

FireFighter

Trade Union Magazine of the Year

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

March 2010

“
If the fire gets there,
RUN
”



**How reckless disregard
for safety law killed
two firefighters**

See p10



Defend our service



We need a strong and united union more than ever before

Reading *Firefighter* magazine this month, you will get a sense of the scale of the challenge we face to defend the fire and rescue service.

Public confidence and support for firefighters remains extremely high. This is the result of the service we provide. It is also recognition of the risks firefighters face in the line of duty. The FBU has consistently argued that firefighters are proud to do the job they

do, but we want adequate resources to serve our communities safely and effectively.

The floods

Major floods have highlighted these issues.

The public see the fantastic job done by members of the fire and rescue service – members of the FBU. After the 2007 floods, the government promised extra resources and equipment.

Yet nothing has been delivered. During the floods in Cumbria our members again raised concerns about

a shortage of equipment and PPE. The union put this recently to government ministers and our parliamentary group continues to challenge them at every opportunity.

We were promised £2m for additional resources for responding to floods. This is little enough, but the fear now is whether it will ever be delivered as a squeeze is put on public finances.

Over the past five years we have argued with employers and government that the FBU is by far the largest professional voice within the service and therefore must be heard. There is one

Contents

Features

10 MARLIE FARM

Why urgent action is needed to prevent further disasters

14 PAY CURBS AND 'CONSISTENT' CUTS

Firefighter examines Lib Dem policies for the fire and rescue service

16 TRAINING IS THEIR PRIORITY

FBU organises training in the UK for eight Palestinian firefighters

Regulars

4 NEWS

Cuts fightback: London, Merseyside, Essex and Norfolk
Back from Haiti

5 SOUNDING OFF

Planned changes to costs in legal cases will undermine the ability of unions to offer free legal services to members, says solicitor Tom Jones

7 NEWS FOCUS

Chief fire officer confirms union warning on flood rescue failings

8 VIEW FROM THE AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

Unions and climate change

18 HEALTH

Now's the time to break free from a cigarette habit

19 LEGAL BEAGLE

Accidents at work

20 DAY OFF

Meet pagan drummer Stuart de Fraine Ford

22 PUZZLE PAGE

Your chance to win a lemon tree plant in our global-themed quiz

23 STATION CAT

The news they don't want you to hear

24 25-YEAR BADGES

20

Day Off: Meet Stuart de Fraine Ford, pagan drummer and Harley Davidson enthusiast



ANDREW WARD

16

Palestinian firefighters train in Scotland and England



clear reason why they wish to silence us: the FBU is the main obstacle to the cuts agenda for the fire service and in other public services.

Our argument is simple – and unanswerable. If you want top quality services you cannot cut them to pieces. If you want to maintain a world class fire and rescue service you need to invest in it rather than make cuts. All the glossy leaflets in the world cannot replace well trained and well equipped firefighters.

Stop stabbing us in the back

At a fire service event which I attended a few months ago the chair of a large fire and rescue authority said: “The cuts are coming. We all just need to get on with it and stop whingeing.”

Some of these same politicians want to pat our members on the back after a major incident while at the same time making plans to stab them in the back at the first opportunity.

I don't accept that arguing for investment in our service, for investing in public safety is “whingeing”. No – our campaigns are about protecting our communities and protecting the safety of our members. Our campaigns are about ensuring that we can do our job safely and effectively.

Unfortunately there are far too many fire service politicians prepared to put the knife into our service. There are too many chief fire officers who have completely forgotten what the service is really about and are prepared to play

their role in undermining and attacking our profession.

Our voice matters

The truth is that the only voice which consistently defends our service, which always stands up for firefighters, is our own – the Fire Brigades Union. As the attacks on our service develop, as the cuts proposals get worse, we need that voice more than ever.

We face a very serious battle over the coming months. Those who oppose us are determined to force through cuts. It is a battle that will require the support of every single member. We have the arguments and I hope every member supports us in the fight to defend our service.



7
Fire chief confirms
union warning on
strategic flood
rescue failings

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at home?

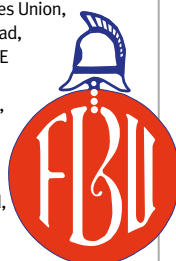
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DARREN STAPLES/REUTERS

March 2010

- Latest news
- Sounding off
- In brief



JOHN HERCOCK/ROMFORD RECORDER



Firefighters demonstrated against cuts last month at the new Harold Hill fire station in London

FBU reveals secret cuts plan

LONDON

Changing shift patterns will mean firefighter job cuts, fewer appliances and less night cover, according to a confidential document obtained by the FBU in London.

A document by the strategy and performance department of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) in November 2008 discussed providing "a capability to withdraw personnel from night shift and move them on to days". All the options considered involved "the removal of 10 appliances", either on a rotational or fixed basis. The document states that this would mean fewer appliances on the run at night.

Ian Leahair, FBU executive council member for London, said: "Finally the brigade has revealed the true agenda behind shift changes. As the FBU has been saying for three years, shift change will mean reduced fire cover at night. Management's agenda is 'change for change sake'. This document proves we are right."

He added: "If senior managers and the

chair of the fire authority in London get their way then fire cover will become a postcode lottery or, worse still, those same people will be playing Russian roulette with the lives of both the public we serve and firefighters who serve them.

"The Fire Brigades Union is prepared to negotiate on increased productivity and efficiency improvements within the current shift system but we will not take part or support change that will see either firefighters or fire engines removed from service."

The document also explicitly calls for job cuts through cutting crewing levels. It states: "Reduce the crewing level to 4 ...

loss of either a CM [crew manager] or Ff [firefighter] post." The FBU has warned the authority that members will take action to prevent the cuts. Four hundred firefighters demonstrated against cuts last month at the new Harold Hill fire station in Romford, East London.

Ian Leahair said: "If senior managers and the chair of the authority do not withdraw the proposals to change shift systems for London firefighters then the union would be forced to ballot its membership for industrial action up to and including strike action to defend the current level of fire cover for the general public of London."

BERTHA MUST GO

Bertha Joseph, the Conservative deputy chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, has been banned from sitting as a Brent councillor for six months after she used charitable donations to buy herself ball gowns and was told to repay £900. Ian Leahair, FBU executive member for London, has protested to London mayor Boris Johnson (right at the Romford protest), who has the power to fire Councillor Bertha Joseph from the LFEPA. "Her continued presence on the authority is an insult to firefighters," he said.



Brigade tops the job-cutters league

MERSEYSIDE

Merseyside fire and rescue service has cut more firefighter jobs in the last decade than any other brigade, according to figures revealed in parliament.

Shahid Malik, the fire minister, provided the number of firefighters employed by fire and rescue authorities in England over the last ten years. FBU analysis found that there were 1,325 fewer wholetime firefighters in 2008 compared with 1998, a 4.2% fall.

Merseyside cut more than twice the jobs of other fire authorities, cutting the most wholetime firefighter posts in absolute terms and in proportion to the size of its workforce in 1998 (see table).

Les Skarratts, Merseyside FBU brigade secretary, said: "This is the clearest evidence



Les Skarratts: authority must instruct managers to recruit now

TOP 10 JOB CUTS: WHOLETEIME FIREFIGHTERS 1998-2008

Fire and rescue service	Net job losses 1998-2008	Percentage fall in jobs 1998-2008
Merseyside	437	29.5
West Yorkshire	222	12.9
Cumbria	31	11.0
Tyne and Wear	111	10.9
Surrey	76	10.5
Cleveland	62	10.3
Grtr Manchester	207	9.6
North Yorkshire	34	9.6
Lancashire	91	9.2
South Yorkshire	82	9.0

Source: Hansard, 12 January 2010, Col 883-886

Note: these are full time equivalent figures, not actual numbers of firefighters.

possible that Merseyside firefighters have suffered the biggest and most severe cuts agenda imaginable, dressed up as 'modernisation'.

Merseyside FBU started an overtime ban in January in a dispute over cuts to frontline fire services. "That is the reason for the current overtime ban and that is why we say the fire authority must instruct its managers to recruit now and to recruit in considerable numbers," said Les Skarratts.

'Chiefs playing politics with lives'

ESSEX

Essex fire chiefs are engaged in a massive "spin" operation to convince the public that standards of fire safety in the county are not deteriorating, the FBU has found. The truth is that cuts in the service have created unnecessary risks – and it's going to get worse.

Response times are down on last year, and nowhere near the targets. The target is for firefighters to reach the scene of an incident within eight minutes, eight times out of 10. In fact they get there within eight minutes just over six times out of 10. Targets say they should get there within 10 minutes nine times out of 10; in fact

it's just under eight times out of 10.

"Essex fire chiefs disguise the decline in response times by spinning the figures," said Keith Flynn, FBU acting brigade secretary for Essex. "They want to quote figures from the time firefighters get the call to the time they leave the fire station. That way they can ignore the fact that when stations are unavailable due to planned shortages, firefighters have to travel further. And they can ignore the fact that when there aren't enough firefighters on duty, other firefighters have to travel long distances to get to the incident."

He added: "The cuts in firefighters and fire stations have been savage. They may

be taking the same time to get out of the fire station. But they arrive at the fire much later because they have further to travel, and that puts lives at risk."

The budgeted Essex establishment is 954 firefighters, but in fact there are 920, and there will only be 890 at the end of this year.

These "jump crewing" arrangements mean that there are not sufficient firefighters available to crew both appliances. If one receives a call the other is not longer available.

Industrial action in Essex fire stations has been going on since autumn last year, with bans on overtime, working outside contracted hours, and "acting up".

Sounding off!

TOM JONES

Head of policy and public affairs, Thompsons solicitors

Legal changes will rob injured workers

Proposals in a report on the costs of legal cases, including workplace accidents, would rob injured people of up to half of their compensation.

The "civil litigation costs review" will also undermine current arrangements that allow unions to offer extensive free legal services to members.

Top judge Rupert Jackson launched the costs review after insurance companies complained that legal costs were too high.

Jackson's recommendations would mean:

- ◆ The end of insurers having to pay for the risk of cases being lost. This will make it harder for unions to back the most complex compensation claims;
- ◆ The money that insurers pay when they lose a claim will no longer be paid by them. Instead it would be paid out of victims' compensation



Tom Jones: Winners will be insurance companies and their shareholders

and hit union legal services; and

- ◆ Costs would be fixed in cases where the whole claim is for less than £25,000 compensation (well over 80% of union cases).

Fixed costs will enable employers to work out what an injury to a worker will cost them in total and therefore to calculate whether it is a cost worth paying. And it will encourage non-union lawyers to take short cuts to avoid running up costs that they cannot get back.

To soften the blow of injured people having to pay costs out of their damages, Jackson proposes to increase "general damages" by 10%. But loss of earnings and other big parts of people's compensation will not be increased.

The winners from the report will be insurance companies and their shareholders who will enjoy extra profits. There is heavy pressure from judges and insurers to implement these changes.

In brief

◆ FBU members in South Yorkshire are being balloted on a management proposal that could form a settlement to the dispute. The proposal, based around an 11-13 shift duration on the 2-2-4 system, was the outcome of a conciliation meeting on 8 February. The South Yorkshire FBU brigade committee voted not to agree the proposal on the members' behalf, but to recommend it in the event of a membership consultation. The NJC conciliation reconvened on 12 February, where the FBU pressed for the proposal to remain available. This was achieved on the basis that we surveyed our members through a consultative ballot. The outcome of that ballot was due to be known on 4 March 2010.

◆ Scottish government ministers and MSPs praised the FBU's work on open water and flood rescue in Scotland in a debate in the Scottish parliament on 21 January. FBU Scotland had made a detailed submission to the Tompkins review, a Scottish government inquiry into open water and flood rescue, reiterating concerns about training and kit. John Duffy, FBU Scotland acting secretary, said: "We want to bring the same level of professionalism to flooding and water incidents. What we will not accept however is our members continuing to be sent into incidents ill prepared, without training and wearing completely wrong protective equipment."

FBU CONTROL STAFF NATIONAL COMMITTEE SEMINAR

Wortley Hall, Sheffield • 14 and 15 April

For all control members

- Pensions update
- Buncefield – lessons learned
- Media awareness
- NJC/MMNB structures
- Future strategy

To attend contact your regional secretary

DEFEND THE WELFARE STATE!

March and rally

10 April

Assemble 12 noon

for 1 pm

Temple Place,
Embankment

Rally 2pm

Trafalgar Square



Two-year-old Mia with Dean Harris (right) and Rudi Parkes, two of the UK firefighters who rescued her

Firefighters back from Haiti

RESCUE

The Haitian earthquake in January caused massive loss of life and damaged most of the buildings in the capital Port-au-Prince.

Dean Harris from West Midlands fire service, one of dozens of FBU members who went to Haiti, told *Firefighter*: "I felt privileged to be part of the UK team and I'm immensely proud of the overall contribution we made."

County's 'worst ever' cuts

NORFOLK

Frontline cuts will mean the loss of one in 11 firefighter jobs and as many as eight fire engines in Norfolk, the FBU has warned.

Norfolk fire and rescue service proposes to reduce emergency response fire cover to save £1.5 million between 2011 and 2014.

Peter Greeves, FBU brigade chair, said: "These cuts plans are the worst we have ever faced in Norfolk and are targeted at our emergency response capability. Politicians from all parties say they want to protect frontline

services and we will challenge them to do so."

The proposals, part of Norfolk's integrated risk management plan (IRMP), mean that 63 frontline firefighter posts would be lost, both wholetime and retained, at nine fire stations. Currently there are around 750 frontline station-based firefighters, so one in 11 crews would be lost.

Although the proposals are complex, the union believes they will also mean the loss of eight frontline fire engines. Some stations would see the number of appliances available halved.

The FBU has been told further cuts to response times for second fire engines at incidents will mean they will take longer to arrive at some emergency incidents. The brigade is actively opposing the cuts.

Jamie Wyatt, Norfolk FBU brigade secretary, said: "These proposals are at a very early stage but they have still come as a very big shock to local fire crews. We are still assessing the full impact of the proposals but it is clear that they will mean a large reduction to emergency fire cover in Norfolk which will put firefighters and the public at greater risk."

Fire chief confirms union warning on strategic flood rescue failings

FLOODS

The government has failed to resolve fundamental strategic issues on flood rescue and there are now fewer flood specialist teams than during the 2007 floods, according to a leading chief officer. The comments echo arguments put forward by the FBU since the 2007 floods.

Paul Hayden, chief fire officer in Hereford and Worcester and CFA lead in the government's Flood Rescue National Enhancement Project, told *Firefighter*: "There are a number of fundamental strategic issues still to be resolved in relation to emergency response to flooding and the funding support that would be necessary to create a national flood response capability."

He told *Firefighter*: "There are fewer assets now than at the time of the 2007 floods," confirming FBU concerns. Hayden

said that there are currently 75 boat teams registered to provide national mutual aid in the event of major flooding. He said that after a more stringent look at the organisations available now and three years ago,

'These comments show the FBU is increasingly the professional voice of the fire and rescue service'

today there were "a couple fewer, and no more" than in 2007.

Hayden provided a breakdown of current figures, collated in December 2009. There are currently 55 boat teams from English fire and rescue services, one from the Northern Ireland fire and rescue service and 19 from

others (16 from the RNLI). Fire services in Scotland or Wales and other agencies such as SARA, RSPCA and the Red Cross have not indicated their capability. The key point is that fire and rescue services account for almost three-quarters of the registered boat teams, or nearly three times those of other agencies.

Although the government has earmarked £2m for flood response, so far "none" of that money has been spent on firefighter training or personal protective equipment. Hayden said the money "had never been a fire and rescue service resource" and that it is possible "that the entire amount could be spent on bringing voluntary sector teams up to a standard".

He rejected the argument that fire and rescue services needed to cut frontline firefighters, arguing: "You rescue people with people, not boats."

Hayden agreed with the FBU that all firefighters need high levels of training to work on or near water. He said: "You don't do BA training just with smoke, so every firefighter needs training for all kinds of water work."

This year the government has promised to publish a revised manual and generic risk assessment on work on or near water and national standards on equipment and training for flood response.

Hayden backed the FBU's call for a statutory duty on flood response, which he said would bring "clarity and certainty" to fire authorities. The minimum is a "duty to coordinate" flood rescue response, he said.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "These comments show the FBU is increasingly the professional voice of the fire and rescue service. The public expects firefighters to respond to emergencies like flooding. We want the legal backing to do so and the resources so our members can do it safely and professionally."

GOVERNMENT DITHERS OVER NEW LAW

The FBU's campaign for more resources, training and equipment for flood response was widely praised in the House of Commons last month, but the government is still fudging over the law.

Labour MPs David Drew and John McDonnell quoted examples from *Firefighter* magazine during the Flood and Water Management Bill on 2 February, to highlight the lack of kit during the Cumbria floods. They called for a statutory duty on fire authorities to respond to floods.



Firefighters patrol a flooded street in Evesham, Worcestershire, after the River Avon bursts its banks in 2007. There are fewer registered rescue boats available now than there were then

VIEW FROM THE AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM



There was a large union contingent as tens of thousands of demonstrators took part in a march in the centre of Copenhagen
PETER DEJONG/AP/PA



The road from Copenhagen

**PHILIP PEARSON,
SENIOR TUC POLICY OFFICER
WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR
CLIMATE CHANGE**

Despite overwhelming evidence of global warming and its impacts, the UN's Copenhagen climate conference failed to deliver a comprehensive climate change agreement. The so-called Copenhagen Accord lacked binding commitments from governments to cut their greenhouse gas emissions and made no mention of trade union calls for a "just transition" to a low carbon future.

A key objective for the unions was to persuade governments to include the notion of a "just transition" in the agreement. This means that policies to shift to a low carbon economy will take into account the impact on workers' jobs and living standards and involve consultation with unions and workers.

But, unions did succeed in getting the notions of "just transition" and "decent work and quality jobs"

A key objective was to persuade governments to include the notion of a 'just transition'. This means that policies to shift to a low carbon economy will take into account the impact on workers' jobs and living standards

into a UN "Shared Vision" document, also agreed in Copenhagen. This would have formed the basis of an agreement – until the accord over-rode it at the end of the conference. The UN resolved to press on with intergovernmental negotiations in 2010, with a view to concluding a fully-fledged treaty in Mexico in November 2010.

Unions were represented by 320 delegates in Copenhagen, from countries in most regions across the full spectrum of economic development, except for China.

Union delegates took part in a three-day series of workshops under the title of the World of Work (WOW) Pavilion, hosted by the LO Denmark union federation. There was also a union contingent on the main demonstration in Copenhagen on 12 December.

Climate change and its impacts, in developed and developing countries, present profound challenges for politics and the labour movement at the highest levels. Unions should therefore continue to press for a fair, effective and binding agreement. There is everything for unions to play for in the coming year.

MARLIE FARM

Scene of



PA PHOTOS

the crime

**'Reckless' and
'obstructive'
firework factory
owner and son
guilty of firefighters'
manslaughter**

Video shot by Brian Wembridge moments before he died in the fireworks explosion at Marlie Farm, East Sussex, on 3 December 2006 has helped convict the two men on trial for the negligence that led to his and a colleague's deaths. The final seconds of the footage, which was shown in court, show the doors of an ISO shipping container blown open by the pressure of exploding fireworks. Then the screen goes blank.

Martin Winter, owner of Festival Fireworks, and his son Nathan were convicted in December 2009 of manslaughter through "gross negligence" by knowing an unlicensed metal container packed with fireworks could explode in the event of a fire. Martin Winter was jailed for seven years and Nathan Winter jailed for five years at Lewes Crown Court.

Fire video technician Brian Wembridge and firefighter Geoff Wicker, both serving with East Sussex fire and rescue service, were killed in the blast.

More than 20 other firefighters and police officers were injured in the explosion. They had passed close to the site of the explosion only minutes before.

The verdict

Justice Cooke, who presided over the case, told the convicted men: "You were reckless not only in the storage and handling of fireworks but also, and just as importantly, you failed to give full and accurate information to the fire officers as to what explosives and fireworks were located where and what the firemen therefore had to contend with in seeking to control the fire and to protect people and property."

He added: "You deliberately flouted the Explosives Regulations for reasons of profit. No doubt familiarity bred a certain contempt for the dangers thus run."

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "This tragedy could happen anywhere and could happen again. The FBU is still unhappy

Main image: Marlie Farm after the explosion on 3 December 2006

Inset: Festival Fireworks owner Martin Winters and son Nathan Winters



about the enforcement of fireworks regulations and the use of shipping containers. We are still concerned about the training firefighters are given. Firefighters and the public want urgent government action to prevent further disasters.”

The full story of what happened on 3 December 2006 is not yet available. The FBU is seeking to produce a joint report with East Sussex fire and rescue service. However the court case revealed a number of important facts which established the culpability of Martin and Nathan Winter.

Nathan Winter admitted that the fire had started when he mishandled fireworks in an unauthorised location. He told a police officer: “It all started because I took a detonator out of a firework and dropped it.”

Steven Wells was the acting watch manager

on the first pump to arrive at Marlie Farm. Nathan Winter told Wells there was a fire in the fusing sheds and was anxious about a metal container. Wells told the court that Winter said: “If the fire gets anywhere near this container, I would advise you to run like f***.”

Another firefighter, Ricky Ross, said he was approached by two men, one of whom was Nathan Winter, who said: “If that goes up, we’ve got to be miles away.” Ross asked: “How far?” To which the man replied: “F***ing miles.”

The judge pointed out that Nathan Winter never told firefighters or police officers the real issue was that the container was full of fireworks that could cause a mass explosion. The court also heard that Nathan Winter was so uncooperative when retrieving items from the house that he was arrested and removed to the cordon.

Martin Winter’s behaviour was even worse. He told firefighters the container only had wood in it. He was abusive, accusing firefighters of cowardice. He falsely accused one firefighter of being drunk on duty. Justice Cooke said that Martin Winter “appeared to have been about as obstructive and objectionable as it was possible to be and to have misled more than one fire officer”.

The lack of clarity about the contents of the container meant that firefighters were trying to set up a pump to cool the container when they should have evacuated. Firefighters heard a hissing sound, shortly before the fireworks exploded like a bomb, shattering the metal container and hurling large pieces of metal across the site.

Before firefighters arrived at Marlie Farm, Martin and Nathan Winter had already failed to take reasonable care with the fireworks on their premises.



Fireworks research – the CHAF project

The CHAF project was an important part of the evidence at the trial. CHAF was a European Union-funded research project that examined mass explosion fireworks. It followed a mass explosion in the Netherlands town of Enschede in May 2000 that killed four firefighters and injured 19 others.

CHAF specifically tested fireworks packed in ISO containers. The research led to a change to the global classification system for firework transport and in the UK to a revised system of classification for the manufacture and storage of fireworks.

Matt Dale, East Sussex FBU chair, said: “There have been many firework-related incidents across the world that have left a trail of devastation behind them. There has been multinational research into the behaviour of some low-rated fireworks when stored together in shipping containers. Yet this country still allows, even encourages, this type of storage. What have we learnt from Marlie Farm?”

CHAF stands for the Quantification and Control of the Hazards Associated with the Transport and Bulk Storage of Fireworks. Its website is at www.chaf.info

Breached licence

The trial revealed that the Winters’ business had only been licensed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to store the lowest “hazard type” (HT) fireworks, known as HT3 and HT4, and then only in small quantities and in particular buildings.

In fact they breached the licence and the Manufacturer and Storage of Explosives Regulations by storing the most dangerous (HT1) fireworks – those having a mass explosion hazard and by storing them in unauthorised places, including in a shop and in containers not suitable for long-term storage.

The firm had been warned about the storage of HT1 and HT2 fireworks by their safety adviser a year before the fatal explosion. They had told their insurers they had removed all unauthorised fireworks from their site.

They were also aware of the risks of mass explosion from HT1 fireworks. Martin and Nathan Winter had attended the Berlin fireworks conference in April 2006, when they saw videos showing the risks of mass explosion from HT1 fireworks.

Justice Cooke told the guilty men: “In particular, you did not tell the firemen that there were HT1 fireworks in the ISO container and elsewhere on site, or that there



Lessons for the fire and rescue service

The FBU report *In the line of duty* identified a number of systemic failures that were apparent when firefighters have been killed at work, particularly in firefighter training, the resources for emergency response and in risk assessment. It also highlighted particular failures in certain situations, such as working at height, and identified a policy vacuum in the absence of detailed guidance for many incidents.

After the Marlie Farm explosion, the FBU called for an overhaul of the law regulating fireworks in the UK. Steve Huggins, East Sussex FBU secretary, said: "We must make sure that fire and rescue services across the country learn the lessons we have learnt through bitter experience. CFA have mentioned a root and branch review of fireworks regulations. This is the same review they promised three years ago and have never delivered or even started. If two fatalities are not enough to prompt action we wonder what will."



were fireworks there which were, to your knowledge, potentially liable to give rise to mass explosion and endanger life."

While the trial established the culpability of Martin and Nathan Winter for the deaths, the judge said that Lewes was "the fireworks capital of the country" and criticised fire service procedures for tackling explosion incidents.

Justice Cooke said firefighters lacked knowledge of their own procedures for dealing with explosives and "their lack of training in dealing with fireworks contributed to what happened".

He added: "The vast majority of the firefighters did not regard fireworks as explosives capable of causing a large explosion. They thought only of individual fireworks detonating and causing the sort of explosions that fireworks ordinarily cause when fired. They were, generally, unaware of hazard types."

The judge also recognised that "the firefighter's natural inclination is to attempt to put out the fire unless it is apparent that it is too dangerous to contemplate doing so". This point has been raised repeatedly in previous investigations into firefighter deaths on duty.

Jim Parrott, FBU executive council member, said: "Since 1998 and the production

of the first response options document, government, with the aid of principal officers and the Audit Commission, has tried to undermine the importance of emergency response. How many more tragedies do we have to suffer before government realises that to deal with emergencies you need sufficient numbers of properly trained and properly equipped firefighters responding as quickly as possible?"

Lessons

It is still too early to make a fully rounded assessment of the Marlie Farm explosion. However the terrible escalation of firefighter deaths in recent years demands a more rigorous response from the government and the fire and rescue service in general.

East Sussex FBU secretary Steve Huggins, who attended the incident, said: "Over the past decade we have seen more and more tragedies involving firefighter fatalities. We are concerned that the lessons from these disasters are not being learnt by fire and rescue services across the country. The trauma and despair that these events bring with them must never become an acceptable risk and everything possible must be done to make sure they never happen again."

Victim impact statements

After the verdict, the victim's families paid tribute to the firefighters killed at Marlie Farm

Lesley Wembridge

"I met Brian when I was 17 and we knew we would always be together. He was the kindest, most considerate and loving person you could ever meet, and we were married for 32 years. We all miss him more than these words can ever say. There is a massive hole in our lives that can't be filled, and so we live without him, the husband, the father, the centre of our family, and our lives are much poorer for it."



Heather Wicker

"My husband had served with the fire service for just over 30 years. He absolutely loved the job. He was well respected by all who knew and worked with him. Geoff was a quiet man who was friendly and caring. He would try and help anyone."



PA PHOTOS

Liberal

chainsaw massacre

The Lib Dems promise to cap public sector pay, levy higher pension contributions and make 'consistent' cuts

Above every other issue, the word "cuts" is set to dominate campaigning in the looming general election. Cuts will hang over the winning party's first term in office.

With Britain's economic recovery still fragile, the debate is about the level of cuts to be made, how quickly they will be introduced and which of the parties will hit the public services hardest and soonest. A recession caused by the reckless excesses of bankers has had a massive impact on public spending and the main parties all have you in their sights.

The only apparent point of agreement at the moment is the universal pledge to protect frontline services. But exactly what constitutes the frontline and how that will affect the fire service – clearly regarded as one of those services – is far less apparent.

For example, the old trick of promising to protect a service from cuts, but then slashing grants to local authorities so the responsibility for hitting the services lies locally is well tested by the two biggest parties. Recent disputes with fire authorities and campaigns against direct assaults on the most frontline sections of the service may be a taste of what is to come.

The two main parties get the biggest headlines. But what about the Liberal Democrats, who might hold the balance of power should the election end in a hung parliament with no party in overall control?

The party's treasury spokesman, Vince Cable, is regularly voted the most trustworthy of the three parties' economics spokesmen and the Lib Dems make much of the claims that he is the only one who has constantly called the recession right.

His line is that there will, indeed, need to be pretty large cuts in public spending.

"The Liberal Democrats are the only party that has had a consistent approach. We've been very open about the scale of cuts required and setting out where our priorities would be, while recognising that the timing must be decided by the strength of the economy," he said recently.

Party leader Nick Clegg has confirmed that the recession means the party will have to shelve some of its best-known policies such as extending free childcare, free personal care for the elderly and a "citizen's pension".

He said the days of "shopping lists" of spending pledges were over so his party could focus on priorities like schools.

"I'm putting our cards on the table. David Cameron and Gordon Brown are playing the politics of the airbrush and the focus group," he said.

And as for the public services, including the fire service, the party is committed to a strict pay policy with a cap of £8-a-week increases across the board for at least two years and a ban on all bonuses.

For some this would mean even less, as local employers would be able to offer more to some workers where they deemed it necessary – meaning others would be offered smaller rises.

Fundamental reform

As for pensions, the party is proposing fundamental reforms which could involve increased contributions. But it would first organise a major independent review of the system.

The party also has a policy of opposing current government plans to regionalise emergency fire controls and has consistently said it believes the service must be protected from cuts at the sharp end.

Party spokeswoman Julia Goldsworthy told *Firefighter* that the government should think again over its proposals and follow the blueprint set down in Scotland and Wales.

"Firefighters are a crucial part of the UK's emergency services," she said. "The Liberal Democrats are opposed to the government's plans to centralise fire control. This project will mean vital local knowledge is lost and



JULIA GOLDSWORTHY
Called for regionalisation
of control rooms in England
to be halted

BRUNO VINCENT/GETTY IMAGES



VINCE CABLE
'We've been very open
about the scale of cuts
required'

MATT CADDY/GETTY IMAGES



NICK CLEGG
Public service pay rises
would be limited to £8 a week
for at least two years

this could risk the response time to incidents. "The project has already proved to be too expensive and is likely to make the service less rather than more responsive.

"We have called for the project to be stopped and for existing control rooms to be upgraded as necessary to ensure the communications benefits sought by government are delivered by local fire brigade control rooms, as they will be in Scotland and are in Wales, without the need for regionalisation."

The party also has policy, agreed at its conference, to maintain and enhance the service's central role in dealing with civil emergencies such as terrorist attack.

Part of that policy is to modernise all the relevant services, specifically in the area of inter-operability, with formal agreements between the emergency services to ensure inter-operability of equipment and standardised practices.

The party also wants to see a senior cabinet minister made responsible for coordinating the necessary planning.

Balance of power

Liberal Democrat bosses, however, also point out that much of their work on the fire service is necessarily done at local and regional level.

And they point to disputes with local councils over the closure programmes which, they say, have seen Lib Dem councillors opposing the proposals.

For example, the ruling Conservative administration in Warwickshire planned for the closure of seven of its 19 stations which led to a campaign supported by the Lib Dems who said it threatened the service's ability to meet the council's response standards – 10 minutes in urban areas and 20 minutes in rural areas.

As with other local campaigns against closures, firefighters opposed the proposals. They have now stalled amid suspicions they will await the outcome of the general election.

The Liberal Democrats are unlikely to form the next UK government and the best they will be able to hope for is to hold the balance of power and demand that some of their key policies are adopted in return for supporting one of the

two big parties.

How that would affect public spending proposals is anybody's guess.

On the other hand, the local elections on 6 May could prove more fruitful for the party and it is there that the impact of their policies on public services in general, and the fire service in particular, may best be seen.

BRUNO VINCENT/GETTY IMAGES

Firefighters know that training is essential for safety on the job. So it was an important act of international solidarity when FBU members organised training for eight Palestinian firefighters in Scotland and the north west of England.

The offer of training followed a visit by a Scottish TUC delegation to Israel and the West Bank which included a stay in the Palestinian city of Nablus. Ken Ross, who was then Scottish FBU regional secretary, asked local firefighters if there was any assistance the union could offer them.

The Nablus fire department said its priority was training to allow the 72 firefighters it employs to improve their skills. Nablus has three fire stations serving a population of 300,000 which includes 50,000 in 25 surrounding villages.

When Ken Ross returned to Scotland the region began to raise the £10,000 needed to pay for the proposed visit of eight Nablus firefighters. He spoke to Fergus Ewing MSP, the minister responsible for the fire service in the Scottish government, who agreed to make the fire service training centre at Gullane, East Lothian, available for the training sessions. The Tayside fire and rescue service also agreed that the Palestinian firefighters could use the

Palestinian firefighters on the way to cover a fire are often stopped at Israeli checkpoints and searched. This can delay them for up to an hour.

facilities of Perth fire station.

FBU Scotland then linked up with Kevin Brown, the FBU north west regional secretary, who had also visited the West Bank with a separate delegation, to organise a fourth week of training.

Visas had to be arranged for the Palestinian firefighters. The FBU was informed that the firefighters would not be granted visas to allow the group to leave through Israel. The British ambassador in Amman, Jordan, was approached for visas to allow the Palestinians to leave through Jordan and fly to Heathrow.

Regional chair John Duffy said: "Obtaining visas for the intended visitors proved problematic. However a letter to the British Ambassador

assisted and they were eventually granted."

The Scottish end of the training covered a wide range of skills, including the use of breathing equipment and firefighting procedures, rescuing car crash victims and urban search and rescue.

After three weeks in Scotland the Palestinian firefighters travelled to Manchester for a final week of training where they were divided into two. One group attended the Lancashire training centre where its members learned fire investigation techniques. The other group was attached to Bolton fire station to learn how to pass on what they had learned to their colleagues back in Nablus.

Sustainable

"It was important that their training was sustainable," said Kevin Brown, "which is why we gave them training as instructors so that they could pass on what they had learned here on to their colleagues back home. You also have to do what you can to ensure that the benefits are passed on to future recruits to the Nablus fire service."

The training manuals the visitors were given during their stay have been translated into Arabic with the help of a university in Nablus so that there is now a proper training syllabus which can be used for future recruits."

Training is their priority

The FBU organised safety training in the UK for eight Palestinian firefighters – raising £10,000 and writing to an ambassador as part of the process

The Palestinian firefighters learned urban search and rescue techniques



Regional treasurer Gavin Barrie said: "Our comrades from Palestine work in a very demanding environment, it is not unusual for them to be stopped and searched on route to an incident, delaying them for hours. Their equipment has seen better days and is in need of upgrading."

During their visit to Scotland the Palestinian firefighters visited the Scottish parliament where they met community safety minister Fergus Ewing MSP and Labour MSP Pauline McNeil, chair of the cross-party group on Palestine in the Scottish parliament.

To celebrate the 30-year twinning arrangement between the cities of Dundee and Nablus, the firefighters were honoured with a city tour and civic reception by Dundee's Lord Provost.

"This was a once in a lifetime opportunity," said regional organiser Jim Malone. "All but one member had never flown, been on a train or indeed seen the sea." They could not believe that they could travel 400 miles between London and Edinburgh without being stopped and questioned."

During their week in the North West, they visited Old Trafford and a mosque in Bolton. Before leaving for home, they visited parliament in



Palestinian firefighters battle a fire after an explosion caused by sparks from an electrical tool being used by workers at a petrol station in the West Bank city of Ramallah

London, where Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn gave them a tour of the House of Commons.

The FBU in Scotland has managed to gather 170 sets of personal protection clothing vital to firefighters attending a blaze. Equipment is also being gathered, but getting this clothing and equipment to the Nablus fire service is fraught with difficulties. The Israeli authorities have a record of not allowing such material through border checkpoints.

Efforts will save lives

EC member Roddy Robertson said the union has spoken to Jeremy Corbyn MP who was arranging a meeting with the UK minister for international development to try to help to ensure a smooth passage for any further equipment or clothing for the Nablus fire department.

"The humanitarian efforts of the FBU members in Scotland and the North West were appreciated by their counterparts in Nablus and will help to save lives in the future," he said.

"I'd like to say a big 'thank you,' first to all the officials and members who supported the fund-raising quiz night at last year's conference and all those who contributed both time and finance to make it all happen, and second to the Scottish Fire Service College and in particular area manager Gary Burnett."



The Palestinian firefighters with (right) instructor Allan Menzies, Lothian & Borders FRS; (middle back right) instructor Gary McGregor, Tayside FRS; and instructor (top left) Billy Cunningham, Strathclyde FRS

I want to break free!

No Smoking Day on 10 March is the time to start quitting

1 0 March 2010 marks the 27th annual No Smoking Day – the UK's leading health awareness campaign for smokers who want to quit. The day provides an excellent opportunity to start quitting as the support available on No Smoking Day significantly increases the chance of success.

This year's campaign theme, *Break free, we can help*, reminds everyone that No Smoking Day is the time for smokers to break free from their habit and is a message of support and empowerment that has come from smokers themselves.

The campaign is one of the highlights in the stop smoking calendar and gives health professionals an opportunity to help and support their local communities.

Many professionals use No Smoking Day to develop public health partnerships with primary care trusts, fire services and local government.

The No Smoking Day charity is working with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Fire Kills campaign for the fifth year running to raise awareness of the fact that

TOP TIPS FOR QUITTERS

- ◆ Find a buddy who is also going to stop smoking – it's easier if you've got a friend
- ◆ Throw away ashtrays, lighters and cigarettes – you are no longer a smoker
- ◆ Patches and nicotine gum are a great way to stop the cravings – and available on prescription
- ◆ Enrol in a free NHS stop smoking course – contact your GP surgery for details of a local venue
- ◆ Avoid anyone who is not supporting your quit attempt
- ◆ Fill the fridge with healthy, low-calorie snacks like carrot sticks and celery so if you are tempted to eat rather than smoke you won't pile on the pounds
- ◆ Save the money you used to spend on cigarettes in a jar and treat yourself after a month: if you smoked 20 a day, you'll have saved £182.

smoking is the biggest cause of deaths in accidental house fires.

Sir Ken Knight, chief fire and rescue adviser, says: "People need to be aware of the risks of smoking in the home and how smoking materials can very easily lead to fires.

"Ideally people shouldn't smoke inside at all, but if they are finding it difficult to break the habit, I would urge them to extinguish cigarettes properly – when extinguishing a cigarette 'put it out, right out'."

The 2009 campaign saw thousands of people across the UK organising local No Smoking Day events.

They showed their creative side and developed fun, innovative events for their local community.

The Organiser of the Year Awards

2009, which followed No Smoking Day, recognised and rewarded the creativity, hard work and determination of those organisers.

Dan Tickle, chief executive of the No Smoking Day Charity, says: "70% of smokers want to stop, but aren't aware that there is free, local help available to them.

Your local stop smoking service can

increase your chances of success by four times.

Why not take the first step this No Smoking Day and feel fitter, healthier and safer in your home."

To get involved with your local No Smoking Day events, contact the coordinator at your local stop smoking service.

To find out more about the No Smoking Day campaign, go to www.nosmokingday.org.uk and order your free campaign pack for lots of information on using the theme and get ideas for No Smoking Day activities and events.

→ www.nosmokingday.org.uk
0800 1690169



'It wasn't our fault'

Q I slipped on ice in the car park at work and hurt my back. I am in a lot of pain and have been on sick leave as a result. My employer says they are not responsible for an injury caused by the weather. Is that right?

A It depends on the circumstances and whether your employer could and should have known that conditions would be icy.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations require employers to ensure that the surface of every traffic route in the workplace is suitable for the purpose for which it is used and that its surfaces are not slippery and have no substance on them that exposes employees to risk of slipping.

If it was impossible for your employer to make the car park safe – by gritting it for example – because the ice was some sort of freak occurrence, then they may have a defence against any compensation claim that you might take.

But in winter, ice is predictable. Slipping on ice is therefore a foreseeable hazard and employers, like local authorities, have a duty to ensure walkways are safe.

You may be able to claim compensation for your injury. This would be for the expenses and losses that you have incurred as a result of your injury, such as the cost of treatment and loss of earnings. So speak to your union rep about getting free legal advice through the union.



their workforce. They have to ensure that the workplace is safe, prevent risks of injury, ensure that equipment is properly used, maintained and stored, and ensure that employees are properly trained in its use.

Your accident could have been prevented by your employer if your colleague had been properly trained in the correct storage of equipment. It may be that there should have been warning signs reminding employees how to do so. And perhaps there should have been regular inspections of storage areas to ensure there were no hazards.

Whatever the circumstances that resulted in the accident, your employer appears to have failed in their duty of care to you and as a result you have suffered a serious injury for which you should be

compensated. You also have the right to compensation for any pay you have lost as a result of not being able to work and for any expenses that have resulted from your injury, such as travel to hospital or prescriptions.

Seek advice through the FBU legal service as soon as possible as there are strict deadlines for claiming compensation for personal injury and it sounds as though the brigade may put up a defence to the claim.

So the earlier a union lawyer can look at the facts and details the better.

→ The advice published here is not intended as legal advice on individual cases. Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

Legal Beagle

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

'It's not our responsibility'

Q I tripped and fell over a piece of equipment that a colleague had not put away properly. I landed heavily on my right wrist. It's not broken but it is still very painful and stiff several weeks later and I

still cannot work. The brigade says it is not responsible for my accident as it was my colleague's fault.

A Your employer is wrong. A co-worker's contribution to injury does not mean that an employer is not liable for it. Under health and safety law employers have a duty of care to

‘It’s all about having a laugh and playing live’

Stuart de Fraine Ford, a Surrey FBU learning and fairness at work rep, explains the buzz he gets from pagan drumming

Stuart de Fraine Ford has been drumming in bands since he was 16 – playing anything from pop to blues. But since joining pagan drumming band RumbleDrumskin a decade ago, the Surrey-based FBU regional fairness at work rep has tapped into ancient rituals, played gigs in 14 countries and even willingly attended fires when off duty.

So what’s the satisfaction of pagan drumming? “It’s completely different from work and a lot of fun,” Stuart says. “It’s a group of guys who like drumming and drinking, having a laugh and playing live. We’re on Facebook and YouTube and sometimes perform with contemporary female dance group The Rhythm Warriors – one of them used to drum in the band, so it hasn’t always been all guys.”

Stuart certainly enjoys his “days off” drumming with fellow pagan drummers who aren’t necessarily pagan. “There’s about eight of us at the moment with different types and drum sizes – bass drummers, and a snare drum who we all kind of feed off the back of. We call him the drum majorette. I’ve played in lots of bands before. But I think I’ve found my niche with RumbleDrumskin,” he said.

You don’t have to be a pagan to play in the band – Stuart isn’t – but a couple of fellow band members embrace the religion.

Biking enthusiast

Stuart, a biking enthusiast whose three customised bikes include a Harley Davidson, first met RumbleDrumskin band member Spider at a biker event. He’d seen the band play in 1996 at a “biker do” and went on to meet other band members in his local pub in Carshalton. When they learned Stuart was a drummer, they asked him to join.

Stuart usually plays a large “tom” drum in processions, but can play across the range. He is the only band member with a background of mainstream drumming.

Stuart began his firefighting career 13 years ago. He now works in policy and procedures at Surrey fire and rescue headquarters in Reigate, after six and a half years as watch manager at Esher Green. He is also an FBU union learning rep.

Stuart enjoys performing at festivals, Pagan Pride and biker events in England. But he has also enjoyed travelling to perform and take part in events abroad. RumbleDrumskin has played at festivals and pagan gatherings in Europe and beyond. But they also lay down their distinctive beats at more mainstream events, and are, Stuart said, available for bookings.

“We’ve done weddings, birthdays, fashion shows, the Lord Mayor’s parade, lots of different stuff.” The band has even played on the pitch at half time on Queens Park Rangers’ west London ground.

RumbleDrumskin started out as a spin-off from a bikers’ morris dancing team known as the Knuckle Rappers, who used to perform at fire festivals.

Stuart de Fraine Ford with his fellow RumbleDrumskin drummers

Inset below: playing at a Jack-in-the-Green celebration





ANDREW WIARD



STUART DE FRAINE FORD

Stuart de Fraine Ford began his firefighting career 13 years ago. After six and a half years as a watch manager at Esher Green in Surrey, he now works in policy and procedures at the brigade's headquarters in Reigate. He is also an FBU union learning and fairness at work rep.

'We've done weddings, birthdays, fashion shows, the Lord Mayor's parade, lots of different stuff.' The band has even played on the pitch at half time on Queens Park Rangers' west London ground

It may sound like firefighter heresy, but some big fires are deliberately lit and a cause for celebration. Fire festivals, along with May Day celebrations and wassails, can date back to ancient times, when the annual calendar was studded with festivities to mark the rhythms of the changing seasons.

Some lapsed for centuries, others have evolved over time. But over the past 30 years, there has been a revival in rituals rooted in rural customs. And old traditions have been revived in unlikely settings.

RumpleDrumskin have been pretty busy drumming at festivals over the past year. Regular gigs include the Witchfest in Croydon, the Spring Festival in Caterham, a new year wassail in Carshalton and bashing out the beats at the annual Devils and Blacksmiths thrash in Uckfield.

Then there's the huge festival in Hastings straddling May Day. The straw "Jack-in-the-Green" is garlanded and paraded through the town before being taken up the hill and ritualistically murdered.

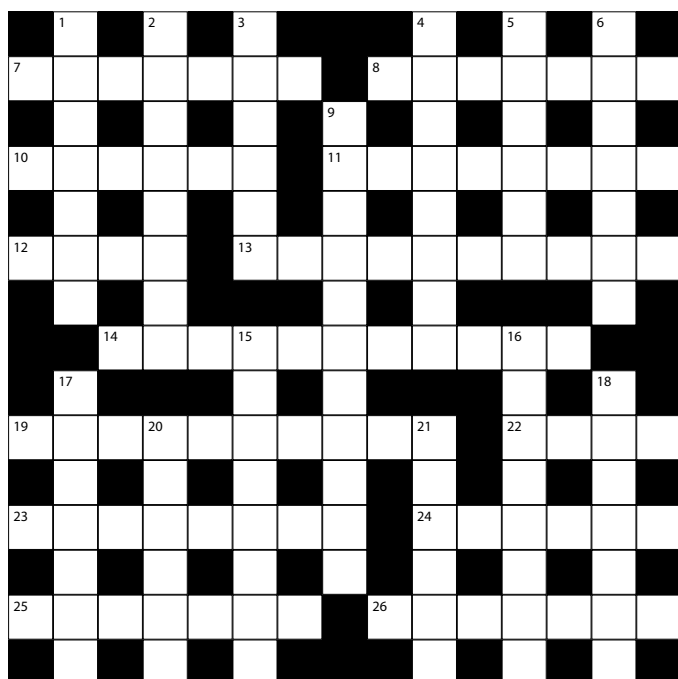
Jack-in-the-Green

You wouldn't expect to find an end-of-harvest ritual, complete with the stripping and burning of a straw "Jack" in a built-up area in suburban Surrey. But that's what you'll find in Carshalton in early September. It's only been going for a few years, but pulls in the crowds. RumpleDrumskin are regulars and, as a website publicising the event spells out, public safety is taken very seriously and fire extinguishing equipment is present throughout the day.

RumpleDrumskin, with their black T-shirts and "dynamic drums" can often be found building their rhythms to a crescendo in other towns where Jack-in-the-Green is celebrated. The band also regularly turn out for the huge fire-festival in Lewes, held to mark the demise of Guy Fawkes, and much more.



Quick Crossword



ACROSS

- 7 Held up (7)
 8 Lockjaw – need to be immunised against it (7)
 10 Invisible workplace hazard (6)
 11 Leave the country, for good (8)
 12 Uncovered (4)
 13 Not moving (10)
 14 Major entertainment hit (11)
 19 They are spread on beds! (10)
 22 We need to fight them (4)
 23 Loyal (8)
 24 We fight them (6)
 25 Cut (off) (7)
 26 West Brom (7)

DOWN

- 1 Favouring neither side (7)
 2 Goodbye (8)
 3 Poems and songs have them (6)
 4 Confirms accuracy (8)
 5 Rabbits' home (6)
 6 Creme Anglaise – pour it on your pudding! (7)
 9 Firefighter's law column (5,6)
 15 Without a worry (8)
 16 A fair one said to be no robbery (8)
 17 Threatened (7)
 18 Said (7)
 20 Sofa (6)
 21 What New Yorkers call their Tube (6)



Solution to January/February 2010 crossword

Winner of the November/December 2009 quiz

Andy Hockley of West Sussex

Answers to January/February 2010 quiz

1. a – 8
 2. a – The Iraq War
 3. a – Tiger Woods
 4. b – The Ashes
 5. b – MPs



Prize quiz

Win a lemon tree plant

1. The forests of which country are being preserved in a bid to absorb carbon dioxide and defend against global warming?

- a. Great Britain
 b. Canada
 c. Saudi Arabia
 d. France

2. The New York City Marathon men's title was won for the first time since 1982 by

- a. An American
 b. A Swede
 c. A Canadian
 d. A Russian

3. By a vote of 187 to 3 the UN general assembly has condemned the US economic embargo of

- a. Cuba



- b. Russia
 c. Iraq
 d. South Korea

4. British mercenary Simon Mann was pardoned for his role in a coup plot in

- a. Guinea
 b. Equatorial Guinea
 c. New Guinea
 d. Guinea Bissau

5. In this years Winter Olympics Amy Williams became the first Briton to win an individual gold medal in 30 years in which event?

- a. mogul
 b. downhill
 c. bob skeleton
 d. slalom



HOW TO ENTER

To win a lemon tree plant please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 31 March 2010 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (March 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

Recline and fall



Brian Coleman, who chairs the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA), never knowingly misses a chance for a sneer at firefighters. Opening a new fire station at Harold Hill in Essex, he boasted that he was “throwing out old-fashioned ideas of firefighters sleeping in beds in individual bedrooms whilst on duty”. Instead of beds, the fire station boasts a brand of “recliner chair”. **You can't sit in them, but you can't lie in them safely for more than 50 minutes either**, according to the Health and Safety Executive. This, he said, is “modernisation”. Apparently, making sure that firefighters are tired and uncomfortable while they wait for an emergency call is somehow going to “improve how the brigade operates through the night shift”.

How the other half live



From all of which you might suppose that Mr Coleman is spartan about the way he performs his own duties. A glance through his publicly available expenses will quickly dispel any such foolish notion. Soul-nurturing discomfort is for firefighters, not their boss. Mr Coleman lives in an area of north London which is well served by public transport and is within a few miles of central London. Nonetheless, his attendance at the London Fire Brigade's annual carol service in December cost the taxpayer £132.18 in taxi fares – £66.09 each way. Perhaps the LFB might consider doing without Mr Coleman at its carol service this year and spend the money on better quality recliner chairs. His taxi to the Firefighters' Memorial Trust Service cost another £66.09 and it's another event that could probably have done without him – in fact, having Mr Coleman at their memorial service might be seen as insulting by some firefighters. But these are dwarfed by his taxi fare to the Lord Mayor of Westminster's luncheon. That cost £143, just to get him there. No wonder Coleman tried to block publication of his expenses, claiming they were none of the public's business. Fortunately, he lost, and **anyone who wants to see how the other half live can visit www.london-fire.gov.uk/brian_coleman_2009_2010.asp**.



JOHN HERCOCK/ROMFORD RECORDER

News management



You might also have supposed, from the report of the event sent to newspapers by the London Fire Brigade, that Mr Coleman, mayor Boris Johnson and London fire commissioner Ron Dobson were alone at the event. **The fact that 400 firefighters were there, protesting about new shift patterns and the new “recliners”, was not mentioned.** Our picture shows Ron Dobson talking to the protesters through an FBU loudspeaker.

Generous to a fault



Mr Coleman's deputy, Bertha Joseph, has been banned for six months from sitting as a councillor in Brent – the longest suspension the standards committee was allowed to set – and her appeal against the ban has been turned down. She was also told to repay £900 to the current mayor's charity to reflect money she had received from Twinstar Motors and Malcolm Butchers. **She was censured for obtaining cash to sponsor a mayor's ball that she subsequently spent on a dress for herself.**

Yet London mayor Boris Johnson has allowed her to continue working on the LFEPA and recently promoted her to the position of deputy chair. The position commands a £12,000 annual allowance. Only the mayor has the power to remove her. She may be unfit to be a Brent councillor, but apparently Johnson thinks she's quite fit to be deputy chair of the LFEPA. There is, says Johnson, “nothing to prevent” her from carrying on. Evidently the LFEPA under Johnson and Coleman has lower standards of probity than Brent council. **Could this extraordinary leniency**

have anything to do with the fact that the Tories cling onto control of the LFEPA by one slender vote?

Assume nothing



When Paul Waugh, deputy political editor of the *Evening Standard*, reported the ban on Ms Joseph, on 14 October 2009, he added that she was also banned from serving on the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. It was a natural assumption for him to make – you could hardly have lower standards there than on the council, could you? But Mr Waugh was wrong and had to run a correction.

No smoke without fire



Of course, preventing fires is better than having to put them out. It's not clear that campaigns to get people to fit smoke alarms are a good reason to cut the number of firefighters. And this sounds like a particularly bad idea if some of the smoke alarms don't work. Ever since 2005, the government has been buying, and fitting in people's homes, smoke detectors that beep when there is no fire or smoke. Irritated householders, sick of the false alarms, may break the things, or just learn to ignore them. Thousands have complained to their local fire and rescue service. The alarms were made by a Gloucester-based firm called Dicon. John McDonnell MP asked the government how many alarms have been bought from the firm. The answer is an almost unbelievable 878,000.

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

25-year badges



Andy Dennis (r) receives his 25-year badge from Region 7 secretary **Chris Downes**



Billy Stubbs (l) receives his 25-year badge from Retford branch secretary **Steve Bull**



Paul Hilton (l) receives his 25-year badge from Retford branch secretary **Steve Bull**



Ian Atkinson (l), East Ham, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary **Dave Thomas**



Dave Currie (r), performance and improvement team, West Midlands, receives his 25-year badge from Region 7 EC member **Rose Jones**



Steve Luff (r) White Watch, Luton, receives his 25-year badge from watch rep **Andy Walker**



Roger Long (l) Blue Watch, Kingsway, Derbyshire receives his 25-year badge from **Chris Tapp**, BMS Derbyshire



Chris Hughes (r), Mid and West Wales FRS, receives his 25-year badge from Welsh regional treasurer **Simon Jenkins**



Andy Holmes (l) Green Watch, Arnold, Nottinghamshire, receives his 25-year badge from **Ian Young**, Nottinghamshire BMS



Alan Bird (centre) and **Mick Buckley (r)** receive their 25-year badges at Broughton fire station from GMC brigade chair **Alan Anderson**



William Light (l) White Watch, Bath, receives his 25-year badge from Bath branch secretary **Alastair Dunlop**

FBU REGIONAL OFFICES

→ **Region 1 Scotland**
52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow,
Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309
o1rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 2 Northern Ireland**
14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn,
Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622
o2rs@fbu.org

→ **Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear**
1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley,
Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142
o3rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside**
9 Marsh Street, Rothwell,
Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000
o4rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire**
The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St,
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400
o5rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire**
Little Dennis Street South (above Dawsons)
Nottingham NG2 4EU
0115 947 2042
o6gen@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop**
195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill,
West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633
o7rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales**
4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,
Bridgend, CF35 5UJ
01656 867910
o8rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk**
28 Atlantic Square, Station Road,
Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL
01376 521521
o9rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 10 London**
John Horner Mews, Frome Street,
Islington, London, N1 8PB
020 7359 3638
london@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex**
Units A&B, Ground Floor,
219B Preston Road, Brighton BN1 6SA
01273 509450
11rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
FBU Regional Office, The Merlin Centre,
Unit L, Gatehouse Close, Aylesbury HP19 8DP
01296 482297
12rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**
158 Muller Road, Horfield,
Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132
13rs@fbu.org.uk

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.