

FireFighter

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

July 2007



No cuts in Kernow

FBU continues campaign in Cornwall



Pay formula

Employers deliver eleventh-hour rise under the pay formula



Respect our privacy

Men and women members demand action on station facilities

Urban search and rescue

What does a USAR technician do?



Another death on duty



We have all been saddened by yet another death in the line of duty. Paul Mallaghan of Blue Watch, Stevenage, Hertfordshire

Fire and Rescue Service was killed at an incident on the evening of 16 June.

I know that every member of the FBU will share in the grief that has brought to Paul's family, friends and colleagues. There is nothing that can replace a loved one who is killed in such circumstances but I am sure that everyone concerned has done, and continues to do, everything possible to support Paul's family.

As with other serious incidents and other fatalities, the Union will engage in a detailed investigation of the incident and possible causes. Often major lessons can be learned from such investigations. I am aware, from talking to the families of other members killed at work, that this process can assist them in coming to terms with their loss.

I am also aware that the families are frequently keen to see everything possible done that can be done to learn any lessons and to try to prevent such tragedies from occurring to other firefighters. We will be doing everything we can to ensure that is the case with this incident as well as with the other fatal accidents we are still addressing.

Pay rise 2.4%

In June we were able to reach agreement at the National Joint Council that the 2007 pay rise would be 2.4%. This is the rise due under the APT formula so it

was an achievement for all of us that the rise was delivered – on time and without a major fight. We asked for some stability in the service and this pay rise may assist in achieving some.

However, we are aware that the employers have not agreed to honour the formula for the future and that they are likely to have a range of demands in relation to pay. So the coming 12 months will be busy again on the issue of pay.

CPD

As we go to press, the long running saga of CPD (continuing professional development) and LSI (long service increment) rumbles on. The union has not been able to reach final agreement on the new payments because of our concerns over the effect on our pensions.

The introduction of CPD and removal of long service increment are the result of the 2003 pay and conditions agreement and these issues have inevitably proved to be the most controversial aspects of that agreement. The Union continues to press for the best possible arrangements in terms of pensionability. The downside of that is that we have been unable to reach final agreement and therefore the payments are not yet in your pay packets.

Glyn Evans

You will see from the article in this month's magazine that our advisor on fire safety matters is retiring from this role. Glyn Evans previously served on the union's Executive Council on behalf of officer members. Since

A London Fire Brigade urban search and rescue (USAR) team work to rescue a builder trapped after a collapse last month

MORE ON USAR – PAGE 16



his retirement, he has continued to advise the Union on a huge range of issues. Glyn's technical understanding and detailed knowledge of the service has been absolutely invaluable over many years and his contribution

will be sadly missed.

Reading Glyn's article you will note his deep affection for our service and those who work within it. He brought that affection and understanding together with his expertise and

YOUR LETTERS

Iraq journey worthy of commendation and recognition

I have just read your epic journey to Iraq (Road to Iraq, June 2007) and I am almost at a loss for adequate words to express my admiration and appreciation for your efforts.

I congratulate you for the whole work needed which made it possible.

The time, the calculations, the money and the determination of you all is worthy of commendation and recognition.

I have always insisted that fire service personnel are a breed apart, which is proved constantly and I am thankful there are people like you.

Well done!
Alice F Campbell
Manchester

Not getting your own copy of *FireFighter* at home? Make sure you have informed your brigade secretary of any recent change of address.



provided an invaluable service to the Fire Brigades Union. His contribution will be greatly missed and on behalf of all members I wish Glyn all the best for the future.
Matt Wrack

LONDON FIRE BRIGADE/PA PHOTOS

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WIN
A Viking
Maelstrom
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PUZZLES

Win this month's quiz, and you'll be the owner of a Viking Maelstrom bicycle



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News

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JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

FBU slams shortage of hazmat officers

DAVID JONES/PA PHOTOS

LANCASHIRE

The FBU has called for more specialist hazmat officers to be employed by Lancashire Combined Fire Authority to tackle the rise in chemical incidents and fears proposals to widen the responsibilities of existing hazmat officers will undermine the ability of the brigade to respond effectively to a range of emergencies.

In its response to the brigade's draft integrated risk management plan, the FBU has pointed out that there has been a more than 10% increase in chemical incidents in the county from 2004 to 2006 while the number of station managers who attend them – either as incident commanders or specialist function officers – has been slashed by over 20% since June 2005.

An additional proposal to make hazmat officers responsible for inter-agency liaison at major incidents comes despite evidence that this could lead to a potentially high-risk over-stretch of critical specialist resources.

Peter Moss, Secretary of the FBU Officers Branch in Lancashire said: "Senior brigade



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

managers are claiming their proposals will boost resilience. What if a hazmats-trained officer is undertaking the role of inter-agency liaison officer while a further incident requiring hazmat expertise is occurring?

"The evidence shows that Hazmat incidents are large, complex and protracted. Two simultaneous hazardous material incidents in April demonstrated why the brigade's proposals could undermine the safety of the community.

"The role is also demanding enough, during incidents, without any extra burdens on individual officers. What we really need is more hazmat officers."

Instead of tackling the shortage of hazmat officers, the brigade is proposing to deny officers leave if it would mean an area was left without 'hazmat' cover.

Firefighters in neighbouring Cheshire tackled a blaze at Aztec Chemicals in Crewe last month. At its height 85 firefighters were at the scene along with six special appliances, a hazardous materials unit, an aerial appliance and a foam tanker. A 400-metre exclusion zone was imposed.

Union warns on perils of secondary contracts

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

The Union has raised the issue of secondary contracts of employment with the Department of Communities and Local Government, highlighting concerns about their impact on terms and conditions as well as pension and compensation rights.

Secondary contracts, which were discussed at the FBU's Annual Conference in May, are being encouraged by some fire and rescue services seeking to get firefighters to undertake additional duties.

Rolemap

Additional duties can be undertaken under the main contract of employment and, provided the tasks undertaken are within the rolemap of a firefighter, there are no problems associated with the Firefighters' Pension Scheme or the Firefighters' Compensation Scheme.

However, if they are undertaken under a secondary contract, this contract may not be covered by the Firefighters' Compensation

Scheme. As a result, members and their families would not be properly compensated if someone was killed or seriously injured.

Wholtime firefighters working under a second contract as a retained firefighter may also face problems with injury awards.

Members misinformed

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "Our members in a number of fire authorities are being encouraged to undertake a variety of additional duties under secondary contracts of employment. We know that some members have been seriously misinformed about these issues by their employers.

"These contracts pose potential dangers for FBU members and their families. The Union has already discussed its concerns with pension officials of the Department of Communities and Local Government and we will be raising the issue with the fire authorities concerned."

→ For more general information refer to All Members circular 2007HoCo305MW. For individual cases contact your local FBU official.

FBU probes toxins risk

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Forty firefighters are participating in a study launched by the Union to determine their exposure to toxins during the course of their routine work.

Firefighters are regularly contaminated by a toxic cocktail of chemicals and heavy metals. Exposure to dangerous man-made substances leaves firefighters carrying chemicals and heavy metals such as mercury, lead and cadmium, plastics, polychlorinated biphenols and their combustion products.

John McGhee, National Officer responsible for health and safety, said: "Chemical and heavy metal exposures during operational duties bring about



genetic changes or trigger genes to behave abnormally. This, in turn, can and does make firefighters ill, sometimes seriously ill.

"The FBU is collecting medical evidence that should ensure that fire and rescue services provide FBU members with appropriate equipment, and personal protective equipment to manage their safety correctly."

The study is being

led by Dr Sarah Myhill. After examining replies to questionnaires distributed by the Union, Dr Myhill selected those FBU members most suitable for the study and sent to their home addresses test kits for body fat, blood and urine analysis. Initial results are now being analysed.

The FBU will be publicising the theme of Toxins in the workplace at the annual Hazards conference at the end of July.

Sounding off!

JOHN DRAKE

FBU South West Regional Official

Compulsory redundancy

The Union has a longstanding policy of opposing any compulsory redundancies (CR) among wholtime members on fire stations and control rooms with national strike action. This has been and continues to be the right reaction to any sacking of our members, because that is what a redundancy is.

Collins' Concise Dictionary defined redundancy as "surplus to requirements: unnecessary or superfluous". But there is a human cost to redundancy. This glib term is something that can and does have far-reaching life-changing effects on the individuals it touches – and, of course, their families.

The bible of HR managers, Personnel Today, published research in 2005 showing that in 2003 89% of organisations used CR as a method of "downsizing" their workforce. It has become almost acceptable among both private and public sector workers that this is an inevitable element of modern-day working practices. But the questions that should

By accepting redundancies for one group of members, we are tacitly accepting redundancies for all members

be asked are: Why are workers resigned to compulsory redundancies? And what, if anything, can they do about it?

Other unions, such as PCS, are running high-profile campaigns to protect their members' jobs. It is not only a fundamental role but also morally correct for trade unions to use all methods at their disposal to protect members' jobs. But this can only be done if the full impact of CR is understood by all members. The basic premise of a trade union is that only by uniting can workers have the ability and strength to protect each other from detrimental treatment by a bullying employer.

However this can only be achieved if all union members understand that by accepting redundancies for one group of members they are tacitly accepting redundancies for all members. If compulsory redundancies are forced on our control members without action from all members of the FBU then, as sure as night follows day, they will soon be coming to a station near you!





RDS firefighters attend a new ULF course at Cindeford Fire Station, Gloucestershire

In brief



Union launches new 'skills for life' strategy

LIFELONG LEARNING

The Union is launching a new strategy to take forward its lifelong learning agenda to improve the numeracy, literacy and ICT skills (SfL – Skills for Life) of members and officials.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack was to formally unveil the strategy – 'Whole Organisation Approach to Skills for Life' – for the FBU and the UK Fire and Rescue Service at the Fire Service College on the 28 June.

The strategy sets out a number of principles and ideals that will help recognise that SfL impinges on all aspects of FRS work and importantly touches all members of staff, both uniformed and support.

Home and social lives

Just as important as improving SfL in the workplace is the impact this strategy will have in helping individuals improve their home and social lives.

The FBU has been proactive over the last three years in promoting and delivering an ethos that

lifelong learning should be an integral arm of the FBU and Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) training and development delivery for all staff.

As part of its commitment to lifelong learning, the Union is also active in the TUC's Unionlearn, which has been at the forefront in promoting SfL throughout the trade union movement.

Matt Wrack, National Official John McGhee and FBU ULF project manager Trevor Shanahan have all been signed up as Unionlearn Skills for Life advocates.

Consultation period

The strategy has been endorsed by the ULF project partners and will be the subject of a 12-week consultation period.

Trevor Shanahan said: "This is the first strategy document produced in the FBU and FRS that takes up the challenge of improving the numeracy, literacy and ICT skills of members, officials and staff. That it has been achieved in partnership with CFOA and other FRS stakeholders is a credit to the FBU ULF project".

◆ Cleaners at London's fire stations shouldn't receive a "living wage," three Conservative fire authority members have said. According to Brian Coleman, Conservative vice chair of London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, the rate of £7.20 an hour is, "just ridiculous". Labour Mayor Ken Livingstone described as "scandalous" the attempt "to block a decent wage for fire station cleaners" that reflects the high cost of housing in London and urged the meeting of the fire authority on 21 June to reject the Tories' arguments and pay the cleaners the London living wage.

◆ Sir Ken Knight, London Fire Brigade commissioner, has been appointed as the Government's new chief fire and rescue adviser. He is due to take up this post – created by the Department for Communities and Local Government – this summer. The chief fire and rescue adviser's unit is to "provide independent, professional advice on fire and rescue issues to the government," including "structure, organisation and performance, including equality". Sir Ken and his unit will also advise ministers, the Cabinet Office and local government during a major emergency. The unit will 'identify and disseminate good practice to fire and rescue services.'

◆ Just 300 out of over 30,000 schools in the UK have sprinkler systems installed, according to the Government, citing figures from insurance companies. There were 1,291 fires in schools in 2004 causing £52 million in losses, which covers property damage and the costs of the fire and rescue services attending the fires but not the consequential costs of, for instance, providing alternative accommodation when needed, or disruption to education. The figures were in a parliamentary reply by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

Another Hertfordshire firefighter dies on duty

FIREFIGHTER FATALITY

Another firefighter from Stevenage Blue Watch has died on duty.

Two crews from the watch were attending a car fire close to Junction 8 of the A1 at 21:16 on the night of 16 June. At approximately 21:35 the vehicle involved in the car fire was struck by another vehicle causing the death of Sub Officer Paul Mallaghan, age 46, and injuring another firefighter, both from Blue Watch, Stevenage.

Blue Watch, Stevenage had previously lost firefighters Jeff Wornham and Mike Miller in a

flat fire on 2 February 2005. The inquest into their deaths only took place earlier this year.

Tony Smith, Hertfordshire FBU brigade secretary said: "Paul was an extremely well respected Sub Officer in Hertfordshire who will be sorely missed by his friends and colleagues. The injured firefighter has been released from hospital and is recuperating. "To lose three firefighters from the same watch at two separate incidents is cruel beyond imagination. Our thoughts are with their families, friends and colleagues."

→ See General Secretary's comment



Paul Mallaghan, an extremely well respected Sub Officer

SEAN WATCHER/FIREPHOTOS



Proposals mean there would be no provision for scene safety at car fires

FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) claims to be the leader of modernisation within the UK fire and rescue service. In demonstrating just how modern it is, HFRS appears to want to outdo Cheshire Fire Service – and its Targeted Response Vehicle (TRV) – with its own First Response Vehicle (FRV), which is to be stationed at Redbridge in Southampton. Don't confuse this with co-responding. This is a cut-down version of a fire engine – but not so good.

HFRS has conducted roadshows with the public on their Fire Service and according to their interpretation of consultation: a roadshow led by deputy chief fire officer Alan House, the new king of spin.

The party line is that Southampton, a major port city, is not losing a fire engine. It is just getting a different type. A fire engine that can only crew two firefighters, carries less equipment and can only hold 200 litres of water, otherwise it will exceed the safe working load of the vehicle.

There is a proposal that this new appliance will tackle all secondary fires (bins, rubbish etc), including car fires. HFRS intends to ignore a number of health and safety requirements for breathing apparatus at car fires. There is no provision for scene safety. And the safety of the firefighters and the current risk assessment for car fires that requires a minimum of four firefighters in attendance will not apply.

There is every possibility that at an incident firefighters could be out of sight of each other and so find themselves in lone working conditions. In the climate of attacks on firefighters – which are becoming more prevalent – this is not a good thing. If both firefighters tackle the incident together, they could be in a position that no-one is operating the pump. This would leave it open to any reprobate to interfere with and endanger the safe working of the firefighters, or perhaps decide to take the fire engine for a joyride.

HAMPSHIRE

**From TRVs to FRVs
– this cut-down fire
engine will tackle
all secondary fires,
including car fires**

This is the latest idea from HFRS that will mean not recruiting enough firefighters to handle the incidents it has to attend, from a brigade that has decided that the Critical Attendance Standard (CAST) does not apply to it because it has been devised by the FBU.

Redbridge will lose six firefighters from each watch of 16 and lose a proper fire engine, despite Redbridge's fire ground having the greatest number of residential high-rise properties in Southampton.

Have no lessons been learned from Stevenage? It will mean that the nearest fire station to back up Redbridge is five to eight minutes away – time that will be critical.

Worse still, the FRV will be jump-crewed with the Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP), which is currently primarily crewed. So if the FRV is out, the ALP will be unavailable at a time it is most needed. There will be a delay in mobilising it as the FRV will have to return to station to crew it.

The other part of the plan is to introduce an RDS fire engine to Southampton at St Mary's Fire Station, a sister station to Redbridge. Part of the rationale is that Redbridge often standby at St Mary's; so why not already have the fire engine there and just call in a RDS crew when needed?

This proposal certainly has not got anything to do with targeting ethnic minority workforces in the area for retained duties, an initiative that is struggling to make any headway. The fact is, HFRS has not been able to entice firefighters working at St Mary's to undertake RDS duties.

Our members there know that this could lead to further jobs cuts in Southampton and mean St Mary's losing an existing fulltime fire engine, for HFRS will be able to claim – should the plan go ahead – that the RDS fire engine can cope with the workload alone.

The service – past, present and future

GLYN EVANS

“ Looking back at my experiences in the early 1970s in the UK fire service, I find myself surrounded by the ghosts of the men and women I have served with. I also find that while many things have changed, some issues and realities are still here with us today.

When I joined, in my home town of West Bromwich in 1970, firefighters across the UK were on a 56-hour week. In my brigade we worked three day shifts, three night shifts, followed by three days off. Other brigades worked different shift patterns. With one very young daughter to look after, the shift system suited my wife and I very well.

Many of my fellow firefighters and officers had served in the fire service or HM Forces during the Second World War and brought an immense sense of perspective and understanding of life to the role of the fire service. The average age of the 16-person watch that I joined was 37. Joining at 22, I was the second-youngest member.

At least two of our emergency fire control staff, who were all women of immense character, had also served in the fire service during the war years. They all taught me that being a firefighter is not simply a job, it's a vocation. I learned that humility, respect, tolerance, patience and caring for your fellow human beings are virtues of a firefighter.

Although there was a common pay rate system then, it was incremental and age-related for the first few years. Promotion was very slow and generally referred to as being 'dead men's shoes'.

There were also three firefighter pension schemes in place at the time, two for existing fire service members and one for new entrants.

Officers – and I was destined to become one of them – either worked the shift or day duty system of 56 hours per week, or the residential duty system that saw them work extremely long hours on call from home. Residential officers received various allowances in addition to their salary. Unfortunately, their allowances were not pensionable so on retirement their pension was the same as the equivalent shift or day duty officer who had worked 56 hours a week. The introduction of the flexible duty system removed that anomaly.

In some brigades, firefighters were encouraged to work part-time outside the service to make up their wages – the experience gained in driving lorries, for example, was considered a useful aid to driving fire appliances, and window cleaning in developing topographical knowledge of your area. Despite being a three-station brigade we were under strength. In an area then enjoying full employment offering good wages for much shorter hours, the fire service was not an obvious career prospect for a young person. Equally, retention of trained and experienced personnel proved difficult. I don't recall ministers telling us then how many people were waiting to join the fire service.

What propped up front line staffing levels was the use of both prearranged and casual overtime. Unfortunately, it was self defeating system because the cost of overtime working impacted upon budgets making it difficult to find funding to recruit and train additional staff. When FBU members decided to ban overtime and wholetime retained duties in 1973, many brigades were forced to recruit a substantial number of firefighters – both wholetime and RDS – to make up the shortfalls they had been running with for years.

The major adjoining brigade to West Bromwich was the Birmingham Fire and Ambulance Service. So no problems with co-responding there, then. Except they weren't paramedics, but firefighters with a St John's Ambulance First Aid Certificate who staffed the ambulances. Nevertheless, as firefighters, they did whatever they could to save people's lives and provide a public service. With the creation of the West Midlands County Council in 1974 a professional ambulance service was created and the role passed from the fire service.

Each year the brigade was subject to the HMI's inspection – as were all. We spent weeks cleaning and polishing and practising drills in anticipation of the arrival from London of HMI, which watched on as the on duty watches performed drills and a large exercise normally performed in conjunction with a neighbouring brigade. This annual inspection and the subsequent HMI's report – now no more – proved to the world, or at least the local populace, that we were, in today's jargon, fully competent in our role.

By 1970 the FBU had already published a forward-looking document entitled *A Service for the 60s* which proposed a far more professional fire service in all its aspects. Over the years we worked hard and struggled through dispute after dispute to achieve that professional recognition and status and despite opposition from many quarters we got a long way towards it.

However, whether it's co-responding, establishment levels, "family-friendly" shift patterns, overtime or pensions – and, most importantly, the challenge of ensuring there is a trained, experienced and skilled workforce able to maintain high standards of health and safety while properly protecting the public – many of the issues we faced 30-odd years ago are now back on the political agenda today.

Now, perhaps, it is for the youngest members of the service and the FBU to set down their ambitions and aspirations for the fire and rescue services in the 21st century and get started on pursuing them. Don't argue – just do it. We did.



→ Glyn Evans retired this month as fire safety advisor to the FBU. The Union would like to put on record its thanks to Glyn for his significant contribution to the work of the FBU over many years.



RTA 1978 – being a firefighter is not simply a job, it's a vocation

PICTURE: LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

Changes to fire and rescue service responses to automatic fire alarms (AFAs) are provoking controversy across the UK. Below, we publish two letters on Greater Manchester's new AFA policy

The 'Drive to Arrive' policy: is it working?

YES

The article on GMFRS "Drive to Arrive" Policy seems full of inaccuracies and is misleading (Firefighter, April 2007, Fifth Column).

In my direct experience there is no truth in the statement 'Pumps within GMC [Greater Manchester] do not turn out on blues and twos to schools, hospitals, airports and (in some areas) domestics'.

The policy we work to clearly states that an immediate response under blue light conditions will be made to property fires, including vehicles on roadway, RTC [road traffic collision] persons trapped, AFAs [Automatic Fire Alarms] which have operated and confirmed an actual incident and AFAs unconfirmed where a life/sleeping risk exists. Crews are also able to respond under blue light conditions to any other situation where, based on information received, they consider people are in immediate danger or there is a risk of distress. For example, some people, particularly the elderly, become distressed at even minor incidents. This information will be indicated on the turnout instructions and crews have the flexibility to respond accordingly.

Not forced to guess

Watches and officers are not 'forced to guess' how they should respond. They have had training and guidance on the policy and they have the information on the turnout sheet obtained from Emergency Call Management

questioning by control staff. One would hope, in their position, they have the knowledge and experience to make a considered risk assessment and, using their professional judgment, respond appropriately. If there is any doubt the option to default to a blue light and two-tone horn response should be made.

For the three examples quoted, the first occurred Sunday 13/8/07 15:03hrs, Seaford Road, Salford. The fire was reported as a rubbish fire. However, a repeat call indicated proximity to a vehicle. This information was relayed to the responding crew who upgraded to a blue light response en route. It did develop into a large incident but this could as easily be attributed to the conditions on site, a running fuel fire and poor water supply. (15:18hrs Make pumps 4 for Water Relay)

The second occurred Wednesday 12/7/06 17:11hrs, Dial Park School, Offerton. Two pumps were mobilised on the initial call to a school on fire and a further pump was mobi-

lised by control following several repeat calls.

The third example occurred Monday 25/12/06 06:43hrs, Simply Fresh Foods, Astley. Two pumps responded to the AFA. A full de-brief of attending operational crews was carried out and it was agreed that the 'Drive to Arrive' policy had no impact on the outcome of this incident.

Hotel evacuations

Following the introduction of the policy I have no doubt that some hotel occupants have been inconvenienced waiting for the arrival of the Fire Service. I haven't heard of any waiting as long as 45 minutes. I'm sure that wouldn't have gone unnoticed! I am personally aware of an occasion where hotel management evacuated several minutes prior to calling the Fire Service, making it appear to the waiting hotel occupants that the Fire Service had taken a long time to arrive.

I've been in this job long enough to remember colleagues and friends who've had the misfortune to be involved in RTCs en route to incidents. These RTCs have caused physical and mental injury and even fatalities to both operational crews and members of the public. In my opinion, often they have occurred while proceeding to incidents for which there was no need for a blue light response. The risk has to be considered, assessed and addressed. In a professional Fire Service we are being paid to take that responsibility and make that judgment.

Phillipa Palmer, GFCO, GMFRS

One would hope they have the knowledge and experience to make a considered risk assessment and, using their professional judgment, respond appropriately



Fire destroys a school.
Delayed response can cost
millions – and lives

FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

Since January 2006, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMCFRS) has been operating a "Drive to Arrive" policy. All turn-outs, regardless of the origin of the call/incident, place strong relevance on 'sleeping risk', not 'life risk'. Pumps within GMC do not turn out on blues and twos to schools, hospitals, airports, and (in some areas) domestics ... unless we are provided with specific information stating that persons or property of value are involved, or if there is a likelihood that persons may be asleep within the premises.

If it is deemed that an emergency response is required, a decision must be made in character to make a risk assessment – an AFA.

GREATER MANCHESTER

Under the Drive to Arrive policy pumps do not turn out on blues and twos to schools, hospitals, airports, domestics

destroyed, along with two buildings.

May 2006 (weekend, Offerton) Automatic fire alarm (AFA) at a primary school. One pump, normal road speed attendance, as per policy. School destroyed.

Christmas Eve 2006 (Sunday morning, Astley) Food packaging company. AFA. One pump, normal road speed attendance, as per policy. Ended up as four pumps and two aerals. Business destroyed.

And that's not the only result of the policy. Imagine the reaction of the occupants of the many hotels within Manchester who are made to wait in all weathers, up to 45 minutes for an attendance to

NO

The (left) views of the GFCO only support the thrust of the original article – 'AFAs which have operated *and confirmed an actual incident*' (my italics). What is the function of Automatic Fire Detection if not to alert at the earliest opportunity that a fire may have started? If we await confirmation then inevitably the fire will have grown larger. This eventuality does of course place both firefighters and members of the public alike in significantly greater danger.

Whilst the GFCO speaks of 'training and guidance' for crews (woefully inadequate) the people who are making the incident assessment – the caller (even given the skills of our Emergency Fire Control Operators) has received no such training. Knowledge, experience and professional judgment does not count for much when you are some 10, 20, even 30 minutes away from the incident! The article is correct when referring to limited information. By its very nature information from an AFA, for example, can only be limited. The 'default to a blue and two tone horn response' comment is, I feel, accurately addressed in the article with the comment 'We know who will carry the can'.

While deliberately not exhaustive [since this letter at least two further 'drive to arrive' responses have resulted in a large incident – including the fire at the historic Manchester Central Library], the facts concerning the three incidents quoted are in fact supported

by the GFCO. The crews responding to the Salford fire were proceeding at normal road speed without warning devices until repeat calls were relayed. The first crews responding to the Offerton school proceeded at normal road speed (the third pump was required because the fire had developed!). The crews attending the Astley fire proceeded at normal road speed. I have attended these incident de-briefs and I would question who 'agreed' that the policy had no impact on the outcome.

Risk of mishap

The GFCO seems to make light of the fact that members of the public are now required to stay outside until a fire service response arrives. Ignoring the weather and other comfort aspects, the FBU believes that a 'Drive to Arrive' response negates the 'get out and stay out, call the fire brigade' ethos. Indeed, we feel it will not be long before a serious mishap

If we await confirmation, then inevitably the fire will have grown larger, placing firefighters and the public in greater danger

happens to someone who has not 'stayed out'. Incidentally I do note that the GFCO chooses not to address the significant fire losses or the concerns being expressed by the insurance industry.

Timing crucial

As an operational firefighter of over 30 years – all of it spent at a very busy fire station – I too have seen the results of RTCs on route to incidents. In my experience accidents occur often when drivers are attempting to get that little extra when responding to a 'persons reported', and not always as a result of the way in which the fire appliance has been driven. I have more frequently felt frustrated when dealing with a major fire, or worse, a fatality, with the knowledge that maybe if we had arrived just a minute or two sooner it would have made all the difference. This is a major factor when dealing with attendance times.

The article in general was not misleading but accurately reflected the views, and frustrations of those operating this policy. I do however feel the views expressed in the response from the GFCO more accurately reflect the views of the ACFO who has been responsible for the introduction of this policy.

Kevin Brown, regional official, FBU R5

→ Both authors point out correctly that the date for the introduction of the policy was August 2005 (despite FBU opposition and reservations) and not, as stated in the article, January 2006.



Demonstration in Truro on May 31, with the coffin symbolising the 35 posts to be axed

DUNCAN MILLIGAN

NO TO CUTS IN KERNOW

The brigade is not even pretending that its cuts proposals are risk-based. The FBU is leading the fightback

Down in the far flung South West of England is the County of Cornwall. It is a part of the country that is famed for surf, sea and sunshine. During the summer months holiday-makers from across the UK and further afield swell the population of Cornwall massively. Cornwall, or Kernow as it is known in the Cornish language, had until recently Objective One status from the EU, reflecting the low wage economy and the economic decline following the collapse of both the mining and clay industries. However, investment in Kernow is now rising with new businesses and homes featured in the local press on an almost weekly basis. So with this influx of new investment, better roads, more houses and the subsequent increase in risk how does the county council-run fire brigade plan to improve community and firefighter safety? By downgrading the only two-shift station in the county to day-crewed.

When cuts have been proposed in other areas across the country they have been clouded in the alchemy of integrated risk management planning (IRMP). But not in Cornwall.

The chief fire officer (CFO) Matt Littmoden has been very clear that these cuts are not based on risk, but on financial restrictions imposed by the Liberal Democrat-controlled county council, and that they form the “least worst option”. So hats off to CFO Littmoden for that honesty. But before we get carried away let’s put those hats back on because as the county council’s chief advisor on the fire service in Cornwall shouldn’t he also be at the forefront of the fight to improve the Service – not decimate it? He has given his professional opinion, which is that it is the “least worst option”. Well FBU members have another option. It is called campaigning to save and then improve the fire and rescue service in Cornwall. It is called fighting for what is right. It is called being the true voice of the fire service. It is called

‘IRMPs reflect local need...set out plans to tackle effectively risks to communities’

Fire minister Angela Smith



DUNCAN MILLIGAN

THE PROPOSALS

- 35 wholtime firefighter posts will be lost in the brigade – one in six of the wholtime workforce of 206;
- Night time cuts at Camborne and Falmouth fire stations would mean that between 6pm and 8am the fire service would take longer to get to 999 incidents;
- Cuts would reduce emergency response capability across the whole of Cornwall;
- Cuts would mean Cornwall would be the only county in England without any around-the-clock, immediate response fire crews.

savage cuts. The silence from CFOA has been deafening. Once again when called upon to stand up for what is right, the CFOA has been comatose, perhaps on the horizontal resting platforms they are so keen to get in fire stations.

Now to HM Government and their insistence that IRMPs are not about cuts but rather matching “resources” to risk in a fire authority’s area. Well let’s see how this stacks up in Cornwall. On 5 March David Drew, Labour MP for Stroud and a member of the FBU’s parliamentary group of MPs asked Angela Smith, the Fire Minister, in the Commons “what assessment she has made of the adequacy of fire service cover in Cornwall; what discussions she has had with the Fire Brigades Union on this matter; and if she will make a statement.”

Ms Smith replied:

“Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) are required by the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework to have in place and maintain an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) which reflects local need and sets out plans to tackle effectively both existing and potential risks to communities. The IRMP enables the authority to tailor cover to fire and other incidents to local circumstances—evaluating where risk is greatest and allocating resource accordingly. It is not the role of Ministers to intervene in the operational proposals of an authority’s IRMP. That is for elected members of the authority concerned to determine following full consultation with the local community. The local authority is best placed to act on the professional advice of principal officers and to balance the competing local demands on available resources for the benefits of the communities they serve.”

So, the CFO says that these proposed cuts are financially-driven and not risk-based while the Fire Minister says that IRMPs are to reflect local need and tackle effectively both existing and potential risk. Meanwhile, CFOA are asleep or don’t care (oh, and the RFU don’t know anything about it and as for FFA, well nothing has been heard from baby CFOA at all!)

Once again, no prizes for guessing who is leading the fight to protect frontline services in Cornwall. The FBU! One thing can be certain, if Cornwall County Council can get away with this, and other fire authorities are watching with interest, then the next time it could be your brigade! As the name suggests, IRMPs should be risk-based, not cost-based. It’s about time all those other “stakeholders” that claim to care about the Service stood up and were counted. As for the FBU, we will continue to campaign to oppose these cuts vigorously, and if necessary take industrial action to stop them. Why? Because as the real professionals in the service, we know that cuts cost lives.

As *Firefighter* went to press, 19 June, Cornwall councillors voted to refer the cuts plan back to the CFO for further risk assessment. Any future package will be referred back to the full county council. The campaign continues.

John Drake, FBU regional officials, South West (Region 13)

Cuts are financially-driven, not risk-based, and represent the ‘least worst option’ Cornwall CFO Littmoden

professional responsibility! How’s that for a number of different options!

FBU members know only too well that members of that august body, the Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CFOA) are only too quick to attack us when we oppose their dangerous cuts in front line services. The likes of McGuirk, Hessler (see *Firefighter* magazine, June 2007) and others write lengthy articles and papers criticising the FBU for not seeing things their way. They criticise our industrial tactics when all else fails, and for having the audacity for challenging their right to manage. So where have the CFOA been on the Cornwall issue? Well, the FBU have not been inundated with messages of support, with condemnation of the County Council policy makers and bean counters who are proposing these

RESPECT OUR PRIVACY

The FBU is to review facilities in all UK fire and rescue service facilities built with PFI funding as a result of growing concern about the 'unisex' approach of their private owners

The FBU believes the fire service should be fully and properly financed by public funds and has opposed the Government's costly and controversial Private Finance Initiative for the past decade. Boosting the profits of private companies that win PFI contracts to build and run public sector buildings such as schools, hospitals and fire stations just doesn't add up.

And there is a hidden cost that is now getting the attention it deserves. Frontline firefighters are paying the price in loss of privacy when they are expected to use unisex locker rooms, showers and toilets in new buildings funded and managed by private firms.

That this should be happening when the

that lack of privacy could help deter women from sticking with their chosen career.

There is now a groundswell of support for moves to stop the rot. The FBU annual conference heard first hand from women delegates about the indignities of shared facilities and why they and their male colleagues deserve separate changing rooms, toilets, showers and locker rooms.

A grim litany of complaints unfolded during the debate. They detailed the lack of privacy frontline firefighters face, from no floor-to-ceiling partitions in toilets and cramped steamy shower cubicles to embar-

assment at having to change in joint locker rooms and use toilets alongside colleagues from the opposite sex.

Delegates voted unanimously for the Union to carry out an up-to-date review of facilities in all PFI buildings within the UK Fire and Rescue Service, to present to the women's Annual General Meeting later this year.

Some regions are already on the case. In Avon dissatisfaction with facilities at the PFI-funded Severn Joint Training Centre (JTC), built three years ago, was chronicled in a hard-hitting report outlining current inadequacies. The centre is used by other brigades, including crews from Gloucestershire and Somerset.

Kerry Baigent, FBU National Women's Committee Secretary, who co-wrote the

The fear is that lack of privacy could help deter women from sticking with their chosen career

Government is trying to encourage more women to join the service – the target is 15 per cent of frontline firefighters in England by 2009 – makes penny-pinching plans which fail to build in separate facilities, even more astonishing. Failure to get it right is a missed opportunity.

Latest figures show that just 2.8 per cent of frontline fire crews are female. Inroads are being made – 6.6 per cent of new frontline trainees were women in 2006. But many women firefighters – and a far greater proportion than male firefighters – leave the Service early. The fear is



Kerry Baigent: Chief Fire Officers in denial

At the Severn JTC men – uncomfortable changing in front of female colleagues – first raised the issue

report, is keen to see "Dignity for All" in stations and training centres. Cost-cutting should not compromise privacy, the report argues. It contains a checklist of minimum standards, calling for current unisex facilities to be split into separate private spaces for men and women, floor to ceiling screening for all showers and toilets and sanitary disposal units in all women's toilets.

"We've got Chief Fire Officers who are in denial and fail to recognise that all firefighters need to feel comfortable changing and showering. And that means respecting



Women firefighters at Martock station in Somerset use a makeshift sign to let male colleagues know they are using the shower

their privacy.”

It is not only female firefighters who are keen to see an end to unisex facilities. At the Severn JTC it was men who first raised the issue. Kevin Herniman, regional FBU official for the South West says men reported feeling uncomfortable changing in front of female colleagues. “Not everyone’s got a George Clooney body, and men can be quite shy and embarrassed to be sharing locker rooms. It shouldn’t have to happen. The locker room also opens straight onto a corridor, which, again, can cause embarrassment.”

Lothian and Borders brigade has a third of all female frontline firefighters in Scotland – 45 women making up a very impressive – in UK terms – five per cent of the firefighting workforce.

Denise Christie is women’s rep and vice chair for the Union in Lothian and Borders and regional chair of the women’s section in Scotland. She has championed the cause of ending both inadequate and unisex facilities. She carried out a survey at stations across the region and won the story media coverage.

“The service actually do quite a lot encouraging women to join, but once they are there their needs tend to get forgotten about,” she says. “If they want to recruit and retain more women, they should put their money where their mouth is and invest in proper facilities across the board.”

Speaking out can get results. Denise’s own station in Edinburgh – Tollcross – was built 21 years ago and had just one shower and one toilet. After union involvement in the early stages of recent revamp plans, women now have their own toilets, showers and locker room.

A new station is planned in Edinburgh, and Denise is clear how the Union should respond. “We need to get involved at the very start of the project, demand to see the plans, and even the pre-plans. Money is always an issue, but minimising space for facilities is just not on. We have to point out what’s not acceptable, armed with examples from other

After Union involvement in recent revamp plans, women now have their own toilets, showers and locker room

brigades. It’s a lot harder to get changes once new buildings have gone up.”

The Union now has a voice on the facilities sub-committee in the brigade, and will be making sure its voice is heard.

Questions on facilities are to be included in a wide-ranging survey – prompted by the Union – of all female firefighters and a sample of 2,000 men to be carried out by the department for Communities and Local Government in the coming weeks. Women’s responses could well boost the “Dignity for All” campaign now starting to roll.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

An experienced woman firefighter who has trained at the PFI-funded JTC in Severn Park, Avon, tells it like it is ...

“When I train at the centre, I won’t use the facilities to shower, I’ll wait until I get back to my own station or back home.

It’s far from ideal, but I’m just not comfortable with carting my undies and everything across a communal facility, where people – mainly men – are stripped off down to next to nothing because they’re not used to women coming in there. I don’t want to see men in the next to nothing and they probably don’t want to see me either.

The changing rooms are unisex – they are not separate units, but individual traps, that get all steamed up. People can look over the top or underneath, which doesn’t make you feel very secure.

It’s a very male environment because there are so few women. The locker room is unisex: everyone is expected to get changed in there together. Me, I just get my stuff and go into the ladies toilet on another floor to change, if it is free.

I’ve worked in jobs outside the fire service and separate facilities have just not been an issue.

The new building was a chance to get it right but they didn’t. It seems ridiculous not to have separate facilities if fire chiefs really want to encourage women to join and stay on.

People are not happy about the lack of privacy, but don’t like to make a fuss. Now, after the Union report, it’s getting talked about more openly, which has to be good.

We want Dignity for All. People shouldn’t be made to feel uncomfortable. The job can be challenging enough without that. They should split the locker room and changing rooms.



WHAT DOES A USAR TECHNICIAN DO?

Pug Molloy, after 25 years as a firefighter, now has a new specialist role created as part of the Government's New Dimension programme

Pug Molloy has clocked up more than 25 years as a frontline firefighter, working for Hereford and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the past 11 years. He is now a USAR (Urban Search and Rescue) technician, a new role created as part of the Government's New Dimension programme that aims to bolster the fire service's preparedness for larger scale incidents and catastrophes.

A long-standing FBU official who recently took over the Health and Safety brief, Pug is relishing his role as a USAR technician, getting to grips with how best to use equipment designed to deal with "new threats" in a complex and increasingly unpredictable world. From global terrorism to global warming, the potential challenges are immense. "The attack on the World Trade Centre on 9/11 changed everything," says Pug. "If something similar happened here then – or three or four incidents happened simultaneously – the services would not have been able to cope." The atrocity certainly focused minds and helped inform New Dimension.

USAR is a key part of contingency plans for coping primarily with large-scale building collapse, and Pug and fellow technicians across the country are acquiring the skills and know-how needed to use new state-of-the-art equipment to tackle major incidents.

Pug says that learning how to use the new equipment is "a bit like being a probationer" – it's all new and fresh at first. Intensive training brings the competence and confidence to use the kit effectively when the call comes.

With his long-term experience as a mainstream firefighter, Pug is finding it "energising" to learn fresh skills and build on old ones. Rescuing people and saving as many lives as possible when disaster strikes is a very serious

business. But he adds, rather winningly, "you do get to play with Big Toys." He was ready for the challenge of learning new skills and honing competence in using new equipment. He is also a USAR trainer, working with fellow fulltime and, on occasion, on-call colleagues.

There are five USAR modules – each a big container, Pug explains. The first contains "breaching and breaking" equipment – to get through concrete for instance – and materials to shore up buildings as it's being done. Module 3 is an extension of this – carrying more heavy-duty kit such as equipment for shoring up, mitre saws and platforms to work on.

Module 4 is a very big skip lorry, equipped with a "BOBCAT" – a Multi Purpose Vehicle – which, Pug explains is "a cross between a tipper and a forklift truck" to dig into places and, rescue people. Module 5 is an open container carrying wood to shore up buildings.

'The attack on the World Trade Centre on 9/11 changed everything'



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



USAR Module 1 includes 'breaching and breaking' equipment



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Pug Molloy (left) is also a USAR trainer

The latest phase of the USAR roll-out programme is "Module 2, carrying rescue equipment, designed principally for use in major transport-related incidents, especially those involving trains or aircraft. The new equipment is complex and requires specialist training. It allows for two different methods of hot cutting, cold-cutting and confined space working equipment, including "SavOx" self rescue sets, a ventilation system with ducting and air monitoring equipment.

Learning how to use equipment effectively and safely takes time and practice. "We spend a lot of time testing out systems, getting to know the kit, working on safe and efficient

‘We focus tightly on the equipment and how best to use it’

working practices and focusing on the basics," says Pug, who enjoys the disciplined focus. "In this job, there is no time to get involved in community outreach. We can focus tightly on the equipment and how best to use it," he adds.

Pug, of course, like the rest of us, hopes there won't be too many catastrophes to attend. "It's double-edged – we want to go out and use our skills but no-one wants a disaster or major incident to happen."

But if and when they do, as they surely will, the thinking is that USAR teams and other highly trained New Dimension staff will be on the scene quickly to minimise loss of life and damage. "If it hadn't been for HVP (High Volume Pumps – another New Dimension strand) they'd probably still be damping down now at Buncefield. They made a huge difference."

All those rigorous training drills, time spent testing out systems and safe working routines should pay dividends in lives saved and damage minimised. "As long as there's a phone call and we turn out and do a proper job, that's what we are there for," says Pug. New Dimension teams and firefighters across the country would no doubt agree. Not to mention the public.

With reference to What does a public servant of the year do? (May 2007), *Firefighter* omitted a word of thanks to WM Jan Morris, FF Mark Kirkham, FF Nick Carlier and FF Jason Hill, who assist Alan Middleton at cadet evenings at Ashfield Young Offenders Institute on Thursdays.

Working For You



GILES THOMAS

Control staff rep

Mid and West Wales

Emergency fire control staff in Mid & West Wales are up in arms over establishment shortfalls that are seeing them work overtime in contravention of the Grey Book and national agreements.

Since May, 14 shifts have gone uncovered while crewing has been reduced to four. And on five shifts crewing levels were as low as three – two below minimum! Meanwhile, officers have been forced to remain in control because on two night shifts there were no supervisory ranks on duty. The agreed staffing for emergency control in the brigade is 36 uniformed posts, 32 of which are on watch. The actual staffing level today is 28, with just 24 staff on watch. This is tantamount to running a 24 hour shift station with just three watches instead of four. Things have reached crisis point.

The problems herald from three years ago when, following falling establishment levels, M&W Wales senior managers refused to employ more staff until a staffing review was completed. Delays followed delays and a report was finally produced by external consultants in September 2006. The costs were significant, the report over three months late and the supporting evidence lacking. The Service nevertheless concurred with its recommendations that staffing levels should be significantly reduced.

Subsequent consultation with staff and negotiation with the FBU saw little progress and the final recommendations went before senior managers in early June – without the knowledge of the staff – and were approved for submission to the fire authority in mid June. Watch staffing would be reduced to five, with a minimum of four, a number of part time posts created to augment the watch at 1200-2359 and the number of flexi duty officers would be increased from three to five. In the meantime, the CFO made a number of assurances on staffing, including not implementing the recommendations prior to approval. However staff in temporary promoted roles have been reverted to their substantive positions and public holiday leave is only being granted 'subject to minimum crewing being maintained'. Minimum crewing, however, can only be maintained by staff working overtime!

In a further attempt to end this long running issue, on 5 June FBU officials tabled a compromise position in which watches would be six-strong with a minimum of four while there would be four flexi-duty officers. Management rejected this and the proposals were agreed by the authority's personnel committee on 18 June. As *Firefighter* went to press they were to go before the full fire authority on 25 June before approval by the Welsh Assembly Minister. This is an attack on all FBU members. Messages of support: control@mawwfire.gov.uk

Sobering thoughts

40% of male drinking occasions are binge sessions. Women's drinking is growing too

ALCOHOL

In recent years there has been growing concern about the way that British people drink, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of 'binge-drinking' and dependency.

Constant media reports have brought the issue to a head, but our consumption has been on the increase for some time now. Forty percent of all male drinking occasions are binge sessions – defined as twice the recommended daily limits: 3-4 units for men; 2-3 units for women. Binge drinking among women has also risen significantly over the last three years. More broadly, around one in 13 people in Britain is dependent on alcohol.

Men

Men are less likely than women to abstain, twice as likely to drink above recommended levels and more likely to report alcohol-related problems.

One indicator of men's vulnerability is the gap between men and women in terms of life expectancy. On average, men in all developed countries die five years earlier than women.

The World Health Organisation has identified cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes as the three principal health problems for developed countries, with shared risk factors including "smoking, unhealthy nutrition, lack of physical exercise and heavy drinking".

For men there are a number of alcohol-related chronic conditions that need to be flagged up. Among men deaths from liver disease and liver cirrhosis between 1990 and 2000 increased by 74%. In addition, approximately 13,000 men were admitted to hospital with liver disease where alcohol was a primary or secondary cause.

High blood pressure or hypertension will make a person more susceptible to heart disease and strokes. At least 5-7% of diagnosed cases of hypertension are due to heavy drinking and it is the commonest cause after obesity, to which alcohol misuse can also contribute.

Temporary impotence following heavy drinking is a common problem experienced by men. However, prolonged heavy drinking can also cause loss of libido and potency and can lead to shrinking of the testes.

Surveys of public attitudes to alcohol



MARTYN F CHILMAID/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

DRINKING TOO MUCH? THE SIGNS:

- ◆ Getting drunk often, especially when you really need to be sober
- ◆ Taking time off because of hangovers
- ◆ Having accidents, fights or arguments because of drink
- ◆ Getting into trouble because of things you do when drinking

misuse suggest that men in general are very alert to the problems caused in society as a whole such as drink driving and disorder. However, they are less aware of the problems it creates for them personally.

Women

Studies suggest that women are highly responsive to the emotional and social contexts in which they drink and it is possible to identify a number of key situations where women are vulnerable and at risk of developing problem drinking.

These include:

- ◆ The family – women in their role as mother or carer can use alcohol as a prop to cope with exhaustion, anxiety, isolation and possibly feelings of loss of role when children leave home
- ◆ Employment – studies suggest a range of

factors that influence drinking including stress created by having to balance home obligations and intense competition at work

- ◆ Partnerships – heavy drinking by partners, whether male or female, contributes to the start of heavy drinking, and equally the loss of a partner can trigger harmful drinking.

Men and women experience many of the same effects and ill effects of alcohol. However, women's physical make up affects the way that alcohol is processed in the body. Women's bodies have 10% more fat than men's and they have less fluid to dilute the alcohol, so the concentration of alcohol in the body is higher.

Seeking help

Research suggests that there are a number of factors that discourage people from seeking help for an alcohol problem.

These include the stigma attached to admitting a problem, fear of the consequences of making the problem public and practical problems of organising time to organise treatment.

→ If you require advice about your drinking please phone Drinkline on 0800 917 8282

Secondary industrial action

Q I work near an emergency fire control room that's about to take industrial action. We are all firefighters – can I take industrial action in support of my colleagues?

A If the staff at the control centre are employed by the same brigade as you, then you would be able to take industrial action as long as the Union has organised this industrial action after a statutory ballot. The dispute would be with the same employer and this would not be outlawed secondary action. The position would be different if the control centre staff were employed by a neighbouring (or different) brigade. In that situation, you would be taking illegal secondary action. This is something that the union is campaigning to change in the Trade Union Freedom Bill.

Q What is unofficial industrial action and what would happen to me as an individual if I took unofficial action?

A Unofficial action is action called for by individual representatives or firefighters without the support of a ballot and without full compliance with notification requirements. Unofficial action is unlawful. The union can be sued for damages and members taking it have no protection against dismissal. Calling unofficial action also has the effect of tainting any subsequent ballot and usually removes legal protection for that subsequent action.

Change of contract

Q My employer has issued me with a 12-week notice of a change of contract. Can

SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI



legal assistance can be requested to take the case further by making a claim in the employment tribunal or civil courts.

The time limit will be three months from the date when the pay was reduced in tribunal cases and six years in the courts.

If you consider the breach to be so serious that the contract is fundamentally undermined and you feel you have to resign, then you may be able to claim unfair dismissal in the tribunal even though you have brought your employment to an end. However, these claims are difficult and you must seek legal assistance before taking any action.

Pensions benefits under 50

Q I am under 50 and would like to retire, get a lump sum and then take up employment again with my pension abated. Can I do this?

A No you can't. The minimum pension age in the Firefighters Pension Scheme is 50. In the New FPS, it is 55. In the FPS, the only option you have below age 50 is to take a transfer to another scheme, unless you are eligible to retire on ill-health grounds. In the NFPS, you have a further option which is to draw an early but reduced pension (at age 55 or older). In neither scheme however can you draw any benefit below age 50.

→ 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

they do this and what are the implications?

A If your employer forces through a change without your agreement they may be acting in breach of contract. You should consider whether it is a term of the contract that is being changed. Non-contractual provisions or benefits can be modified by an employer at any time without the consent of the employee. You should also consider whether or not the change is accommodated within the meaning of the existing term.

Job descriptions, for example, are normally drafted more widely than the particular duties that an employee normally undertakes. You should consider whether the term is worded to give the employer the discretion to make the change – a “flexibility” clause.

If you are dissatisfied about a change of contract you could make a formal complaint under the grievance procedure. If the change in contract involves a shortfall in your wages and the matter remains unresolved then

‘The great thing about athletics is you can keep progressing’

Dalton Powell’s display cabinet is getting pretty full, as he just keeps on winning races

The display cabinet in Dalton Powell’s office at home in Nottingham is getting pretty crowded: he returned from the World Police and Firefighter Games in Adelaide earlier this year with three more gold medals.

Dalton, 43, is an elite athlete. He has been competing against elite sportsmen from fire and police services from around the world since the late 1990s, and usually returns with a trio of gold medals. In 2000, he came home from the Paris games with five.

This year, he won gold in the 100 metres, gold for his role in the four-person 100 metres relay and broke the world firefighters’ record for the 200 metres event in the 40-44 age group – coming in at a record-breaking 22.45 seconds, smashing through the 23.28 barrier, the previous record for this category at the games. He was running against mere whippersnappers as young as 40.

“The atmosphere in Adelaide was fantastic,” says Dalton. Police and firefighters come together for the games every two years and in Adelaide over 15,000

athletes gathered to compete. “The competition is always fierce in the games, but there is loads of socialising in the evenings and it’s very good natured,” says Dalton.

But, far from resting on his laurels, Dalton is gearing up to run against fellow sportsmen who don’t necessarily work for the uniformed emergency services. He is in training for the British Masters Athletics Championships in Birmingham later this month. Masters championships cater for mature sportsmen and women whose appetite for elite competition remains at a time in life when others may be happy to wind down a little and take up less strenuous sports.

Legendary sprinter

Not so Dalton. In September, he will again be up against top-class athletes from around the globe, travelling to Italy to compete in the World Masters Athletic Championship in Riccione, where athletes in their forties, fifties, sixties, seventies and even beyond turn out to test their prowess. Legendary sprinter Carl Lewis is among former Olympians expected to turn out.

“It will be the first time I’ve competed in outdoor events at the World Masters, and I hope to be in tip-top shape,” says Dalton, whose favourite distance is the 200 metres.

His training routine is rigorous and includes hill runs alongside a mix of gym workouts and traditional track running. There is certainly no slacking even when it’s cold and wet outside. “You’ve got to make sure you train well in winter in order to reap the benefit in the summer,” he says.

Dalton still finds time to coach Nottingham youngsters in athletics and has become well known in the community both for his role in community safety and his sporting success. He is often on local radio stations promoting safety and was interviewed when he got back



The games also include firefighting events

ROHAN PHILLIPS PHOTOGRAPHY





DALTON POWELL

Athlete Dalton Powell is a community safety officer with Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service who relishes his role as an FBU BEMM rep. When it comes to competing in the Police and Firefighter Olympics he has a winning track record.

‘In sport and at work, I like to surround myself with positive people. I love the job and have some very good colleagues. It’s important to encourage young people to achieve their dreams and mentoring can be helpful for those thinking of applying to the service’

from Adelaide with another clutch of gold medals.

In his role as FBU BEMM rep for the East Midlands, he is keen to encourage youngsters from the black community to consider joining the fire service. He is looking forward to turning out at Nottingham Carnival and the Mela festival, organised by the city’s Asian community to promote fire safety and spread the word that a career in fire and rescue can be very rewarding.

Colleagues at Notts FRS headquarters, where Dalton is based when he’s not out in the community, are “very supportive” when he’s off to compete, he says. “In sport and at work, I like to surround myself with positive people. I love the job and have some very good colleagues.

“It’s important to encourage young people to achieve their dreams and mentoring can be helpful for those thinking of applying to the service.”

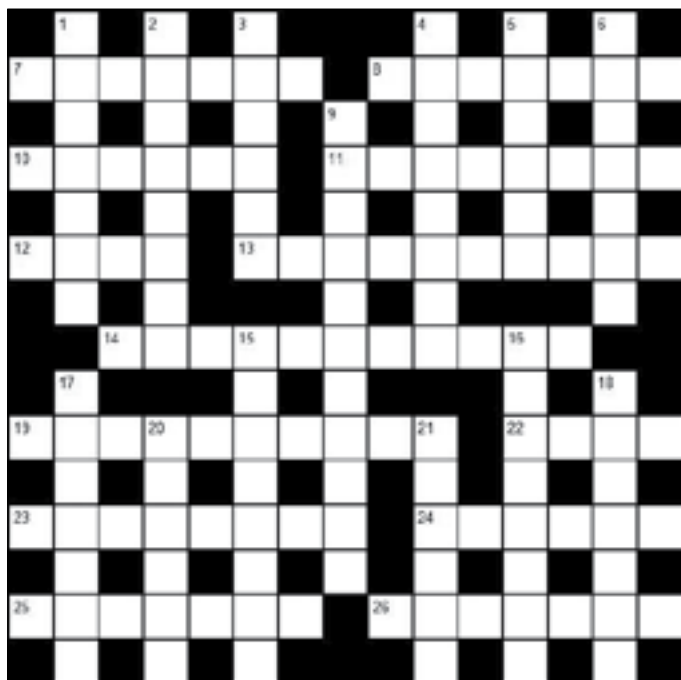
Still competing in their eighties

Dalton has 11 years left in the fire service, but hopes to carry on running when he can no longer attend the World Firefighter Games. “The great thing about athletics is you can keep progressing. It’s good to see people who are still competing in their eighties. Running is my release mechanism, and I can’t imagine giving it up.”

Dalton’s display cabinet now holds around 200 cups and medals. There could well be more before the year is out, if all goes well in Birmingham and Italy. And the World Firefighter Games will be held in Liverpool next year, which, on past form, should yield at least another three gold medals.

If Dalton carries on running, and winning, he’ll no doubt need a few more display cabinets before he finally decides to hang up his trainers. (But that, of course, may never happen!).

Quick Crossword



ACROSS

- 7** (Monumental) figure with square base and four triangular sides (7)
8 Cold-blooded, scaly animal (7)
10 Members or priests of ancient Celtic religious order (6)
11 German or Austrian wine, or its grape (8)
12 Small, two-winged biting fly (4)
13 Such countries have nowhere to park their ships (10)
14, 24 9 of all conflagrations – September 2-6, 1666! (5,4,2,6)
19 Re-states (10)
22 Source of heat or power (4)
23 Dependable (8)
24 See 14 (6)
25 Gets off bus, train etc (7)
26 Young hare (7)

DOWN

- 1** Stand-pipe – seriously lacking during 14, 24! (7)
2 Device for cooling engine or heating room (8)
3 Type of 22 (6)
4 One who works in precious metals and stones (8)
5 Sloping type, often used for emphasis (6)
6 Bed-cover from pre-duvet days (and not the best fire escape!) (7)
9 Parent's male parent (11)
15 Tumblers – but not for drinks! (8)
16 Law-breaker (8)
17 Breakfast crops? (7)
18 Reduced in rank (7)
20 Items – ain't what they used to be! (6)
21 Precious metal, second prize (6)



Solution
to June
crossword

PAUL ALMASY/CORBIS



Prize Quiz

Win a Viking Maelstrom bike

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

1 When did Switzerland join the United Nations?

2 What is the world's largest landlocked country?

3 Sugar Loaf mountain looks out over which capital city?

4 What is the capital of Venezuela?



JOSHUA ROBERTS/CORBIS

5 What was Thailand formerly known as?

6 What is the largest land-locked water body on earth?



FRANK LEONHARDT/CORBIS

HOW TO ENTER

To win the bike send your answers to the prize quiz by 31 July on a postcard to: Prize Competition (July 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.



Answers

1. Charlie Chaplin
2. William Shakespeare
3. Winston Churchill
4. Abraham Lincoln
5. Bill Clinton
6. Zsa Zsa Gabor

Winner of
May 2007 quiz
was P Banner of
Norfolk



StationCat

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

Oh Gina



In Notts, head of human resources Gina Woods is reaping the rewards of findings that her department was in "crisis" after 81 grievance hearings and 41 disciplinaries in 18 months. Her husband Paul Woods is now the ex-chief of Notts after a spell of "garden leave", while Gina remains.

Strangely I can't find anything in the CFA fire service human resources strategy that deals with the chief officer being married to the head of human resources.

I am truly cat-gutted to hear Gina is now on half-pay. **Given the findings that the Notts HR department was failing in six out of eight areas, I'm surprised it's that much.**

Dangerous chairs



You may recall my mention of an article in *Personnel Today* boasting about how human resource managers were taking over the fire service. The Greater Manchester FRS head of HR Peter Brooks was quoted at length.

Peter appeared to have been struck by the curse of Station Cat and left his post only weeks after his first mention in this column. Now *Personnel Today* has stuck its oar in again.

This time it's over the investigation into three Greater Manchester firefighters suspected of resting on the floor using sleeping bags rather than on the new "reclining chairs" using aircraft style lightweight blankets. This caused much amusement at *Personnel Today* because "firemen have long been known for getting paid to push out the Zs, in between games of pool and attending discos with nurses and WPCs".

That's the sort of garbage you get when you cross journalism with human resources: an attack on three firefighters whose shoes this strange but reviled crossbreed is not fit to polish.

The furore threw Anita Wainwright, the new Greater Manchester head of HR into the media spotlight. And what a glorious quote she gave them: "Risk-assessed facilities have been provided for rest only, not sleep. However, if a firefighter were to doze off on the rest facilities provided, a commonsense approach is adopted."

The problem, you see, is not falling asleep during the 15-hour nightshift. It is falling asleep somewhere other than on the authorised recliners.

You could not make it up. You really couldn't.

Cat burglar



The official photos of former chief officers of Durham and Darlington Fire Service have been mysteriously disappearing from the walls of brigade headquarters. Is this the work of a cat burglar with poor taste in pictures?

No, but their removal has set the fur flying in Durham. The initiative has the blessing of chief fire officer Sue Johnson, **one of the newest recruits to the highest ranks of the fire service, albeit, straight in at number one as chief officer.**

The removal of the photos is apparently part of a "new image" which might include a move to new premises. The removed pics of the former chiefs are being earmarked for a possible new display area for photographs and other memorabilia at the theoretical new site.

Rumours they are looking at using a side-room of a sub-basement for this important exhibition are without substance.

Agent 009 lives



News from Spooky Cat (agent 009 lives). The security service MI5 is trying to re-build itself after the shortsighted decision that saw the service dispense with thousands of the spooky ones in the aftermath of the Cold War. Linked to this was a move from the emphasis on using HUMINT (human intelligence gathering through contacts with individuals) to COMINT (communications intelligence gathering based on intercepts and other technology).

It was the grand idea that technology would solve all the problems so they could get rid of the soft fleshy human things. Combined, these left the service seriously short of experienced operatives who would have been useful in dealing with the new terrorist threat where communications intercepts don't deliver the goods.

Agent 009 lives tells me MI5 has rebuilt itself on regional lines and might be interested in new premises. He reports

an interesting job advert which mentions a "£multi-million property development portfolio" and "the storage of complex data warehouses in a state-of-the-art new build".

I suggest to agent 009 lives that such regional state-of-the-art new builds are already under way. I come away with the afterglow of assisting our hard-pressed security services find new state-of-the-art regional homes and answering those who want ideas about what to do with the nine fire service regional control centres no one appears to want.

Problem solved. But mum's the word.

Fish dish



Consultants to the fire service are one of my favourite dishes, especially when it involves fish. Step forward consultants Water for Fish (no, I am not joking).

These are the consultants used by Mid and West Wales Brigade to try to justify major staff cuts in the local fire control room. I am following the issue very closely and I am now taking a keen interest in Water for Fish.

I am also launching my own consultancy aimed at delivering the modern business and organisational needs of tomorrow's fire service to ensure value for money alongside win-win outcomes (see, I'm getting the hang of the spiel). **My vibrant new consultancy at the cutting edge of change is called Loads a Money for Very Old Rope.**

It is set to be a smash hit at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLOG) and across the fire service. With money rolling in it'll be fresh fish every day from now on.

Clogged



I have been taken to task over my outdated use of the term DCLOG for the Department. **An outraged civil servant points out that the word Department has now been officially removed from the title** (it is just so last century).

From now on – well, until Gordon Brown "modernises" them – they are Communities and Local Government. That's CLOG, which sums the Department up perfectly.

→ Stories of interest through the catflap:
stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Andy Willson (r) of Sittingbourne, Kent, Green Watch receives his 25-year badge from Branch rep Jim Green



Billy Carruthers (r) receives his 25-year badge from Nick Ginty, Officers Chair, at Harrow Training Centre



Dave Day (right) of Beeston White Watch receives his 25-year badge from Brendan Woodhouse, Notts Membership Secretary



Greg Connolly Crew Manager, Cumbernauld, Strathclyde, receives his 25-year badge from his brother Billy Connolly, Group Manager, Hamilton



Paul Lewis (r) Manager Blue Watch, Leytonstone, London Fire Brigade, receives his 25-year badge from Leytonstone FBU rep Tim Roedel



Billy Connolly Group Manager, Hamilton Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service is presented with his 25 year badge by brother Greg Connolly



Crew Manager Jim Fallows (right) receives his 25-year badge from Sale, Greater Manchester, Branch Chair Jack Grady



John Mc Clure (r) Station Manager Rushden, Northants receives his 25-year badge from Kevin Hedges, Officers Branch Rep



Phil Hoskins (right) receives his 25-year badge from Sale, Greater Manchester, Branch Chair Jack Grady

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.



Robbie Sanders (right) receives his 25-year badge from Sale, Greater Manchester, Branch Chair Jack Grady



Paul Ferguson (l) Manager Red Watch, Harrogate, North Yorkshire receives his 25-year badge from Brigade Secretary Ian Watkins

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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.



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