough choices in public spending. It is absolutely clear that public services will have more to do with less.’

“It is absolutely clear that public services across the board will have to do more with less”



A firefighter stands thigh deep in flood water. Keswick, Lake District

In mid-November, huge downpours deluged Cumbria, flooding 2,000 homes in Workington and Cockermouth. A month's worth of rain poured down hillsides and into swollen rivers over 24 hours, unleashing floods of near Biblical proportions. Fire crews were seen to be at the heart of the rescue operation, working alongside other emergency services and the military to help save lives.

News of the Cumbrian floods dominated national news for days, as people were rescued from homes, rooftops and stranded cars. A bridge collapsed in Workington, tragically claiming the life of police officer Bill Barker, who was swept into surging waters.

Fire crews won praise for their role in the flood rescue. But *Firefighter* has learned the ability of key crews to do their job was hampered by lack of available resources and flawed planning. These instances, and those

from other flood-hit areas, provide clear evidence that the lessons of the 2007 summer floods have not been learned.

Shortage

This provides further ammunition for the union's campaign to give the Fire and Rescue Services a statutory duty to deal with future flooding in England. This was a key recommendation of the Pitt Review into lessons of the 2007 floods, and on which the government has failed to act.

"Fire crews will always do the best they can with the equipment, training and resources available to them," said General Secretary Matt Wrack. "But why are we still waiting two and a half years after the major floods of 2007 and 18 months after the Pitt Review identified the problems and the solutions?"

In Cumbria there were only 64 sets of SWR PPE. There were reports of a shortage of food

and drinking water during long arduous shifts with crews going hungry and in danger of dehydrating. *Firefighter* has also had reports of crews coming out of water contaminated by sewage becoming ill.

In Cumbria, when the floods first broke, a Whitehaven crew, fully trained in Swift Water Rescue, couldn't carry out its duties. In the safety critical period when the floods first hit, there were no dry suits for them to wear: crews who had not been trained for water rescue had put on dry suits that were available and taken to the water – leaving the SWR-trained crew high and dry.

Ade Kevern, a firefighter based at Whitehaven and FBU brigade health and safety rep in Cumbria, explains: "The crew trained to carry out SWR was mobilised to pick up dry suits and SWR equipment when the floods first kicked off. But there was nothing for them to wear. During those first



Why are we still waiting for the kit?

The Pitt Review said the fire service should have a statutory duty and resources to respond to floods

two safety critical days that station couldn't carry out its rescue provision in water because it didn't have any kit. The station does not have its own stand alone supply of kit due to funding issues.

"One station's SWR crew was underutilised and another one wasn't used at all in those critical early days because of lack of equipment. Lessons from the summer floods in 2007 don't seem to have been learned at all." As Whitehaven was the third pump available to Workington and the sixth pump to Cockermouth, it should have been well placed to play a vital role in the early stages of the rescue operation. But lack of enough dry suits and other vital equipment made that impossible.

Since the floods, Ade Kevern has been collating "quite eye-opening" information from other FBU members throughout the county, passing it on to FBU headquar-

ters. "The union in Cumbria has got very grave concerns about the lack of availability of equipment," he says. "We had crews working over extended periods to the point of exhaustion, despite the fact that members throughout the county who were off duty contacted the service and were keen to assist, but no recall of duty was in place or utilised. Crews using equipment over an extended period should have been relieved by others who had the commensurate skills. Off duty SWR Instructors should have been recalled to duty in order that their skills were utilised at the scene, but it didn't happen."

Critical

There's more. "We've got 700 firefighters in Cumbria – 200 wholetime, based at five stations and 500 RDS at 33 retained stations. There were people available for recall duty who were never utilised – there just didn't

seem to be a system in place. The Cumbria FBU H&S team have been trying to get better provision of equipment for the past two years – RDS members do not have satisfactory equipment to carry out the work they've been doing. Our RDS members were at the forefront throughout the risk critical stages. Our RDS members deserve adequate PPE to keep them dry, to protect them from hyperthermia and to reduce the risk of water-borne contamination.

"Our HVP crews are not provided with suitable PPE, so they are wet from the moment they drop the pumps into the water until they finish their tasks."

Other emergency service workers in Cumbria reported seeing an FRS boat with no engine. One said: "I saw the boat and thought: why are they having to paddle? Then I spotted they had no engine."

"A colleague in another area saw another

GETTY



November 2009 – Firefighters and RNLI personnel rescue an elderly lady from her flooded home in Cockermouth



Submerged cars on Cockermouth Main Street after River Derwent burst its banks



FRS boat with an engine, but with such little power it was really struggling in the conditions we were working in. It was obvious what little equipment they had just was not up to the job.”

And it's not as if Cumbria is a stranger to flooding – there were massive floods in January 2005.

John McGhee, national officer for health and safety, thinks concerns flagged up by members raise important issues of command and control. “Command and control at any incident is vital for safety. Our managers need more training and more support to carry out their role.

“Poor command and control can lead to accidents and in some instances deaths. The fire service not only needs to fund and train for water rescues but it needs also to stop cutting the number of officers available to take command of serious incidents.”

Two and a half years on from the 2007

floods, there are still instances of untrained fire crews wading into water in kit designed to protect them from flames.

The Pitt Review – *Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods* – landed on ministers’ desks 18 months ago. The Flood and Water Management Bill flagged up in the Queen’s Speech in mid-November could have been used to give the FRS the statutory duty Pitt recommended. The failure to do so was a missed opportunity, according to FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack.

“The current legal position could allow individual services to refuse to plan, train or respond to major floods,” he points out. “That is simply ridiculous and there are continuing shortages of basic equipment, leaving fire crews going into water with kit designed to protect them in fires but not in flood water.”

The stakes are high as public spending is slashed in the wake of the bank bailout. “We hear a lot about protecting front line services,”

he said, “but we are not seeing any evidence of that in the Fire and Rescue Service. If more cuts go ahead there will be fewer and fewer fire crews able to respond to all the emergen-

FIREFIGHTERS AND WATER TRAINING

LEVEL 1 Training to work near water, but keeping feet dry. Not trained for flowing water. Water should not go above fire booted calf level.

LEVEL 2 Trained to use inflatable rescue craft – five metre long booms – on unstable surfaces or ice.

LEVEL 3 Swift Water Rescue personnel – fully equipped with life jackets, dry suits, trained to swim out to casualties from boats.



The remains of Northside Bridge (Workington, Cumbria) where PC Bill Barker lost his life

Regardless of whether or not FRSs have a statutory duty to plan and deal with flooding, the fight for adequate resources remains a constant.

Experience in Scotland shows that the existence of a statutory duty does not, in itself, address the problem of resources. As the Pitt Review pointed out, it's also about the additional funding needed to go with the new responsibility.

Recent flooding in Moray, Aberdeenshire and Angus highlighted the issue of firefighters once again taking risks and entering water without the proper training, inoculations or welfare arrangements.

Roddy Robertson, Executive Council member for Scotland, said: "It is only a matter of time before we pay the ultimate price, as happened in Greater Manchester a number of years ago when we lost a firefighter who was not fully trained and who had entered water to attempt a rescue. This is a foreseeable occurrence and not an accident. If the service wants firefighters to carry out water rescue then train them and stop playing Russian roulette with their lives."

Serious

The concern was echoed by John Duffy, FBU Scotland Regional secretary: "This was the second time in a matter of weeks that the service dealt with serious flooding. Yet we continue to see firefighters trying their best with little training, without the proper tools and wearing completely the wrong protective equipment. It does beg the question of how serious some managers are about our safety."

The Tomkins Report – an independent

SOUNDS FAMILIAR?

Pitt recommends, warns – and details perils of inadequate kit.

"The Government should urgently put into place a fully funded ministerial capability for flood rescue, with Fire and Rescue Authorities playing a leading role, underpinned as necessary by a statutory duty".

Ignored by government

"In the event of another wide-area flooding, those responding would still not necessarily have the right resources or training to respond safely"

An accurate prediction. It didn't take long.

"We have heard first hand how Fire and Rescue personnel deployed in normal firefighting Personal Protective Equipment rapidly became wet, cold and risked contamination by flood water".

Memo to the fire minister – it's still happening

ment and training; firefighters were reportedly clinging to lamp posts to stop themselves being swept away by fast flowing flood water.

Emergency services were stretched beyond their capabilities, responding to situations that had not been prepared for and without sufficient resources to manage. Some criticism in the post incident reviews focused mainly on lack of pre-planning.

'Crews are in water in kit that protects them in fires'

cies we have to deal with, including flooding."

Not all UK government is so blinkered. In Scotland, where responsibility for the fire service is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, FRSs now have a statutory duty to deal with widespread flooding. According to Roddy Robertson, FBU executive member for Scotland, this move, passed by the Scottish Parliament and backed by both the Union and fire chiefs, shows there was a political will to plan for and deal with the threat of flooding.

There was no deluge in Scotland to rival Cumbria. But FBU officials had already spoken out about lack of Protective Personal Equipment and the need for more flood training for Scottish fire crews before the floods hit England.

So it came as little surprise that when floods arrived in Scotland in early November the all too familiar images of firefighters wading waist-deep in water in kit for fighting fires once again filled Scottish TV screens.

review into water rescue capacity in Scotland, commissioned by Fergus Ewing, Minister for Community Safety, has just reported. Its publication was welcomed by the FBU in Scotland which said it was considering its response.

Every flood highlights the same basic problems. In Northumberland, the floods of 2008 were more severe than those of 2009. In 2008 fire crews tried to use leisure boats on Morpeth boating lake for water rescue – but by the time they got there, the boats had already sunk.

It sounds desperate, but Northumberland fire service had no boats of its own at that time. Over a year after the major flooding of 2007 they had to rely on Tyne and Wear to supply a boat to deal with flooding in Northumberland.

Firefighter was told of reports indicating a significant breakdown in command and control in Northumberland during the incident. And such was the lack of equip-

This year, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service has acquired a high volume pumping appliance, a small boat and one fully trained swift water rescue team, with a further two teams being trained in 2010. North East regional secretary Pete Wilcox says there has been some progress, but there is no room for complacency.

"Inevitably, we need to do more to ensure fire crews have the correct equipment, in sufficient quantities, and are trained to a level that assures their own safety and that of local communities", he said.

Given global warming and climate change, the deluge which hit Cumbria could be seen as yet another wake up call for what's to come for many other areas of the UK. A statutory duty for FRS to plan for and deal with flooding looks way overdue. As does the need to ensure all firefighters are properly trained and equipped to carry out their duties, whether tackling fires or floods.

GETTY



GETTY IMAGES

BUNCEFIELD

Final report of Process Safety Leadership Group into Buncefield explosion in December 2005 published. Herts FBU secretary Tony Smith says: "Firefighters face great risk attending incidents like Buncefield. Our funding is constantly cut. How can we guarantee that we will be so successful in dealing with these incidents in the future when there will be less firefighters with less training, equipment and support?"

ANNA GOWTHORPE/PA PHOTOS



CARL COURT/PA PHOTOS

CAMBERWELL FIRE

Six people including a mother and her three-week-old daughter die in a fire at Lakeland House in Camberwell, south London, in July. FBU is only fire service body to call for a public inquiry. Union rebuts tabloid claims about firefighters at the scene.

2009

A YEAR IN PICTURES

‘Our funding is constantly cut. How can we guarantee that we will be so successful in dealing with these incidents in the future when there will be less firefighters with less training, equipment and support?’

RALLY

FBU members from all over the UK demonstrate in Barnsley in September against South Yorkshire Fire Authority's threat to sack hundreds of firefighters in a bid to impose new shift patterns. "Terminating contracts to impose change would set a dangerous precedent that could affect members throughout the UK," says Yorkshire and Humberside FBU regional secretary Ian Murray.



PA/GETTY

2009

A YEAR IN PICTURES



GARETH FULLER/PA PHOTOS



MARTIN JENKINSON

FIREWORK FACTORY

FBU welcomes December sentencing of Martin and Nathan Winter who were found guilty of the manslaughter of firefighters Geoff Wicker and Brian Wembridge in an explosion at Festival Fireworks near Lewes, East Sussex in December 2006. Martin Winter got seven years and his son Nathan five years for "gross negligence".

FLOODING

Firefighters rescue people from rising flood waters in the Lake District in November. Yet again severe weather conditions cause floods across the UK. Commenting on the inquiry into the FireControl project, Sharon Riley, FBU Executive Committee member for control, says: "Cash-strapped fire services are now seeing where the money has been wasted. Kit that frontline fire crews actually need for use, in floods for example, is scarce on the ground, and now we know why."



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES



WALKOUT

South Yorkshire FBU members walk out on strike in October against their fire authority's threat to sack hundreds of firefighters in a bid to impose new shift patterns. The authority wants 12-hour day and night shifts instead of the nine-hour days and 15-hour nights. Local firefighter Mark Wild says: "I've got a young family and it means there will be a good two and a half to three days when I can't see them. I'll be out to work before they wake up and I'll be back home after they've gone to bed."

FUNERAL

Firefighters carry the coffin of Ewan Williamson, who died in a pub fire, through Edinburgh. Roddy Robertson, FBU Scotland Executive Council member, says: "Ewan's death in the line of duty has had a profound impact on his colleagues in Lothian and Borders fire service. It has also been deeply felt by his colleagues in fire brigades across the UK."



DAVID CHESKIN/PA PHOTOS

WHAT'S MY ROLE?

Ian McGill, FBU North West Region coordinator for health and safety and IRMPs

Ian McGill, a firefighter for 22 years and the FBU's health and safety co-ordinator for the North West Region, has two fights on his hands.

As well as turning out to help fight fires he also has the job of upholding the union's commitment to protecting the public. Key to that is guarding against the erosion of public safety by cuts to the service in the guise of integrated risk management plans (IRMPs).

Ian, who is stationed at Fulwood in Preston, has been the Union's regional co-ordinator for health and safety and IRMPs in the North West for three years. The region covers around 200 fire stations in Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Merseyside and the Isle of Man. He is also brigade co-ordinator for Lancashire, a position he has held for six years.

Ian has passed TUC stage 1 and stage 2 health and safety courses and has the TUC diploma in occupational health and safety. He is a technical member of the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.

Health and safety legislation makes fire service managers responsible for carrying out a risk assessment of the situation they face before deciding the safest way to tackle a fire.

"It is not a case of writing down a risk assessment before dealing with an incident," Ian says, "but of carrying out what we call dynamic management of risk which entails gathering information and assessing the dangers a fire might pose to firefighters, then choosing a safe system of work which is based on the written generic risk assessments which the fire and rescue service should have in place for all foreseeable risks. This requires being trained to a high standard."

Ian stresses that where a fire poses a danger to life then it is acceptable for firefighters to take a higher degree of risk but



that this has to be done in a highly calculated manner. The ability to do this can only be achieved through high quality training and a sound underpinning knowledge of the risks involved.

This vital point is often missed by the media when they portray the carrying out of a risk assessment at fire scenes as a bureaucratic process. In fact it is the means of ensuring a proper approach to tackling the fire.

In the past the standard of training a firefighter received was set nationally. But since the introduction of integrated risk management plans individual brigades decide what type of training is required in their own area.

The dangers resulting from a move away from nationally set standards were highlighted in a Labour Research Department report carried out on behalf of the Union in November 2008. It examined the recent rise in firefighter deaths and highlighted a number of issues.

The report drew attention to spot checks carried out in 2006 for the Audit Commission that concluded that some integrated risk management plans and particular risk assessments were inadequate



Ian McGill talks to watch manger Steve Mountain



Ian McGill: 'The fire service has become driven by targets'

PICTURES: MARTIN JENKINSON

authorities, are forcing senior managers to consider cost-cutting measures such as the different levels of cover being given to areas at different points in the day.

"This is putting pressure on our members to be able to continue to give the public the protection they deserve as well as potentially compromising firefighter safety," he says. "We have to ensure that IRMPs aren't used as an excuse for cuts."

Although some brigades now employ community fire safety practitioners to carry out fire prevention education work, operational firefighters are still used to meet fire safety targets by giving fire safety advice and installing equipment.

"When added to the reduction in funding, the extra duties are a matter of concern and are putting pressure on the front line work of tackling fires," says Ian. He believes that one of the biggest challenges the Union faces is the financial pressure on the service caused by reductions in central government grants.

He says there is already evidence of the adverse effects of station closures and of changes in coverage which in some areas have brought about a lengthening of the time between the arrival of the first fire appliance at a location and the arrival of a second.

He explains: "Many standard operating procedures require the attendance of two appliances at the scene of a fire before they can be carried out – such as the use of certain breathing apparatus and tactical ventilation procedures. This delay in being able to take action can mean that the fire has grown in intensity before safe systems of work can be implemented."

Listening to Ian explain the dangers of what can only be described as "cuts by stealth", it is easy to understand why the Union is so vigilant in this field. Who else can the public rely on to tell it as it is?

and that some were so bad as to have compromised firefighter safety.

These frightening facts only came to light when researchers made Freedom of Information Act requests for them. This level of secrecy about the startling inadequacy of some integrated risk management plans makes it is easy to understand Ian's fears on the dangers of inadequate training.

Since then the government has set up a Chief Fire Advisors Unit to re-write the national guidance which includes national generic risk assessments, technical bulletins for breathing apparatus procedures and other health and safety guidance. Over the last 12 months Ian and other members of the FBU national health and safety committee have been heavily involved in contributing to this work.

Ian draws attention to the fact that following the 2004 Fire Services Act firefighters have to carry out far more community fire safety duties involving visiting homes, schools and other establishments in their area with annual targets set for the number of visits to be made.

"The fire service has become driven by targets and we must guard against firefighters being overloaded with community safety

work and that operational training doesn't suffer as a consequence," he says. "It's about getting the balance right. We would also like to see an increase in the time allotted for training for our retained firefighters, who get as little as two hours a week."

Ian says that these extra duties, together with the financial pressures faced by fire



Observing a training session

On the rise

As many as 750,000 people in the UK may have diabetes without knowing it

DIABETES

Around 2.3 million people in the UK have diabetes. The last 30 years have seen a threefold increase in the number of cases of childhood diabetes. The rising numbers of children and teenagers with type 2 diabetes, usually only seen in older people, is especially worrying and reflects obesity levels in young people.

The facts

Diabetes is a long-term condition that affects the body's ability to process sugar, known scientifically as glucose. It can have serious health consequences. But, with careful management, people with diabetes can lead full, healthy and active lives.

In people with diabetes, the level of glucose in the blood is too high. This is because a hormone called insulin is either absent from the body or not working properly.

Glucose is contained in starchy foods such as pasta, rice, bread and potatoes, and in fruit and sweet foods.

When we eat food containing glucose, the hormone insulin helps to move it from

SYMPTOMS OF DIABETES

The symptoms of both type 1 and type 2 diabetes include:

- ◆ Increased thirst and drinking a lot of fluids
- ◆ Passing a lot of urine
- ◆ Being tired for no reason
- ◆ Weight loss
- ◆ Genital itching or repeated bouts of thrush
- ◆ Slow healing of wounds
- ◆ Blurred vision.

our blood to the cells where it is needed. But when the body does not make enough insulin, or the body's insulin does not work properly, that process is interrupted and glucose builds up in the blood: this is diabetes.

People with diabetes need to understand how food and physical activity affects their blood glucose level. They may need to regulate their own blood glucose and often need to take medication to make sure their blood glucose does not get too high.

Types of diabetes

There are two main types of diabetes.

In **type 1** diabetes the body cannot

produce any insulin. Type 1 usually occurs before someone reaches 40 and accounts for about 10 per cent of cases. It is the most common form of childhood diabetes.

In **type 2** diabetes the body does not make enough insulin or builds up a resistance to insulin so that it does not work effectively.

It is the most common form of diabetes (90 per cent of all cases), and is frequently linked with being overweight. One in 10 people in the UK will eventually develop type 2 diabetes.

Both forms of diabetes are lifelong conditions that have serious potential consequences. Left untreated, diabetes can lead to heart disease, stroke, nerve damage and blindness.

If treated effectively, people with diabetes can lead lives as healthy and active as those without the condition. World-class athletes who have diabetes include Sir Steve Redgrave.

Type 1 diabetes symptoms typically develop over a few weeks and quickly become very obvious.

Type 2 symptoms can develop more slowly over a period of months. Some people with type 2 diabetes have only very mild symptoms and some may have none at all.

Treatment for diabetes

The aim of any diabetes treatment is to keep blood sugar levels as normal as possible.

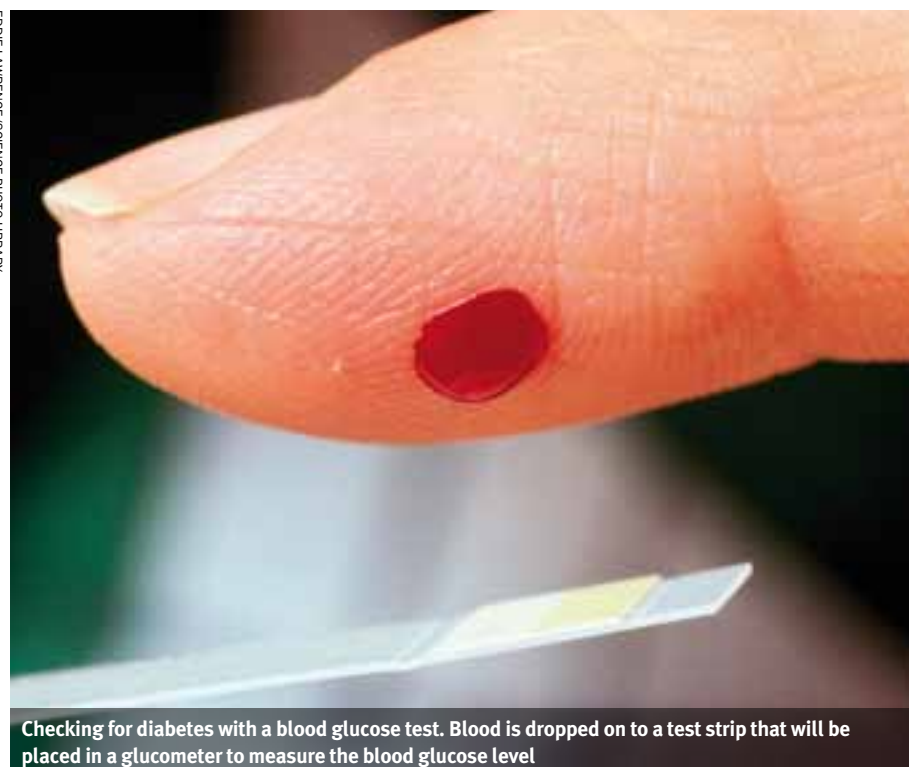
Because people with type 1 diabetes cannot produce any insulin, they must put insulin into their bodies regularly for the rest of their lives.

The most common way to do this is with daily insulin injections or an insulin pump, which is a device about the size of a pack of cards, which sends insulin into the body through a thin tube.

In type 2 diabetes, changing to a healthier diet and lifestyle often helps to control the condition a great deal. But most people with type 2 diabetes eventually need to take tablets and some need insulin injections.

People with diabetes may also take medication to reduce the risk of health complications. For example, many take pills to reduce blood pressure, some take statins to reduce their cholesterol or low doses of aspirin to help prevent stroke.

→ www.diabetes.org.uk/



Checking for diabetes with a blood glucose test. Blood is dropped on to a test strip that will be placed in a glucometer to measure the blood glucose level

Defective equipment

Q If equipment not provided by an employer causes an injury because it is defective or inappropriate, is the employer responsible for that injury?

A The law is confusing on this point as a result of a recent House of Lords ruling.

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER) 1998 protect employees using equipment for work purposes. That means that employers are liable for injuries caused to workers by work equipment (provided the injury was reasonably foreseeable), whether or not the equipment was at the employee's usual place of work.

The Law Lords however, in the case of Smith v Northamptonshire County Council decided that, in certain circumstances, an employee working away from the workplace need not have the same health and safety protection as someone based on site.

Because the work equipment – a ramp at a service user's home – had not been provided by the local authority and was not being used with the council's "consent and endorsement" (even though the council knew the employee was using it, had inspected it and had the power to tell her not to use it), the Lords said the council was not responsible for the state of the ramp.

So the position now appears to be – though is likely to be the issue of future legal wrangling – that work equipment totally outside the control of the employer, for instance, equipment at a client's premises that the employer knows nothing about, is excluded from PUWER.

What remains unclear is the position on items that employers are aware of but have not provided, but whose use they can influence.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

I injured my back

Q I'm a retained firefighter. I injured my back in my regular job lifting heavy boxes. I had complained to my employer about having to do this and I asked for some training and also for boxes to be made less heavy. I have now been off sick and in pain for several months and my GP is doubtful that I can return to work. Can I get compensation?

A Back injuries are one of the most common causes of workplace injury. Employers lose millions of pounds in lost working days every year as a result. And they also have to pay out millions in compensation to injured workers.

Yet such injuries are preventable. If your employer had listened to you, given you training and taken steps to reduce the loads you were expected to lift, or provided equipment to assist you, then you would probably still be working now.

It sounds as though your employer is in breach of the Manual Handling regulations and has also failed in their duty under health and safety law to carry out a proper risk assessment of your job.

You will probably have a strong case for pursuing compensation as a result. Expert medical reports will have to be obtained and the amount of compensation you will receive will depend on such things as whether you had any pre-existing back condition before your injury.

Speak to your FBU rep about how the Union's legal service may be able to help you, even though you were injured in your regular employment.

Of course no amount of compensation can restore your health and ability to do your job. But it will reflect such things as your loss of earnings and pension both now and in the future.

→ The advice published here is not intended as legal advice on individual cases. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

Rep is pestering me

Q I'm a retained member. I had an accident at my regular place of work and was contacted soon afterwards by an insurance company representative who offered me £500 to settle my personal injury claim. He said it was a good offer for a minor injury. I asked for time to think about it but he keeps calling me. Should I accept?

A No. The insurance rep, who is presumably your employer's insurer, can have no idea whether your injury is minor and how much it is really "worth". The insurance company is just trying to stop you getting legal advice in order to save them and their employer money.

When someone is injured in an accident that is not their fault and for which someone else is probably liable then various

investigations need to take place before any value can be put on the claim. For example, how serious the injury is, how it was caused, whether it could have been prevented and how long the recovery process will be.

As your accident happened at work, issues such as whether your employer has breached any health and safety laws need to be looked at. Another issue is whether you had to take any time off work and whether you have lost income or incurred any out of pocket expenses – such as prescription fees or travel to a hospital or GP. All these things need to be factored in when working out whether an injured person has a valid claim for compensation and how much that claim should be for.

An insurance company offering what appears to be quick and easy money should be sent packing and you should get legal advice through the FBU.

'I wanted to understand what day to day life is like for Palestinians'

John Drake, FBU south west regional secretary, took a month's leave last September to live with other International Solidarity Movement activists alongside Palestinian families in the territories occupied by Israel

“I'd been part of a delegation to Palestine in 2004 and planned to go back again once I'd retired. But watching Israel's attacks on Gaza last December and January spurred me to go much sooner. I wanted to get a better understanding of what life is like for Palestinians day to day. I'd met International Solidarity Movement (ISM) volunteers five years before and knew I wanted to go back to the area and assist Palestinians directly in some way, however small, and then tell people what I'd seen when I got back home.

I flew to Jerusalem alone – you don't declare yourself as an ISM volunteer to the Israeli authorities, if you do the chances are you won't be allowed in. I said I was there to see the archaeological, religious and historical sites.

I met up with other ISM volunteers in Jerusalem and we crossed the apartheid wall – illegal under international law – and travelled to Ramallah just 20 minutes away, for two days' training. This included learning about the cultural differences we should adjust to and how to de-escalate volatile situations with the Israeli army, should they arise. There are dangers and volunteers tend to go in with their eyes open. The deaths of internationalists Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall got a lot of media coverage, but such deaths are rare. The outrages in Gaza made headlines around the world, but three Palestinians have been killed at Nilin in the past few months and we don't get to hear about that.

Incidents are less likely to happen or escalate when 'internationalists' are there and the ISM plays an important role in being there alongside the Palestinians, bearing witness and spreading awareness of what's actually happening. Through this, ISM volunteers can offer some sort of protection to people who face regular harassment and intimidation and everything ISM does is Palestinian-led.

The first place I went to was Susiya in the southern Hebron hills, giving protection to Palestinian sheep farmers while they grazed their sheep 100 metres away

from their tented camp – the Israelis won't allow them to build more permanent structures. Israeli soldiers would try to harass the shepherds off their own land, saying: 'You can't come on this land. It's a closed military zone.' The job of ISM volunteers in this situation is to buy them time – distracting the soldiers for long enough to allow the shepherds to graze their sheep and move away. You could ask to see the soldiers' credentials and challenge them why they were trying to move the shepherds on. I did this most mornings in my first week.

The Palestinians have so little, and things have got worse since the bombings last Christmas. The olive harvest is a huge part of the economy and many families rely on olives for a significant part of their income.

Resources are scarce. Israeli peace groups provide solar and wind power for tented communities and international volunteers make donations. The South West region of the FBU contributed to the trip and had previously made donations for a generator to provide power for extended families living under canvas. Facilities are very basic.

I moved up from the Hebron hills to Nablus in the north and spent three weeks there, documenting what

Incidents are less likely to happen or escalate when 'internationalists' are there and the ISM plays an important role in being there alongside the Palestinians, bearing witness and spreading awareness of what's actually happening



John and friends take a break during the olive harvest





JOHN DRAKE

John Drake, FBU South West region secretary spent a month in occupied Palestine. He was working with the International Solidarity Movement which is committed to resisting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land using nonviolent direct action.



Israeli forces use CS gas and other methods to deter demonstrations



Graffiti on the wall from a visit in 2004

I saw Israeli settlers who have moved into the area are seen as more of a threat than the military at times, because they do not have the discipline of the army. The state rarely prosecutes them. It's seen as tacit acceptance of what they do.

When soldiers arrest Palestinians there are techniques to use that can assist – such as getting around the person and making it difficult for the Israelis to take them away. The military use “sound bomb” grenades which make a very loud noise to distract people while they do what

It was said that Palestinians don't want a goods boycott, but everyone I talked to about it in the occupied territories – more than 300 people – said they did. They were glad British workers had voted for it.

they do. CS gas is also used and a new weapon is “skunk” – a foul-smelling liquid sprayed at demonstrations to deter people from going on them. Soldiers use rubber coated steel bullets at Bil'in where there are weekly demonstrations.

People in Palestine had heard about the TUC motion calling for a boycott, and I was proud our union played a role in it. During the debate, it was said that Palestinians don't want a goods boycott, but everyone I talked to about it in the occupied territories – more than 300 people – said they did. They were glad British workers had voted for it. It just goes to show that what's said at the TUC can have an impact thousands of miles away.

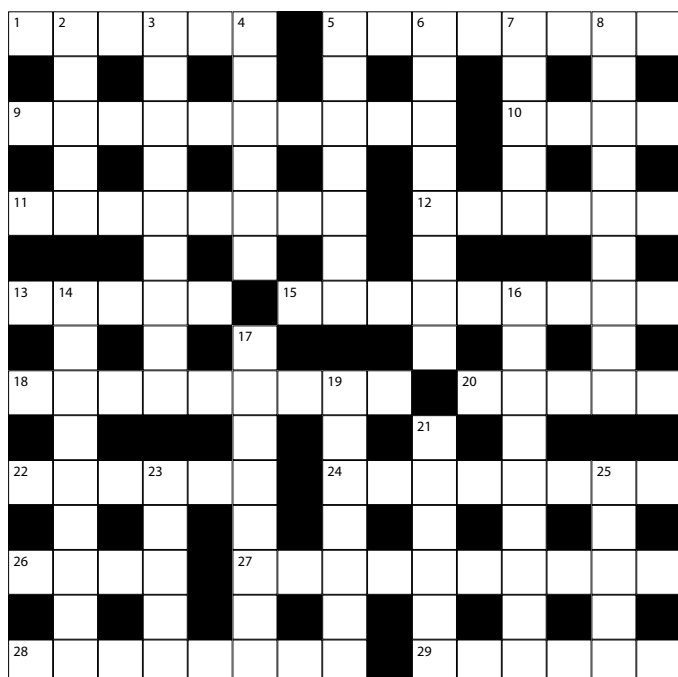
As an ISM volunteer, although you have certain privileges as an internationalist, you are mixing and living with Palestinians and seeing things first hand and getting a better insight into what families have to endure.

I am speaking at meetings to raise awareness of the deprivations and attacks they suffer. I was only there for a month, but it made a huge impact on me – witnessing peaceful non-violent resistance and tremendous courage.

If Palestinians can't come here and tell their own stories, it's up to those of us who have been out there to do so.



Quick Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Rots (6)
- 5 Of the home (8)
- 9 Intensification – provoked by bosses? (10)
- 10 Containers, of tea or ashes (4)
- 11 Anticipated (8)
- 12 Not at sea (6)
- 13 Yearned; had dull pain (5)
- 15 Making better; putting right (9)
- 18 Dance band of God is a DJ fame – atheist? (9)
- 20 Holding weapons (5)
- 22, 26 Ballot here over cuts (10)
- 24 Selecting (8)
- 26 See 22
- 27 One who gathers money for others (10)
- 28 Lets go (8)
- 29 England was, in the world-cup draw (6)

DOWN

- 2 Action against cuts here (5)
- 3 Astonishment (9)
- 4 A bit all over the place (6)
- 5 Diminish by degree (7)
- 6 Made representative (and told how to vote?) (8)
- 7, 16 Action here against shift changes and threat to sack 744 firefighters (5, 9)
- 8 Bliss, according to Orwell, but no excuse according to the law (9)
- 14 Agreement to stop fighting (9)
- 16 See 7
- 17 If your team doesn't get promoted outright, you hope to reach these (8)
- 19 Another helping (they all count!) (7)
- 21 Snakes; Indian beers (6)
- 23 Root vegetable – from Scandinavia? (5)
- 25 Female relative (5)



Solution to November / December 2009 crossword

Winner of the October 2009 quiz

David Allen of Londonderry

Answers to November / December 2009 quiz

1. a – Bite the head off a bat
2. b – Blur
3. a – 1975
4. b – Worthy Farm
5. d – Bob Geldof



ANNA GOWTHORPE/PA PHOTOS

Prize quiz

Win a £250 hotel gift voucher

1. In 2009 hit British film Slumdog Millionaire won how many Oscars?

- a. 8
- b. 7
- c. 11
- d. 6

2. The Chilcot Inquiry launched in 2009 is an independent inquiry into what?

- a. The Iraq war
- b. The Lisbon Treaty
- c. Bankers' bonuses
- d. The war in Afghanistan



PROXIMO/PA/PA PHOTOS

3. What world famous sportsperson had a domestic blip in 2009 which involved crashing his car into a fire hydrant?

- a. Tiger Woods



JOHNNY GREEN/PA PHOTOS

- b. Cristiano Ronaldo
- c. 'Freddie' Flintoff
- d. Roger Federer

4. In what sporting event did the English beat Australia again in 2009 to regain a long disputed trophy?

- a. Rugby Six Nations
- b. The Ashes
- c. Tri Nations Cup
- d. Australian rules football

5. What group of public employees had their expenses exposed in 2009?

- a. Civil servants
- b. MPs
- c. Nurses
- d. Teachers

HOW TO ENTER

To win a gift voucher worth £250 to use in any of the MacDonald Hotels in the UK please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 28 February 2010 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (Jan/Feb 2010) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Covering the cost



CLG has come up with a great idea to cover some of the spiralling costs of FireControl. It has struck a deal with prime contractor EADS to get a share of the profits if FireControl technology is sold around the world.

It's so good of CLG to put the fire service forward for such an experiment and for them to reap some profits if it is successful. **Not that CLG has broadcast this new financial relationship to the fire service.**

They'd better not count the money yet, as there is a fatal flaw. If anyone looks at this Project's great success to date, will anyone touch it with a bargepole, apart from us guinea pigs?

Retain and retire



Norfolk too has been doing the money thing in the middle of austerity as well. It recently emerged (that means it was not made public at the time) that chief officer Richard Elliot had been given a 15 per cent pay rise early in 2009.

The usual reasons were given: desire for parity with local public sector fat cats and need to help retain top talent. The retention bit does not appear to have worked, according to Norfolk FBU brigade secretary Neil Day.

"There was a lot of anger over his pay rise," he told me. "We were told that was the only way to retain the best officers, but it seems that no sooner has he got that, then he is off." Mr Elliot has just announced he will retire in March.

I hope he's waited long enough to make sure the whopping 15 per cent pay rise counts for pension purposes. And that the councillors who approved it realised the impact on the pension.

My claws are crossed for him.

McGuirkieside goes to Texas



Merseyside fire service is in serious financial problems as Kieran Timmins, the head of finance keeps telling everyone. I tried to contact Kieran to find out in detail just how bad things are in McGuirkieside, where their

fire engines are off the run because they have no one to crew them.

Sadly he wasn't available. In Texas you see, paid for by the good taxpayers of Merseyside.

It was, I'm told, part of Gold Command training. But **why would a head of finance be doing Gold Command training anyway?**

There are no current vacancies in the upper uniformed echelons of Merseyside FRS.

There may be senior officer vacancies elsewhere. I'm told up to one in four chief officers is looking to retire.

Something I said?

JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



RFwhat day is it?



Radical, but the Warwickshire RFU turned up at a march against station closures in the county. Their banner demanded "stop this madness" and included Alcester station, top of the list as under threat of closure.

Except it isn't. Someone wake them up and tell them to pay attention. On second thoughts, don't bother.

No risk, no jobs



Off I went to a Hertfordshire careers fair, a few miles from the now-closed Bovingdon fire station and not far from the now-closed Radlett fire station. I was joined by teenage school leavers eager to find out about a career in the local fire service.

Herts FRS was listed to attend at stand 10, a prime spot next to the café. We

marched around the stalls (the usual mix of army, navy, police, RAF) but Herts FRS was nowhere to be found.

A search of every corner of both floors came up empty. No Herts FRS.

Still, **no need to recruit if you're planning up to £6 million worth of cuts** to your local fire service.

Even in a growing town area where thousands of high-rise flats and other new builds have sprung up in recent years. And Buncefield on the outskirts, M1, M25, A1, major rail routes and within a whisker of Luton Airport.

No risk, you see.

Zzzzzzz



Just having a cat power nap when I'm woken by the arrival of a photo of Brian Coleman, chair of London FEPA and chair of the employers' side of the National Joint Council. **Brian is the scourge of firefighters sleeping on stations at night**, even during a break in a long shift.

Photos can be deceiving. This one shows Brian sat behind his desk with his eyelids covering his eyes while he adopts a reclining position.

Is he sleeping! Other people count sheep, given Brian's penchant for taxis, he is probably counting the money the cabbies are earning from his expense claims.



✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Carl Latimer (l) Red Watch manager, Fossway station, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary **Brian Proctor**



Mark Feaver (l) Green Watch manager Wimbledon, receives his 25-year badge from station rep **Jon Lambe**



Graham Noakes (r) former Region 9 and Essex brigade secretary receives his 25-year badge from acting brigade chair **Keith Flynn** at Leigh station



Bob Neill (l) receives his 25-year badge from Suffolk brigade secretary **Steve Collins**



Alastair MacDougall (l) East Kilbride receives his 25-year badge from branch chairman **Derek Watt**



Charles Shearer (r) East Kilbride receives his 25-year badge from branch chairman **Derek Watt**



Jim Henderson (r) East Kilbride receives his 25-year badge from branch chairman **Derek Watt**



Derek Watt (r) East Kilbride receives his 25-year badge from branch delegate **Scott Lynn**



Alfie Glue (l) Chichester Station, West Sussex, receives his 25-year badge from **Rick Williams** education and ULF rep



Alan Boxall (centre right) receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary **Rich Williams** at Tamworth, Staffordshire, station. Looking on were (l to r) **Steve Daley**, **Wayne Puffet**, **Stuart Fane**, **Ben Dunkley**, **Dave Stevens** and **Tom Osborne**

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.