

FireFighter

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

August/September 2007



THE DELUGE

How FBU members rescued 3,500 people
– and the lessons to be learned



Festival Day Off

Stewart, Billy, Kate
and Glendon ...



Hazchem

Officer Graham Dennis on
keeping a cool head

Brigadista!

One member's
journey to
Socialist Cuba



Give us the tools, we'll do the job



In last month's magazine we reported the tragic death of Paul Mallaghan of Stevenage. Like many others, the President and I attended Paul's funeral. I heard first hand about Paul from friends and colleagues. Once again our thoughts go out to Paul's family and all those touched by this loss.

Floodings

During the past month I attended the scene of the major floodings in south Yorkshire and Humberside. Other parts of the country were also affected by significant floods. Our members performed an outstanding role in responding to the floods and once again demonstrated their professionalism for all to see.

There will be many lessons to learn from these floods. Despite the commitment and dedication of those in the fire and rescue service and other agencies there remain problems. A number of these were obvious simply from television coverage. We saw firefighters in flood water wearing fire gear with a minority provided with suitable protective equipment for entering water. There are a range of related operational concerns which we will be raising in various quarters.

The fire and rescue service has always been a 'can-do' service and frequently deals with issues and incidents out of the ordinary.

Nevertheless there is an obligation upon government

and the employers to make the necessary investment to ensure that our members are adequately protected.

There has been some investment in new equipment. We saw a major deployment of the new high volume pumps. Undoubtedly, this ensured that the devastation caused was not considerably worse.

This single deployment of equipment has more than paid for the original investment and demonstrates that investment in public services is more than worthwhile.

Our message to government is, "Give us the tools and we will do the job".

We will be raising concerns regarding the conditions of service and payments of members involved in protracted incidents outside of their fire and rescue service area.

We will also be raising concerns with government about overall planning for such events.

CPD/LSI and pensions

The long running saga around continual professional development (CPD) payments and the loss of long service pay has caused major dissatisfaction among members. In February this year we reached a provisional agreement but this was delayed because the issue of pension payments remained unresolved.

We now have proposals from the government about how this will be addressed within the pension schemes. The proposals are somewhat different to how basic pay is dealt with in the pension schemes. So we



Firefighter at Toll Bar school – a range of operational concerns has been raised by the June floods

will be consulting you on this over the next few weeks and further information will be sent explaining the changes.

One positive outcome from these discussions is that government officials have

acknowledged the Union's concerns about members who have paid pension contributions on long service pay for a number of years. The new proposals also include an Additional Pension Benefit (APB) for LSI members



YOUR LETTERS

Wonderful account of Iraq journey

What a wonderful account of the "Road to Iraq" (June 2007) given by these very brave people taking two appliances to Iraq. They deserve nothing but the highest praise. I salute them.
Peter John Higgins
Cheshire

Firefighter magazine once again won plaudits at the TUC's annual press and public relations awards. Judges described it thus: "Bold, positive and imaginative photos lead this classily designed production, packed with lively human interest stories, relevant news and excellent advice material." The feature article "Ready, Willing and Able," on FBU member Simon Hawkins' return to work after a motorcycle accident, was "highly commended". The "inspirational" article was a "classic tale of one member with a difference, showing how far sheer human endeavour, spirit and union

comradeship can take you." One photograph, taken by Andrew Wiard of member Simon Thompson who acts on his "day off", was also praised as "high impact photography at its best" while judges described an illustration by Mick Brownfield for an article on women firefighters and shifts, as "an undeniably strong image of home life crushed by the cogs of working time: eye-catching, disturbing and well made."



which will take account of contributions made on LSI.

I am sure many of you will join me in wanting to see the back of this long and painful debate.

Matt Wrack

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includes establishing
his credibility
with professional
chemists



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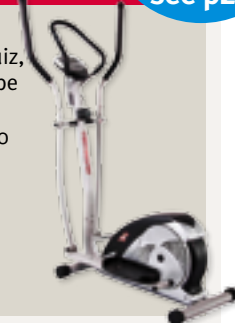
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An FBU member and official report from Colombia and Cuba

WIN
A TXE600
trainer
see p22

PUZZLES

Win this month's quiz, and you'll be the owner of a TXE600 elliptical trainer



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CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

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Avon's fire authority 'remains unconvinced' by case for RCC

PAUL BOY/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Razor wire fence for the Avon control centre building

REGIONAL FIRE CONTROLS

Members of Avon Fire Authority (AFA) have decided to reaffirm their boycott of plans for a regional fire control centre (RCC) after being presented with the latest version of the FireControl business case.

Councillors at a fire authority meeting on Friday July 6 noted with concern that the latest business case projects savings of just 10% from moving to regional control – significantly less than the 30% in earlier drafts – and expressed fears that rather than providing savings, the move would actually cost the authority money.

Former Fire Minister Angela Smith MP had asked fire authority members to reconsider their position in light of the information contained in the latest business case.

'We may see no savings at all'

But Councillor Terry Walker, Chair of Avon Fire Authority, said: "After fully considering the latest version of the business case, the authority remains unconvinced that this move represents best value.

"We are extremely concerned at the significant reduction in the potential savings and, as the project progresses, believe we may see no savings at all from the merger – and possibly face increased costs."

Kevin Pearson, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive of Avon Fire and Rescue Service, said: "Members have reaffirmed their position to refuse to participate in the establishment of a local authority controlled company, which will own and govern the new centre.

"They will, however, review this position once the final full business case has been published, which is expected in early 2008."

The "final full business case" has been long delayed. The Government describes the business case as a "living document".

→ For more: www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/outofcontrol/

Union challenge on contract misinformation

SECONDARY CONTRACTS

Chief fire officers in some brigades have been misinforming FBU members that a circular issued by the Union on secondary contracts was inaccurate.

The circular, dated 6 June 2007 and numbered 2007HOC0305MW, highlighted the problems members could face if they sustain an injury while performing duties under the terms of a second contract.

It alerted FBU members to the fact that pension and compensation entitlements under a second contract may be different to those under the primary contract. This circular is entirely accurate.

A senior civil servant, Martin Hill, who chairs the Firefighters' Pensions Committee on behalf of CLG (the administrator of the firefighters' pension schemes) confirmed at the most recent meeting of that committee,

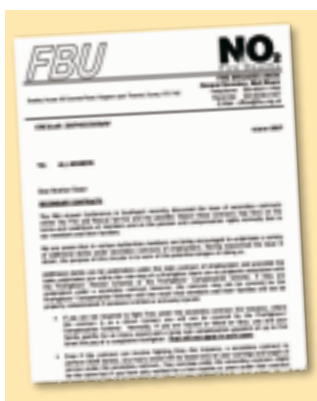
on June 20 this year, that the FBU circular was entirely correct.

Stakeholders represented on the Firefighters Pensions Committee who were present included the FBU, CFOA, LGA, APFO, the Scottish Public Pensions Agency and the Government Actuaries Department. General Secretary Matt Wrack has

written to the representative of CFOA who was present at the meeting, calling on him to "ensure that all operational members employed within the UK fire and rescue service are not misinformed by their managers" and to give assurances that "the facts as confirmed by CLG have been circulated by CFOA to all chief officers and senior managers in the UK, through CFOA and the three associations in

Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland."

Brigade secretaries in those fire and rescue services where secondary contracts are offered to operational personnel are also to write to their respective chief fire officers on this matter.



Service takes TRVs off the run

CHESHIRE

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has taken its targeted response vehicle (TRV) off the run and will not be carrying out a planned pilot in the Halton area until it has consulted the FBU fully on all the Union's concerns.

The FBU feared the TRVs – midi-sized appliances fitted with a small amount of equipment, limiting their firefighting capability – would replace fully equipped, fully staffed appliances, leading to a 25% reduction in fire cover in Halton, and eventually undermine fire cover across the county.

Their deployment would also risk the health



TRVs would have been deployed to 'small known fires'

and safety of firefighters mobilised to incidents.

The plan was for firefighters working the retained duty system and volunteers from wholtime stations to crew the TRVs under secondary contracts.

Senior brigade managers had indicated that, in addition to responding to

"small known fires", they wanted the TRVs to be used for response to automatic fire alarms and road traffic collisions.

The decision to take the TRVs off the run follows a sustained, united campaign by the Union and members working both the wholtime and retained duty system.

Sounding off!

PAUL WOOLSTENHOLMES

National Officer

Bringing trade union freedoms home

In *ASLEF v UK*, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) held that the UK law prohibiting the train drivers' union from expelling a BNP member was in breach of Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The government is now required to amend the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 to bring it in line with international standards. But how far will it go in amending the law? The case provides an early test of the attitude of the new Prime Minister. Unfortunately, there are clear signs that the government is planning to do as little as possible.

On 16 May the DTI issued a consultation paper suggesting how UK law should be amended and the FBU will respond, making full use of advice from the two barristers involved in the case (John Hendy QC and Michael Ford) that has been circulated by the Institute of Employment Rights.

The government wants to restrict any amendments to the question of membership of a political party and political activities. But according to the Institute the case has wider implications requiring more substantial amendments.

In reaching its decision the Court explicitly referred to ILO Convention 87 and other international Treaties. This is important because the Human Rights Act 1998 requires UK courts to take into account not only the Convention itself but also "any judgement decision, declaration or advisory opinion of the European Court of Human Rights". Since the ECHR has now declared that the decisions of the ILO and others are relevant, so now must the UK courts.

In the past, the unenforceability of ILO Conventions has meant they have had little impact in UK courts. The judgement in *ASLEF* points the way to much greater reliance on ILO and ESC principles and decisions.

Based on the Court's newly declared recognition that trade union autonomy is protected by Article 11, Hendy and Ford identify a number of anti trade union laws which also need to be reformed including:

- The restrictions on the rights of unions to take industrial action, including secondary action and strikes for political purposes.
- The complexity of the balloting and notice rules which make compliance almost a practical impossibility
- The right of unions to discipline or expel a member for refusing to support a strike or other industrial action against the majority wishes of the members
- The prescriptive rules governing trade union political funds
- The extensive requirements in relation to the election of union presidents, general secretaries and executive committee members

These are all aspects of UK law repeatedly criticised by the ILO and the supervisory bodies for infringing freedom of association. Let's hope the new government takes the opportunity to radically reform the law on trade union freedoms and prevent the need for future litigation.

➔ More info: www.ier.org.uk

In brief

◆ The new minister with responsibility for fire and rescue is Parmjit Dhanda, Labour MP for Gloucester and formerly Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Education and Skills. A one-time assistant national organiser with Connect trade union in 1998, Mr Dhanda will be reporting to John Healey, minister of state in the Department of Communities and Local Government. John Healey is MP for Wentworth, Rotherham and has a remit for an overview on fire and rescue as well as for resilience and response to the recent floods. He was once head of communications at the MSF union. Hazel Blears MP is the new Communities and Local Government Secretary.

◆ Firefighters received death threats after responding to reports of a rubbish fire, a report obtained from North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service has revealed. The report, obtained by a local newspaper, shows that crews in the county have come under attack on five occasions this year. In one incident, firefighters were sent out to a rubbish fire near Rawdon Avenue in Tang Hall, York. When they arrived, they were met by youths who threatened to kill them.

◆ As *Firefighter* went to press, the Communication Workers' Union had decided to escalate strike action due to the lack of progress in talks with Royal Mail. The CWU, which had already held two one-day strikes, said Royal Mail was "unwilling to engage in meaningful negotiations." The dispute between Royal Mail and CWU is over a 2.5% pay offer and the company's intention to cut 40,000 jobs, reduce postal services and reduce pay by 25% over the next few years. The 2.5% pay offer had a number of strings that meant that most workers would receive a pay cut.



FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack with CWU activists at the Durham Miner's Gala in July



Firefighters from all over the country, representatives of the emergency services and the public lined the route of Paul Mallaghan's funeral procession

Tributes to colleague who will be truly missed

PAUL MALLAGHAN

Firefighters from every station in Hertfordshire stood shoulder to shoulder in silence for the funeral of Stevenage sub officer Paul Mallaghan, who was killed on duty. They lined the streets in their hundreds as a pump carried the coffin to his final resting place. The funeral took place at St Andrew and St George's Church in Stevenage on Monday 2 July.

The popular 46-year-old was tackling a car blaze on the A1(M) at Stevenage on June 16 when the vehicle was struck by a VW Golf. The father of five later died in hospital.

Every service in the country

Before the ceremony, St George's Way was closed and mourners, including FBU officials, representatives of the emergency services and every fire service in the country, stood silently to pay their respects as Paul's coffin was carried on an aerial ladder platform.

Members of Paul's Stevenage Blue Watch – who had lost firefighters, Jeff Wornham, 28, and

Michael Miller, 26, in the Harrow Court blaze in Stevenage in February 2005 – wore ceremonial uniform and acted as pallbearers.

The service was followed by a private burial.

Double tragedy

Herts chief fire officer Roy Wilsher said of Paul: "He will be truly missed. He was known throughout the service for his professionalism, for his big heart and his willingness to help others. He was a great leader and for Blue Watch, in particular, this is a double tragedy."

He said it was a massive blow for the service as the organisation was just starting to move on after the deaths of Jeff Wornham and Michael Miller.

Sub-officer Paul Schilston, Hertford fire station, said: "It brings back the realisation of how dangerous our job is. It has been a testing time"

→ A memorial fund has been set up. Make cheques payable to: The Paul Mallaghan Fund, Nat West bank, Account no: 14021943, Sort code 60-10-39. Cheques or cash can be paid into this account or cheques sent to the service accountant at: Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Old London Road, Hertford, Herts SG13 7LD.

Skills for life boost

LIFELONG LEARNING

The Union is seeking the views of the FRS community on its draft strategy document *Skills for Life, A Whole Organisation Approach for the Fire Brigades Union and the UK Fire and Rescue Service*. The strategy seeks to acknowledge skills for life as underpinning all learning, training and development aspects for individuals in the workplace and their social lives. Consultation ends on 26 September. Responses should be sent to Dean Mills at Head Office, or by email to sfl@fbu.org.uk. You can download the document at: <http://ulf.fbu.org.uk/publications/>

All members welcome

NATIONAL SCHOOL

Representation and negotiating skills and campaigning in the national and international areas will be the focus of the Union's National School taking place on 28 October to 2 November at Wortley Hall, near Sheffield.

Speakers will include Tony Benn and entertainment will be provided by Banner Theatre. Trevor Cave, a tutor from Park Lane College, Leeds, will oversee the school, which is designed to help students operate politically and as union officials.

Application forms are available from brigade officials.

SUSAN GADSBY/PAPILLO/CORBIS



Low-lying Suffolk is sinking at a relative rate of 6mm a year

FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

We're told that, due to global warming, East Anglia is sinking. The waters are rising – by 4.5mm a year to be exact – while the land is going under – at a rate of 1.5mm annually. This means, in the speak of the experts, a “relative” sea level rise of 6mm annually for the East Anglian coast.

This has understandably prompted growing concern among the public in several areas of Suffolk that are susceptible to flooding. So the Environment Agency launched what it called a long-term strategy to manage flood defences for the Suffolk Estuaries, the Blyth, the Alde, Ore and Deben. So what about Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), how are they responding? Well, the short answer is that we're not.

While our problems were almost insignificant compared to other regions, in the first three days of July, the community of Suffolk nevertheless already saw almost half the average rainfall for the month fall from the sky. Since we are quantifying things here, that's one million tonnes of water in the space of 72 hours.

During this period SFRS was congratulated by its chief fire officer, Lee Howell, for the professional way in which it coped. Suffolk brigade control received 200 calls in three hours (enough, as it happens, to flood our proposed regional control room!) In the end though, all we attended was one incident: two fire engines were called to the A12 highway to pump water from the road and clear drains. Why? Our policy on flooding is that “we only attend incidents of this nature when there is a life risk”.

SUFFOLK

During the rains, SFRS sent 12 of its finest in a helicopter to a burning tug off the coast of Norfolk

There were no reports of homes flooded by rivers bursting their banks as in Yorkshire and the Midlands. But residents nevertheless made it clear to us that they were expecting a bit more of their fire and rescue service. Perhaps they had misread Suffolk county council's promise to fulfill its responsibility to “provide emergency assistance” in the event of floods.

If they had read a bit further on the council's website they would have seen that: “although we

try and do all we can to aid people caught in floods, we have no legal responsibility to provide assistance to residents during floods ... will not be able to assist a large number of individual homeowners, who may find their properties threatened”.

In areas that would hardly feature on most Suffolk taxpayers' radar, no such reluctance has been found. During the rainy season, SFRS sent 12 of its finest in a helicopter to drop them on a burning tug off the coast of Norfolk in order to fight fires at sea. The Suffolk FRS Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) team took with them several pieces of equipment from frontline appliances. Since then, the brigade has said that anything they need at sea they will take off the pumps, sometimes for two or three days at a time.

This is in spite of assurances that all equipment would be provided by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and FBU policy that fire-fighting at sea should not be to the detriment of land-based cover.

As you can see, the response the public get in times of need really is a “postcode” or should I say “shipping area” lottery.

Equality for families affected by asbestos

IAN MCFALL, HEAD OF ASBESTOS POLICY, THOMPSONS



It happened at fire scenes when extinguishing and clearing up after fires. It happened when inspecting fire blankets.

It happened when training in boiler rooms. It happened when using anti-flash hoods and gloves made of the stuff. And it happened, as with other employees working in crumbling public sector buildings, such as fire stations. Firefighters were exposed to potentially lethal asbestos in the course of their duties for decades. And they were never warned of the dangers. Now the trade union solicitors Thompsons has launched a campaign to seek justice for families and dependants affected by asbestos-related diseases.

It is estimated that dozens of firefighters have died from asbestos related diseases while employed by the fire service. But this may be a significant underestimate. Identifying asbestos-related diseases, such as mesothelioma, is difficult because only a few medical practitioners have sufficient specialisation to ask the right questions. That exposure to the potentially lethal fibrous material may have occurred up to 40 years ago adds to the difficulty of gathering detailed testimony and evidence.

How firefighters have been exposed to the lethal dust was revealed by the legal testimony of one FBU member who died of asbestos-related disease mesothelioma after exposure to material while working for one brigade over a 20-year period until the early 1970s. He described how he and colleagues would clean out and turn over debris in fire scenes where asbestos was present in the roofing, panelled walls and insulation and which would be liberated in the air as a result of fire damage.

Not being advised of any danger, he and colleagues would never wear breathing apparatus during this process. Nor would they use martindale or gauze masks – sometimes available on appliances – either, for there were no instructions or advice to wear them during cleaning up and turning over activities.

The firefighter was also exposed through checks of old dusty and “hairy” asbestos fire blankets carried on their appliance on a monthly, if not weekly basis. This involved unfolding them and checking them up against the light at head level and possibly above their heads, making inhalation of fibres inevitable. Folding the blankets up again tightly would have added to his exposure to dust. Fire blankets kept in the fire station kitchen were also inspected weekly in the same fashion.

Training was another hazard – some exercises took place in boiler rooms at ageing fire stations, hospitals and other public buildings. The trainees would crawl through roof spaces where asbestos fibres would have been released as lagging on pipe work, roofing and ceiling panels was disturbed when crews brushed against it with their BA, cylinders, helmets and clothing. And while BA (which would have

offered some protection) was generally worn during the exercise, it was taken off before, during and after in order to talk to trainers. Another member who also died of mesothelioma, described similar conditions. He also came in contact with the material when he used asbestos anti-flash hoods and gloves.

Thompsons obtained damages for the dependants of each of these two firefighters in excess of £100,000. They included a fixed statutory bereavement payment of £10,000. Nine FBU members have claims pending for asbestos-related disease, two of them for mesothelioma. Thompsons, which is pursuing the claims on their behalf, has launched a campaign for justice for these and many other families in England and Wales affected by asbestos.

The level of bereavement compensation in England and Wales is set at £10,000 by law and is only payable to the spouse of the deceased. But in Scotland bereavement payments of up to £30,000 have been made to widows while other family members such as siblings can also receive up to £15,000 each.

Mesothelioma, a cancer of the lining of the lung caused by asbestos, causes extreme pain and suffering before death. So families affected by a death from mesothelioma experience unusually severe grief and an enduring sense of loss. This is often exacerbated by knowing that the suffering and death was caused by the negligence of an employer.

The number of people being diagnosed with asbestos-related diseases continues to rise due to the amount of time – usually decades after exposure – that these conditions take to develop. It is predicted that 90,000 people in the UK will die from mesothelioma as a result of previous exposure to asbestos.

£10,000 is a derisory sum for the grief caused by the death of a close family member. The only way to increase the level of bereavement damages is by a change in the law. Already scores of MPs have backed an Early Day Motion in Parliament which urges the government to “act swiftly to ensure that those suffering from this deadly disease have the same rights in England and Wales as they do in Scotland”.

Bereavement compensation for families of those who have died from mesothelioma, many of whom have been FBU members, should be equal no matter where you were exposed to asbestos in the UK. The law must be changed to ensure families in England and Wales are entitled to the same level of compensation for bereavement as a family in Scotland. The current imbalance is unjust and cannot continue.

The FBU is backing the campaign and urges all members to sign a petition on the Thompsons website calling on the government to change the law on bereavement damages.



➔ www.thompsons.law.co.uk/campaigns/justice-for-asbestos-families.htm

ASBESTOS

FLOODING

Lessons need to be learned from the emergency response to the devastating floods that hit the north of England in June. Equipment provided to frontline fire service personnel was not up to scratch, while senior fire service figures have raised questions on how the response was managed at national level. But FBU members – wholetime and retained firefighters, officers and emergency fire control operators – pulled all the stops out to protect communities. Some 3,500 people were rescued. Four members recount their experience of the events.

RICHARD MARTIN/ROBERTS/GETTY IMAGES



The huge summer deluge towards the end of the wettest June on record brought suffering and devastation to thousands and thrust into the spotlight the key role firefighters play when floods strike.

The June 25 downpour came on top of heavy rain in the region 10 days earlier, leaving Sheffield city centre underwater and the River Don and Ulley Dam near Rotherham on the brink of bursting. In Humberside, the entire average rainfall for June fell in an hour. Firefighters from many regions were drafted in with 27 high volume pumps (HVPs) to shift huge volumes of water flooding streets, homes and fields.

Their action and that of legions of wholetime and retained firefighters limited damage in flood-stricken communities and helped save lives – with 3,500 rescues and thousands more evacuated in what was the biggest rescue effort in peacetime Britain.

Fire control rooms received more than 7,300 calls to flood-related incidents on June 25 and 26, mainly in Yorkshire, Shropshire, Nottinghamshire and Gloucestershire. But

Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, the West Country and North Wales were also hit.

In mid July, nearly two weeks after the big downpour, the Government launched a review to “learn lessons” from the flooding and the devastation it wreaked. Then Environment Secretary Hilary Benn said the probe would examine why the problems were so extensive and assess the emergency response.

Four people were killed as a direct result of the extreme weather conditions, and more than 37,000 properties were affected. Thousands of people were still in temporary accommodation a month after the floods struck.

In a statement to MPs, Mr Benn said the response of the emergency services, local authorities and communities had been “impressive”. But, to many, the

Gordon Brown talking to West Hull firefighters on July 7



Government seemed distracted by the leadership changeover – Tony Blair had two days left in office when the June 25 deluge poured down from the skies. As he left, vast run-off had burst the banks of the Don and floodwater that had moved downstream was afflicting low lying Bentley and flood-blighted Toll Bar near Doncaster. The Hull and the Severn had also burst their banks. Rain continued, leaving lakes of stinking water awash with sewage and overflow from drains as terrorists made failed attempts to bring carnage to London and Glasgow (see right).

The Ulley Dam near Rotherham had threatened to burst – disaster was averted by fire crews from around the country using HVPs to pump out water.

With firefighters working “to the point of collapse”, Government was slow to react, as FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack pointed out: “It has not understood the scale, gravity and severity of what has happened. We have witnessed the biggest rescue effort in peacetime

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES



Submerged streets,
following flooding in Catcliff
area, Rotherham, June 26

Britain by our emergency services and it's not over yet.

"Fire crews and officers have been working to the point of collapse. Emergency fire control operators have been under major pressure, with thousands of extra calls for assistance from the public. There has been a massive and outstanding national effort involving fire and rescue services from across the country."

South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service chief fire officer Mark Smitherman, whose region was severely affected, went public with his praise. "I would like to pay tribute to the work of South Yorkshire firefighters and those from further afield, all of whom worked tirelessly to deal with the aftermath of the floods," he said.

Gordon Brown heard some home truths when he got round to visiting flood-hit areas on July 7 – Prince Charles, Matt Wrack and a bishop had got out to the incident scenes days before him.

Ian Murray, FBU regional chair and West Hull blue watch crew manager told the new Prime Minister that kit designed to resist heat offered little water resistance:

Fire service at
Glasgow airport
following terror
attack on June 30



SCOTT HEPPEL/PA PHOTOS

TERROR INCIDENTS

While they were pulling the stops out in response to the floods, frontline fire crews were also called upon to respond to the terror incidents in London and Glasgow on June 29 and 30.

It was fire crews from Soho fire station who attended a call in the early hours of 29 June to the car fire on Haymarket, central London, prior to the arrival of Metropolitan Police explosives officers. This has been wholly ignored by the media, thanks largely to silence by the fire and rescue service and the Department of Local Government and Communities. Instead, myths have been pedalled about heroic policemen and paramedics. Premier Gordon Brown, in statements immediately after the subsequent Glasgow attack, praised the "magnificent work" of police and security services and the emergency services in general but failed to single out the fire and rescue service for praise.

In Scotland, politicians were more forthcoming. First Minister Alex Salmond said that one of the key messages that came out of meetings of the Scottish Executive Emergency Room, which was

established immediately after the attack on Glasgow airport and is chaired by Mr Salmond or the Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill, was that "our emergency services and airport staff rose to the occasion magnificently ... particular praise must go to our fire services for controlling the flames before much more extensive damage was done."

Graeme Dickson

**HUMBERSIDE EMERGENCY FIRE
CONTROL OPERATOR**

Graeme Dickson works in control in Humberside Fire and Rescue Headquarters in Hull.

"It was pretty manic for a week. It started at half six in the morning and we'd taken 1,900 calls in 18 hours, and 3,500 within 36 hours. That's equivalent to six to eight weeks of calls.

The calls just kept on coming. Nine-hour days became 12-hour days, 15-hour nights, 18-hour nights. We had one extra person on shift – and one member turned out even as the water was rising through her own floorboards, which shows the level of dedication. She came in the next day when her house was under two and a half feet of water.

Normally, we like to reassure callers that an appliance is on its way – but it just wasn't possible all the time. We had to prioritise calls, so rescuing vulnerable people in care homes, or people about to be overwhelmed had to come before dealing with flooding in a kitchen. Most people understood that, but not all, and many were understandably distressed. You had to maintain your professionalism whatever was thrown at you.

We were also getting instructions from Silver Command where to send HVPs – and HVP crews from eight different areas were ringing us saying they were short of fuel, food and hydraulic oil. Local knowledge proved invaluable. If everything had been co-ordinated from one regional centre in Wakefield, as is planned, it would have been impossible."

**'If it had been co-ordinated
from one regional control it
would have been impossible'**



Chris Smythe

BLUE WATCH, ALPHA THREE STATION, WEST HULL

Hours after coming off night shift, West Hull firefighter Chris Smythe was bailing out his home after the rains deluged. He'd been on Blue Watch at Alpha Three station, near to his newly plastered and decorated home – and was back there within hours when water started creeping up the wall, soaking carpets and ruining furniture.

"The first thing I did was to go round the corner, put my fire kit on and get stuck in," says Chris, whose immediate priority was rescuing his 86-year old neighbour, taking her to friends streets away. "We haven't lived here long, but people know I'm a firefighter. I explained crews would be stretched – rescuing vulnerable people

**'The first thing I did was to
go round the corner, put my
fire kit on and get stuck in'**

would be top priority so we should just get on with it. People were filling pillowcases with soil to make their own sandbags, and one neighbour had a small electric pump which helped."

The insurance company has warned it's going to be near enough a year before the house is back to normal, and Chris and his partner are now living in a caravan on the drive.

"I've dealt with floods before quite a few times in my job – it's awful wading through someone's house and trying to salvage little bits and bobs, and soon it starts to smell. I've always thought "I hope it doesn't happen to me." Well, it has, but at least we were insured. On the upside it's brought the community together – and I know my neighbours a lot better. "



firefighters would have risked hypothermia if the flood rescue had happened in winter. HVP crews have effective waterproofs, police had waders, but the frontline firefighters first mobilised, wading up to their chests in water to rescue people well before the HVPs arrived, had neither. Front line fire crews do not carry drysuits. Colleague Liam Plunkett told Gordon Brown Humberside fire service was ill-prepared for water rescue, and had to borrow boats and inflatables from the public.

The "lessons" of the floods of 2007 ought to lead to better equipment for frontline firefighters dealing with floods, much improved co-ordination, a proper national strategy and a recognition of the role firefighters play in major flooding emergencies.

It seems astonishing, given what has happened that the properly resourced fire service does not have a statutory duty to deal with floods – or at least adequate training and equipment.

Matt Wrack's cogent and timely criticisms seem to have hit home. Hereford and Worcester chief fire officer Paul Hayden said a lack of standard training and equipment meant

the fire and rescue service response to flooding "isn't as effective as we otherwise could be" and called for improved co-ordination.

In early flood pronouncements, Hilary Benn was "prepared to consider giving the fire and rescue services a flood rescue duty, if and when full equipment and training are in place – but they contribute enormously already, as I saw for myself in Doncaster when I talked to firefighters from that area and to some from Herefordshire and Wales who had come with high-volume pumps to help pump the water out."

On whether there were "too many agencies" involved, he was far from convinced. "The system appears to have worked pretty well, and has been well co-ordinated ... The review offers a chance for a change of stance, improved co-ordination and a properly thought out and resourced national strategy that would greatly benefit public safety." The FBU will no doubt continue to make sure its views, grounded in frontline experience and commitment to public safety, continue to inform debate and, lets hope, have a major impact in the forthcoming flood review.





John Mann

RED WATCH, NEW INN, SOUTH WALES, AND HVP OPERATOR

Members of HVP-trained teams from South Wales were treated like heroes when they started pumping out flood-stricken Toll Bar. HVPs were in use at nearby Bentley, but the South Wales crew were the first to use the equipment in Toll Bar, where streets and homes were engulfed in stinking water.

"As soon as we started to deploy the hoses, people in Toll Bar were cheering," recalls John Mann, Red Watch manager from New Inn Station at Pontypool and an HVP instructor.

Ten HVP operators and two tactical operators arrived after midnight, following a five-hour drive. They left their HVP in Wales where there were fears it could be needed. "We went to relieve HVP teams pumping out South Yorkshire floods into the River Don and Ea Beck," said John who, along with a colleague, was first on the scene to assess how far the floods were from the river.

"It was the worst flooding I've ever seen. There was sewage in the water and it was pretty horrendous for people living there. They were brilliant and brought us out cups of tea and food at all hours of the day and night. Pumping stations in the area weren't working because of electrical faults. There were HVPs from Avon, Devon and Somerset, the West Midlands and Lancashire in the street we were working in and we worked well together. The equipment proved its worth and it was good to see all our training put to good use."

Vic Gregory

BLUE WATCH, ASTON STATION, SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Vic Gregory is Blue Watch crew manager at Aston Station, just off junction 31 of the M1. When the rains came, he found himself acting watch manager as his boss was on holiday.

After what are now seen as the "mini-floods" in mid-June, Vic Gregory couldn't get to work one night because he was flooded in. The water subsided and he thought "well that's that out of the way". Not so.

"Then we got the big floods," as everyone now knows. Aston station was well placed for action; crews are trained for water rescue, near to Ulley reservoir, and there had been an HVP on site for six months.

As a seasoned firefighter and FBU divisional chair for South Yorkshire, Vic well knows that "bad weather on bad weather" spells trouble. The ground was already sodden, the rivers, and nearby Ulley reservoir, swollen. But he didn't expect the damage to nearby communities would be so devastating, and quite so quick. No-one did. "I've never seen anything like it since I joined," said Vic.

From rescuing pensioners from the threat of cold and contamination in flood-hit homes, to pumping out stagnant, smelly water from cellars at Toll Bar school and removing dead rats and rabbits from HVP filters, Vic and colleagues were intent on getting stuck in.

"You like to do a decent job. Most people join the fire service for the core stuff, the thick end stuff – so it's good to be out there when you're needed."

'Most join the service for the core stuff, so it's good to be out there when you're needed'



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES



Personnel from New Inn Fire Station, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, in Doncaster at work (above) and for the essential team photo (top, John Mann far right).

Left: Firefighters search homes in the flooded village of Treeton, Rotherham

While **Cuba** (see right) stands as a beacon of hope amid an historical revival of people power in a Latin America, terror continues to reign in **Colombia** (see below), with trade unionists in the firing line.



ALBEIRO LOPEZA/REUTERS

If you are a trade unionist, Colombia is not the place for you. Assassinations of trade unionists are on the increase with 80 murdered last year alone. John Drake, an FBU official from the South West of England who visited the country in July 2006, at least had the protection of being a foreigner.

In the capital Bogotá and towns in the south west of the country, John and his colleagues in a 12-strong union-led delegation from the UK, heard first-hand from Colombian trade unionists, farmers, agricultural and health workers, teachers and human rights activists of murder, torture and disappearances suffered at the hands of the army and the paramilitaries with which the army colludes.

In the week-long stay in the country

meetings were also held with opposition politicians and lawyers who have been working at great peril to themselves – and sometimes their families – to help these people. John also met firefighters at a fire station in the capital. They told him of the – so far successful – battle they have been fighting against privatisation.

The purpose of the delegation, organised by the UK-based organisation Justice for Colombia, was to collect evidence of human rights abuses and find ways in which the government of President Alvaro Uribe could be pressured to resolving these severe human rights abuses that are an integral part of life for most Colombians.

The UK Government continues to provide no-strings military aid to Colombia, much of

which goes to military units notorious for violating human rights. Since the visit, John, his fellow UK trade unionists and Justice for Colombia have been increasing lobbying of the UK Government to suspend military aid – a

People 'disappeared' by right-wing paramilitaries with whom the army colludes

move backed by 300 MPs – and to pressure the Colombian government to end the appalling human rights abuses.

Says John: "People across Latin America have elected democratic progressive Governments, rejecting the privatising neo-liberal agenda.

"In neighbouring Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez is using the country's oil wealth to improve the lot of the poor who are participating in building a better future for themselves.

"In Cuba the people continue to benefit from, and defend, the gains of the revolution. But nothing has changed in Colombia – and ordinary people and trade unionists are in the firing line. We can and must do something about it."

→ The Union is affiliated to Justice for Colombia at a national level – why not affiliate your branch or brigade committee?
For more info: www.justiceforcolombia.org

Colombian Senator and former trade union leader Gloria Ramirez – in the UK to lobby the Government on ending military assistance to the Colombian government – visiting FBU picket lines on Merseyside during their dispute



ROB BRENNER

CUBA: ONE MEMBER'S PERSONAL JOURNEY



James Leslie experienced Cuba's celebrated health system at first hand

Ever since the 1959 revolution, Cuba has been an inspiration to people across the globe seeking a better life. Predictions by the capitalist media of the imminent demise of the socialist system – and the enormous gains it represented for Cuban peasants and workers – established under the leadership of President Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and their fellow revolutionaries five decades ago are constant. But, despite the best efforts of Uncle Sam to its north, it is still going strong.

Last summer, James Leslie, a 36-year-old firefighter at Barnstaple in Devon, went to the Caribbean island to find out for himself what the Cuban revolution was all about.

James left in July for his three-week work brigade, organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, with 30-odd other British workers, trade unionists and students, ranging from 18 to 60 years of age. When he arrived in the work camp, in a rural area in the same province as the capital Havana, in the early hours of Sunday morning, after a 22-hour journey, Leslie found another 170 people from across Europe.

"We spent the first day settling into the camp and chatting with fellow *brigadistas*," says James. "The camp was fairly basic, with eight-bed dorms, cold showers, simple toilet facilities and rice and beans most meals, most days. And it was hot and humid, rained heavily for about half an hour at 3-ish most days, but the sun didn't seem to burn. The people were all very friendly, the beer cheap and the rum even cheaper!"

"The days quickly fell into a routine. In the first week, for example, we were woken at 05.45 by a cock-crow over the Tannoy and loud Cuban music. A bread roll for breakfast and then work detail, which generally included football scores, birthdays, lost and found and results of the previous days labour, as well as duties for the day.

"We generally worked from 07.00–13.00, weeding yukka fields, pruning orange trees, and scraping paint from the wall in the local Che Guevara School. The afternoons were

taken up with lectures and visits: doctors, social workers, a trip to Havana city, and a visit to a school for disabled children."

The following week they were rock picking in a sugarcane field and attended lectures on the economy and democracy – and met the families of the Miami Five, five Cuban men serving life sentences in a US jail after being wrongly convicted in US federal court in Miami.

One of the most celebrated advances brought by the Cuban revolution is the island's health system. James got to experience it first hand. "While unloading pipes from a truck in the school, I crushed my finger. After showing it to the camp nurse, she sent me to the local health centre, which they have in all small towns.

"Each of the health centres has a casualty department, and I was able to walk straight

in and see a doctor, who stitched my finger up. This wasn't special treatment for visitors – this was normal, and free to all."

Time for fun

James and his colleagues also had time for a bit of fun too: "In the evening we usually had a band or two playing, salsa lessons, rum, and always good company and conversation. One weekend there was a friendship race in the nearest village to the camp 5km away. Several Olympic athletes turned up with world champion boxers, and the world series baseball team, and the run finished with a big carnival in the village square."

They also managed a sightseeing trip to a village of Vinales in an area of great natural beauty. In the final week, the brigadistas had the chance to put their feet up in a good hotel with a swimming pool.

"I had an excellent time," says James. "The trip was very informative and enjoyable. I would recommend it to anyone."

The trip was very informative and enjoyable. I would recommend it to anyone

→ Why not become a brigadista?

More info: www.cuba-solidarity.org



Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Cuba's Fidel Castro: the two leaders are best friends and have been busily cementing cultural, economic, social ties

CLAUDIA DAUT/REUTERS

WHAT DOES A HAZMAT OFFICER DO?

With a high concentration of high risk industrial sites on his doorstep, Graham Dennis has his work cut out

Graham Dennis, 45, is a hazmat officer for Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service. With 37 top tier COMAH [Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations (1999)] sites, a high number for any brigade, Graham and his six fellow Hazmat colleagues have their work cut out.

Graham manages the brigade's New Dimension capabilities as well as having a key role in emergency planning. This means he has to be both highly organised and to be able to stay calm when the pressure mounts. For with all the planning and preparation in the world, when Graham turns up to an incident on an industrial estate or on the road, he'll never be absolutely sure what kind of chemical concoctions are brewing.

Cleveland contains a disproportionately high level of features associated with risk: numerous top-tier petrochemical sites, a nuclear power station, thousands of miles of pipelines, busy port facilities, a coastline, rivers vulnerable to pollution – plus 20,000 tanker movements and day. In 2006/7 alone, Cleveland had 210 hazmat incidents, six of which involved rescuing and evacuating people.

Says Graham, a station manager (ADO), based in the brigade HQ: "When a hazmat officer arrives at an incident they have two tasks – ensure the health and safety of fire service employees and members of the public, and protect of the environment. Given the nature of the risks we are faced with, we've got to keep a cool head. When you arrive at an incident, all eyes are on you: the fire crew in attendance, the public and company



Graham Dennis at an oil refinery exercise

**'You have to have
earn credibility with
professional chemists'**

employees." And the latter includes specialist chemists.

"You have to have earned credibility with the firms' professional chemists by demonstrating a good understanding of a given situation, and gain their confidence to leave the situation, if required, in our hands. We have a vast experience of dealing with hazchem

incidents, and basic knowledge of chemistry, which we have gained at the Fire Service College. They've got degrees in chemistry. We need to engage with them to collectively formulate a plan of mitigating action to bring the incident to a successful conclusion. You've got to have a situation where they can trust us, and we can trust them."

Over the three years that Graham has been a hazmat officer, he's been called upon to provide his expertise and experience in a wide variety of circumstances, some of which might not seem obvious to outside observer.

"People sometimes ask me what exactly defines a hazmat incident. It might simply be a road traffic accident where fuel is leaking. You may laugh, but milk can be a hazardous material. If released into a waterway, it can be 400 times more polluting than untreated

domestic sewage, because naturally occurring bacteria break the milk down, using up oxygen in the water quicker than it can be replaced. One incident I attended involved a milk carrier that had overturned in a road. The unpasteurised milk (unexpectedly) turned into a skating rink."

Then there's the materials the fire service deploys: "Foam, for example, can be more harmful to the environment than the product on fire it is used to put out. We've got to consider all these things."

When more serious incidents do occur, it can mean working very intensely for extended periods. "One incident I attended at a waste management site ran from 8pm one day to 3pm





PICTURES: MARK PINDER

Thanks to relations he had with specialist suppliers here in Cleveland, he helped arrange badly needed foam making equipment and specialist staff to be delivered to the Buncefield fireground.

When Graham started out as a hazchem officer he was the brigade's first emergency planner – scheduling and organising 8 and 12 major live play exercises for the top-tier COMAH sites, in conjunction with his counterparts in the police, ambulance, Health Protection Agency, Environment Agency and Food Standards Agency. Now he's got similar responsibilities for New Dimension, for Cleveland and Durham and Darlington brigade.

Growing concerns about the effect on the environment of climate change has already changed the hazmat role to become "more and more about environmental protection," Graham says. This and other "new threats" such as terrorism, saw Graham get involved from 2002 in regional planning for New Dimension. This work dovetails nicely with his hazmat background. Decontamination of members of the public exposed to hazardous substances is a key part of the New Dimension capability, as is tackling the environmental impact of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incidents and the disposal of contaminated waste.

Graham, together with his counterparts in other agencies, must be doing something right. In March, the council, Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Brigade were awarded "beacon" status – an indicator of excellence and innovation in local government – for their emergency planning.

For Graham, the logical career move next would be to go for the group manager role. But, for now, he says: "As a hazmat officer I'm in

a pivotal position, in ensuring the integration of New Dimension and hazmats throughout the organisation, a challenging role but I am really enjoying it."

the next. The integrity of drums containing highly explosive lithium was compromised, and several damaged a large part of the site. It was exhausting – but we got the job done, professionally and efficiently."

Graham's work is not all restricted to Cleveland, though. When Buncefield blew, he happened to be on-duty, and the assistance he provided, as for so many others in the fire service across the country, was crucial to the successful response to what was the largest explosion in peacetime Europe.

My job is more about environmental protection and 'new threats'



Working For You



BRIAN GIBSON

Fairness at Work rep

North East

THE FBU has a long and proud tradition of promoting respect and fairness for all its members regardless of their age, sex, race, disability, religious belief or sexual orientation. This commitment extends beyond fire and rescue services, and we have been active in supporting broad efforts, together with sister trade unions and other progressive organisations, to achieve a legislative framework that enshrines these principles in law.

To get up to speed with welcome new legislation on equality and take forward the Union's fairness at work policies under its All Different All Equal policy, an education programme is being rolled out for FBU officials and reps. I, along with 20 colleagues from the north east, attended a course from that programme on 2-3 July. Guided by TUC tutors, we gained the skills and know-how to conduct investigations when one member has complained about another member or members not treating them fairly.

To be clear, our All Different All Equal policy is not just about tackling problems. It aims to create a culture in fire and rescue services in which respect and fairness for all is a given.

In my capacity as an FBU Fairness at Work rep I meet regularly with fellow FBU officials, senior fire service managers and employers to ensure that the principles underpinning the Union's policies are implemented in practice for FBU members in my brigade.

A new All Different All Equal policy document that has been sent to all members seeks to make the policy clearer. It includes explanation of the structures and policies that the union has put in place to try and ensure that every section of our membership has its voice heard and its concerns addressed. And it tells members who they should contact and what they should do if they do not feel that they are being treated fairly.

Equally though, it spells out our union's commitment to a fire service where all of its members have an equal chance of being employed or promoted, our commitment to workplaces where all members are treated with dignity and respect and are not frightened to come to work because of bullying or harassment. It is a positive policy and one of which FBU members and officials in the north east, and elsewhere in the country, should all be proud.

Not yuppie flu ...

About 240,000 people in the UK suffer from this condition

MYALGIC ENCEPHALOPATHY

Imagine waking up one morning feeling as though you've got flu, a hangover and that you've just been run over by a bus ... For about 240,000 people in the UK with Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME), this is what it feels like nearly every day.

Macho advice from workmates who think you're swinging the lead like: "Get down to the gym. Work it off" won't necessarily help you get better.

Until recently, the medical profession doubted the existence of ME, while the media dubbed it 'yuppie flu' – attributing it to people who worked too hard and partied too long, or driven perfectionists.

Attitudes are changing

This attitude is changing. ME is now widely recognised as a genuine illness affecting people of all ages and from all walks of life. The Department of Health has urged the medical profession to start taking the condition more seriously and showed how it can be better diagnosed and treated.

ME is often misunderstood, however, because not everyone suffers the same,

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- ◆ Tired all the time after a viral infection and your muscles feel emptied of energy for days at a time? It could be ME.
- ◆ Going down the gym to work it off could make you feel worse, not better.
- ◆ Viral infections trigger 70% of all ME.
- ◆ About 240,000 people in the UK have ME/chronic fatigue syndrome, including firefighters, police officers, and high-risk groups like doctors, nurses and teachers.

symptoms vary and it does not show up on diagnostic tests. This means it is still often confused with deep depression and anxiety.

Main symptoms involve the muscles (fatigue, pain, twitching), brain function (memory, concentration, balance, co-ordination) and the immune system (flu-like symptoms, joint pains, swollen glands, sore throats and disturbances in temperature control) – all of which tend to follow on from viral illness in someone who was previously fit and well.

It can affect anyone. While it is often

referred to as chronic fatigue syndrome (the term preferred by doctors), many sufferers don't think this term takes into account the other symptoms or reflects how severe the condition can be.

Many patients complain that doctors recommend they exercise their way to better health. But there is lots of evidence that shows people with classic ME (not just those just feeling tired all the time) experience long delays in the restoration of muscle power after even a small amount of physical effort.

Exercising beyond energy levels can cause major relapses in people who could have sworn they were getting better.

Patient groups, such as The ME Association, argue that a form of gentle exercising intermingled with substantial periods of rest and known as 'pacing', is a better basis on which to build hopes for recovery.

No one knows what causes ME

No one knows exactly what causes ME but it is generally accepted that it can be triggered by viral infections, like flu or glandular fever. People who were under extreme physical and mental stress at the time of the infection may be at particular risk, if the stresses have weakened their immune system.

While there is no diagnostic test that doctors can order, medics should be able to reach a diagnosis after ruling out other causes of fatigue, such as MS, thyroid disorders and anaemia.

There is no drug to cure the illness, but patients can be prescribed medications to relieve the more distressing symptoms of unremitting muscle pain and sleep disorders.

Help and advice

The ME Association provides information and support to people with ME/chronic fatigue syndrome, their families and carers, through a quarterly magazine, literature, education and training.

It also runs ME Connect, the UK's premier helpline for people with ME, and has a special fund which supports research into physical nature and causes.

→ If you're in trouble with your health, and think it might be ME, phone 0870 444 1836. The line is open every day of the year: 10am-12noon, 2-4pm, 7-9pm. Or go online to www.meassociation.org.uk



It might not be flu ... if you are tired all the time after a viral infection and your muscles feel emptied of energy for days at a time, it could be ME

FAUXHAUX/CORBIS

Doorstep selling

Q I purchased an item from a door-to-door salesman that does not work. What can I do?

A The expression 'doorstep selling' is used to describe buying goods or services away from trade premises, for example, when a salesperson visits a person's home or place of work. Although it may take place on the doorstep, the sale is usually made after a trader has been invited inside.

The customer has the same statutory rights when buying from a trader away from trade premises as when s/he buys in a shop or other place of business. Goods sold are covered by The Sale of Goods Act 1979 and The Supply of Goods to Consumer Regulations 2002. They must match their description, be of satisfactory quality and be fit for their purpose. Services provided are covered by The Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982 and must be performed with reasonable care and skill, at a reasonable price and carried out within a reasonable time.

Time limits for cancelling an agreement do not apply to goods or services that are being rejected under statutory consumer rights. The customer is entitled to have refunded any costs incurred in returning the item.

When cancelling an agreement or making a complaint, the main difficulty can be actually contacting the trader. If the trader was a member of the Direct Selling Association, it will be able to supply the address of the trader. Their contact details are:

Direct Selling Association (DSA), 29 Floral Street, London WC2E 9DP 020 7497 1234
ukdsa@globalnet.co.uk
www.dsa.org.uk



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

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

My money back

Q Are there times when I will not be entitled to my money back or to exchange goods?

A If there is nothing wrong with the goods but you no longer want them or you have made a mistake, your statutory consumer rights have not been breached and you do not have the right to reject the goods and get a refund or exchange, except in certain circumstances.

You may still choose to cancel the contract but you may have to compensate the trader

for any losses incurred. Often if you paid a small deposit, you are unlikely to get it back. The trader should only keep an amount that covers their loss.

You can only cancel the contract and get a refund or exchange goods where it was agreed with the seller at the time of purchase that there is a policy that allows you to cancel, or the goods were sent on approval. You may also have rights to cancel if you bought goods or services by distance sale, for example, by mail order, telephone, fax, email or through a website, or via a doorstep sale or if you have bought the goods through a

credit agreement which allows a cancellation period.

If a contract to buy goods has not yet been made, you can change your mind at any time about having them and will generally not have to pay anything.

I want a divorce

Q I have been married six months and I want a divorce. How do I go about it?

A If a person wishes to divorce in England or Wales, they and their spouse must have been married for at least one year. They must also show that a court in England and Wales has jurisdiction to grant them a divorce, have a marriage recognised as valid by UK law and have grounds for divorce.

Once the first wedding anniversary has passed they can then become legally separated with the intention of divorcing after a two-year separation or divorce immediately on the basis the marriage has irretrievably broken down stating reasons for this. Valid reasons for a divorce would either be because the one party had committed adultery or where there has been unreasonable behaviour. There is also an option to divorce for desertion on the basis that one party had left the home against the other's will with no good reason for at least two years and remained away without consent.

If there are no grounds to divorce and one party will not agree to divorce by consent after a two-year separation, the couple will have to be separated for a full five years before the partner who wants a divorce can apply for one without needing the other's consent.

→ 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.

'I sang the Clash's Garageland with Billy Bragg in front of 3,000 fans'

Stewart Kinnon has been a keen festival-goer since 1980. But there's nothing like Glastonbury, he says

The first festival I ever attended was the Loch Lomond Rock Festival on 21 June 1980. The line up included The Chords, Bad Manners, The Cuban Heals, The Only Ones, The Regents, Punishment of Luxury, Stiff Little Fingers, The Tourists and The Jam. Among the highlights was camping on a steep hillside and everyone singing "Julie's been working for the drug squad" as the police conducted tent to tent searches for illicit materials.

Festivals in Scotland were few and far between until the first T in The Park in 1994, with Blur headlining Oasis at the King Tut's tent. T in The Park continued to grow, becoming one of the major festivals in Europe. And I missed few of them – I remember dancing in the rain to the Proclaimers and the Prodigy in 1995, Paul Weller in 1998, Joe Strummer in 1999 and Iggy Pop in 2000.

That was the year when I started to get

involved with the Workers Beer Company. I was invited to help raise money for Scottish Cuba Solidarity Campaign (SCSC) and so we in SCSC organised bar staff for the Workers Beer Company for Glasgow's Gig in the Green 2000, supplying a crew of seven working for six hours behind the bar.

Contribute to a good cause

We had the rest of the time to ourselves to explore the festival and check out bands and we all agreed this was a fantastic way to get into a gig and to contribute to a good cause – all the wages paid by Workers Beer Company went to SCSC.

We then decided to send FBU crews to work for the Workers Beer Company at festivals; we did the next two Gigs on the Green festivals and the last Glasgow Green festival headlined by the Red Hot Chili Peppers. The money raised went to Scottish

MATT CARDY/GETTY IMAGES



Devon and Somerset FBU members Chris Balcombe, Torquay fire station, and Steve Gilboy, Paignton fire station, taking time out from stewarding this year for a spot of mud-surfing.





STEWART KINNON

Stewart Kinnon, a firefighter at Cowcaddens, Strathclyde, with a number of FBU functions, is mad about music festivals, which he has attended as a reveller and an FBU steward for the past 27 years.



Celebrity lifestyle: Stewart at Glastonbury with Kate Moss, Billy Bragg and his raffle-prize guitar



SARA VIRTUAL FESTIVALS

Cuba Solidarity and other organisations to which the Union affiliates, such as Action for South Africa and Justice for Columbia (JFC).

The next festival on our list was Glastonbury. In 2003, we sent a team of four and we all loved it from the start. Glastonbury, where the campsite is included within the festival site, is a wonderful magical place with something new to see on every turn: music fans of all ages, from prams to pensioners; walking up to the stone circle; watching the hippies, hoping they don't steal your milk; bands on everywhere; performers acting out in the strangest of places; and the 'Green Police' chasing punters who dare to pee against trees.

2003 was the year that the FBU began participating in the Left Field stage at Glastonbury. The then National Officer David Patton spoke, alongside Billy Bragg and the then General Secretary of the Scottish TUC, Bill Speirs, while FBU members and officials attended to work on the bar and as stewards.

The Left Field was introduced to Glastonbury by Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council in 2002. It has proved to be such a success that it has expanded every year since. I was initiated as an FBU steward to Left Field in 2004. We still provided a crew for the Workers Beer Company. But the Left Field was the place I wanted to be: politics and pop, socialism and song, political speeches and old punks. Where else would anyone want to be? In 2005, the bands at Left Field became bigger – Babyshambles, Steve Earl, Hard Fi, The Beat, Neville Staples and Jerry Dammers. I even got the chance to chat with Kate Moss and Jerry Dammers (I must admit I found Jerry far more interesting!) The Left Field is now a fixture

of Glastonbury and it is becoming hard to imagine the festival without it: it is the biggest tent on the site and with the torrential rain we have had over the last few festivals it makes a welcome escape from the mud.

Glastonbury 2007 must rank as one of my best festival experiences. I managed to win a guitar in a raffle. The guitar was donated by Jail Guitar Doors, an independent initiative set up by Billy Bragg to provide musical equipment for inmates serving time in Her Majesty's prisons. It takes its name from the b-side of the Clash's 1978 single "Clash City Rockers".

A dream come true

When I received my prize, Billy Bragg invited me up onto the stage to sing the Clash song Garageland with him, comedian and broadcaster Phil Jupitus and Left Field's Geoff Martin.

A dream come true for an old man like myself singing Garageland on stage at Glastonbury with Billy Bragg in front of around 3,000 fans. It could not get any better.

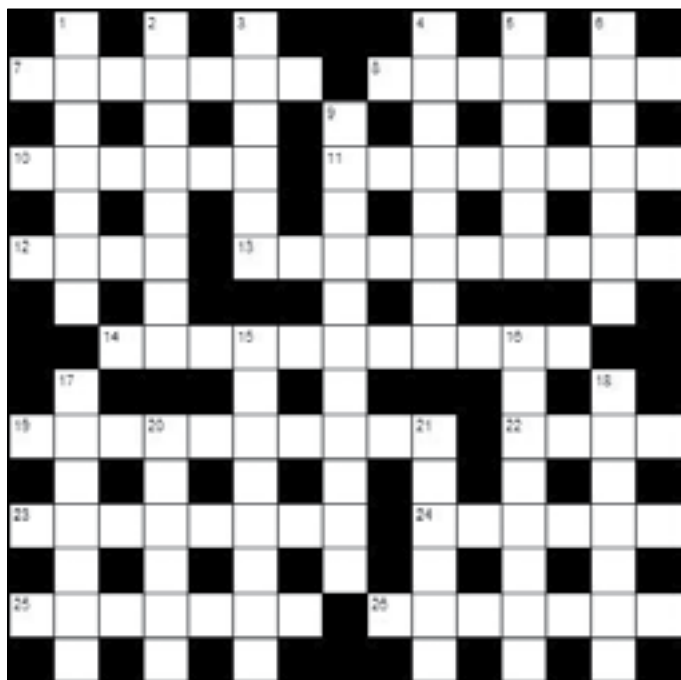
People keep asking me why I keep going back, suffering the poor conditions, the mud disgusting toilets, poor washing facilities and everything else they care to mention.

The strange thing is, when you get back home have a shower and scrape the layers of mud from your tired body, the only things you remember are the good parts: the wonderful music; the new friends and comrades you have met; the hot and spicy cider; and the sun setting at the stone circle listening to a bunch of hippies trying to sing Stairway to Heaven.

The great thing about festivals is the experience, just let the festival happen around you. So my advice is to pack your wellies and anorak and go out and enjoy the experience.

→ www.jailguitardoors.org.uk/
www.leftfield.coop/
www.workersbeer.co.uk/

Quick Crossword

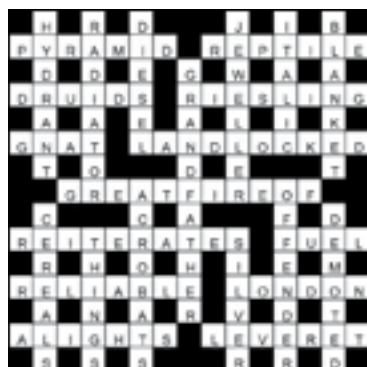


ACROSS

- 7 Few would admit to owning such a video! (7)
- 8 Mounted soldiers (7)
- 10 Multi-faceted painter – such as Picasso or Braque? (6)
- 11 Large, pointed mausoleums, found in Egypt (8)
- 12 Failed candidate for Brown's 21 (4)
- 13 Of fictitious land of historical romance, created by Anthony Hope (10)
- 14 Female church officers (11)
- 19 Like Vietnamese pig, or beer drinker! (10)
- 22 Failed candidate for Brown's 21 (4)
- 23 Going into (8)
- 24 Harry, Len Deighton character played by Michael Caine (6)
- 25 Forced (7)
- 26 Manoeuvred in the right direction (7)

DOWN

- 1 Like clockwork – in the pub? (7)
- 2 Game, woman's name, virtue (8)
- 3 Faster than a trot, slower than a gallop (6)
- 4 Tells story, in film or play (8)
- 5 Winner of election for Brown's 21 (6)
- 6 Losing candidate for Brown's 21 (7)
- 9 Raisings – of children (11)
- 15 Bumps into (8)
- 16 Preserved (8)
- 17 Losing candidate for Brown's 21 (7)
- 18 Ired (7)
- 20 Losing candidate for Brown's 21 (6)
- 21 There were six in line to be Brown's! (6)



Solution to
July
crossword

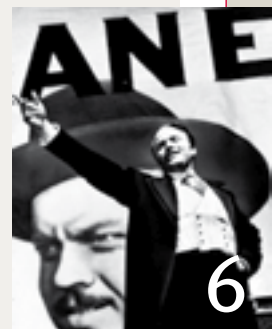


Prize Quiz

Win a TXE600 Trainer

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours.
This issue the theme is movies.

- 1 Name two famous crooners from the 'rat pack' who starred in the original 'Oceans Eleven'
- 2 Name two famous heart throbs who star in the remake of 'Ocean's 11', '12' and '13'
- 3 Which cult mafia movie stars Robert de Niro, Ray Liotta, Joe Pesci and Paul Sorvino?
- 4 What is the name of the highly acclaimed film depicting the war in Vietnam, starring Willem Dafoe and directed by Oliver Stone?
- 5 What well-known book by author Joseph Heller about the second world war was turned into a film of the same name and starred Alan Arkin?
- 6 Actor/director Orson Welles plays a very rich, eccentric media mogul in which classic 1940s film?



Answers to July Quiz
1. 2002
2. Kazakhstan
3. Rio de Janeiro
4. Caracas
5. Siam
6. The Caspian Sea

Winner of the
June quiz:
Hannah Poole
of Kent

HOW TO ENTER

To win the TXE600 Elliptical Trainer send your answers to the prize quiz by 30 September on a postcard to: Prize Competition (August/September 2007), 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

Life of Brian



Unashamedly right wing and with expensively manicured nails, if London Assembly member Brian Coleman did not exist, we would have to invent him. Dear Brian spent a year as chair of the London Assembly and remains chair of the London fire service which is funded by the assembly.

The fire service recently plunged itself into hot water over a row about refusing a pay rise to fire station cleaners to secure them a "London living wage". Brian, ever the right-wing Tory, opposed the rise saying fire stations would have to close to pay for it (conveniently forgetting the fire service had



Brian Coleman ran up a taxi and car hire bill of over £10,000

closed Manchester Square while the cleaners were on the old wages).

It now emerges Brian is not the messiah but could be a very naughty boy when it comes to his local council taxpayers' money. In the last financial year – and when he chaired the Assembly – he ran up a taxi and car hire bill in excess of £10,000.

Mayor Ken accused him of "swanning around London in a chauffeur driven car" and suggested he got the tube, hopped on a bus or even walked more often. How cruel of Ken, Brian might get an attack of the vapours at the mere thought of such torture.

This 10k taxi and car hire bill is in stark contrast to the pay of a fire station cleaner and the average taxi bill of an assembly member which comes in at around £875 a year. My London correspondents also point out the Assembly adverts urging the local population to use the tube and buses (which Mayor Ken does).

To ensure the Station Cat keeps a proper balance, Brian's supporters point out that at least local taxpayers only paid for him to get to Shoreditch and Vauxhall. They had to pay for Ken and his senior advisors to get to Cuba and Venezuela.

Down the CLOG hole



Just when you thought they couldn't get any worse, Communities and Local Government – or CLOG as they are now known – sink further. It appears the department has no idea what operational guidance issued to fire authorities is currently in place.

This is all the more worrying because operational guidance is critical to the health, safety and training of firefighters.

The only reason this is known is because FBU parliamentary group secretary John McDonnell MP asked questions in Westminster. The first parliamentary question asked the department for all current operational guidance to be put in the House of Commons library.

The response was that this was all too expensive to do, and, anyway, the department was reviewing all operational guidance. **This was odd because no one in the fire service appeared to have heard of such a review.**

But the answer was just about plausible (maybe). So John McDonnell then asked for the department to supply only a list of current operational guidance, not the details of the guidance itself. And they could not even do that.

Yes, the recently issued guidance is on the website but the older guidance is not. CLOG whinged on about there being a "considerable body of existing guidance" – although they could not say what it was – which is now under review.

But if the department does not know what operational guidance is current, then how can they expect fire authorities to know and work to it? And when will this supposed review report?

No, they have no idea about that either.

Knock on Woods



There seems little sympathy in Notts for Gina Woods, head of human resources and wife of former Chief Fire Officer Paul Woods. But after 81 grievance hearings and 41 disciplinaries in 18 months that may be hardly surprising.

And none of you were concerned that her pay had been halved since a consultants report said her department was failing in

six out of eight key areas. You point me to the fact that Gina may well have had her pay cut in half, but her fire service-provided car remains intact.

I am truly shocked by the numbers volunteering to reduce the car in size to match the salary reduction. Others suggest transforming it for the summer by removing the roof or generally using it for RTC-style practice operating cutting gear.

I am still looking in the CFOA fire service human resources strategy for the bit that deals with the head of human resources being married to the chief officer. **Strangely, the document has now been removed from the CFOA website and is only available online to CFOA members.**

My quest will go on.

Furniture police



Greater Manchester has been plunged into crisis by their local managers' 'crackdown' on those caught by the furniture police for allegedly failing to rest properly on the new reclining chairs.

Two firefighters and the watch manager at Bury station were disciplined and were very nearly sacked.

The alleged crimes surrounded the suspected resting on gym-style mats on the floor rather than on the new recliners. One firefighter denied it outright, the other said he was using the mat to do back exercises because the recliners were too uncomfortable.

The watch manager was disciplined because he did not see the other two doing something that did not happen. The two firefighters received written warnings and the watch manager a final written warning.

The news caused uproar in GMC because there was little or no evidence any of this ever happened. Another great day for staff morale and motivational management.

I am now looking closely at the work of GMC's human resources department. **There are widespread and, no doubt, baseless rumours that the department's salaries and other costs are not far off £500,000 with the top three staff raking in close to £250,000 on their own.**

I'll get back to you with a more precise figure – then we can carry out a value for money review.

25-year badges



David Young (right) Group Manager, Northants, receives his 25-year badge from Kevin Hedges, Officers Branch Rep



Chris Nation (left) Manager Red Watch Ramsgate receives his 25-year badge from Tim Green FBU Station Rep



John Huxtable (left) Green Watch receives his 25-year badge from area rep Stuart Kalber Barnstaple Fire Station



Andrew 'Spanners' Paterson (right) Chertsey Red Watch, receives his 25-year badge from White Watch Manager Bill Edwards, Chertsey Station rep



Charlie Thorne (left) Guildford Green Watch, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, receives his 25-year badge from Branch Rep Steve Moran



Chris Lowe (right), Group Manager Northants, receives his 25-year badge from Kevin Hedges, Officers Branch Rep



Valdis Freimanis (l) and Paul Moriarty (r) from Ammanford fire station, Mid & West Wales receive 25-year badges from Chris Howells, membership sec



Ean Kenniford (c) receives his 25-year badge from Divisional Rep Darren Kenniford, as members of Blue Watch, Pembroke Dock, Mid and West Wales, look on



Dave Callaghan (r), Watch Manager, Stevenage, Herts, White Watch, receives his 25-year badge from branch chair Jim Bull



Mick East (centre, right), Buxton, Derbyshire receives his 25-year badge from Branch Sec Dom McGlynn alongside members from Green Watch

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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.



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 note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). 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.