



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

THE FBU AND CLIMATE CHANGE

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2009

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1) Background science

Climate change is probably the greatest environmental threat facing humanity at present. The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report (2007) concluded that increases in temperature are "very likely" due to increased greenhouse gas concentrations resulting from human activity. Global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750. Between 1906 and 2005 global average temperature may have risen by as much as 0.92°C. The IPCC also predicted that if greenhouse gas emissions continue at current rates, temperatures will rise by at least 1.1°C but may rise by as much as 6.4°C by 2100.

In 2002, the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) produced climate change scenarios, which estimated that temperatures in the UK will increase by up to 3°C by the 2050s. They expect greater warming in the summer and autumn, and more summer warming in the South East than the North West. There are also likely to be changes in rainfall, with winters being up to 25% wetter and summers possibly being up to 40% drier by the 2050s, though snowfall will significantly decrease. Sea level is expected to rise, especially in southern Britain. UKCIP predicted that the number and intensity of extreme events will increase, including heatwaves, downpours and storm surges.

The *Pitt Review* into the 2007 floods across the UK also made the connection with climate change. Pitt concluded: "The scale of the problem is, as we know, likely to get worse. We are not sure whether last summer's events were a direct result of climate change, but we do know that events of this kind are expected to become more frequent." The Pitt Review update of the Foresight: Future Flooding Study concluded that, "the effects of climate change may be more extreme than had previously been estimated". In particular the potential increases in rainfall volume and intensity and temperature, are greater; and there is a greater risk of extreme sea level rise. It found that the risk of flooding, included urban flood will increase.

2) UK politics and climate change

In the UK, climate change has become a central debate within mainstream politics over the last decade. In 2008, the Climate Change Act committed the UK to a cut of at least 26% by 2020 and 80% by 2050; created a carbon budgeting system to cap emissions over five year periods; and established an expert body, the Committee on Climate Change. The UK government created its own Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) in 2002 and since 2007 UK energy companies have participated in the European Union ETS. In 2008 the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) introduced mandatory emissions trading for large non-energy intensive commercial and public organisations. The aim of these schemes is to create a market for carbon. However market mechanisms such as permit trading schemes and price rises have not reduced emissions, have provided windfall profits for energy firms and increased costs to workers' energy bills.

The Stern Review (2006) described climate change as "the greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen". The report warned that the UK was vulnerable to both drought and flooding. It warned that the costs of not acting to reduce emissions could reduce income per head by "between 5 and 20%" and that "the poorest countries and people will suffer earliest and most". It mentioned the

Philadelphia heat health warning system, which included increased staffing for the emergency services, as an example of good adaptation practice.

There are a number of contentious political issues relating to climate change. In 2006 the government signalled the go ahead for new nuclear power stations to be built by the private sector. The government has supported the expansion of Heathrow airport, including a third runway and sixth terminal. It is also considering permission for new coal fired power stations, beginning with Kingsnorth in Kent.

3) The Fire Service and climate change

In 2006, the CLG published a report, *Effects of Climate Change on Fire and Rescue Services in the UK*. It suggested significant impacts for fires, floods, drought and storms. On fires, the report accepted that there is “a clear and demonstrable link between hot dry summers and the number of fires”, particularly secondary and forest fires. The CLG estimated an extra workload of up to 50% more incidents would, “stretch the resources of the Fire and Rescue Services”. It acknowledged that, “Fire crews will be tired from attending more incidents, sickness and injury levels may rise due to fatigue, and equipment will be under more strain due to increased usage.” The report estimated that the increase in workload will have “the largest impact on rural Fire and Rescue Services” and “on firefighters working on the retained duty system”.

On floods, the CLG report pointed to flooding in Cumbria in 2005, when heavy rain fell for 36 hours, flooded nearly 2,000 properties in Carlisle and affected some 6,000 people. It argued that the role of the Fire and Rescue Services during flooding fell into three main areas: emergency response and rescue; damage mitigation; and (when the floodwaters are subsiding) making flooded areas safe before residents are permitted to return to them. The report said that if flooding becomes more frequent, “Fire and Rescue Services may have to consider adapting their capabilities to allow for a greater flood rescue response capability”. It listed possible changes to: appliances, equipment, training, health implications, additional pumping capability and greater Emergency Fire Control capacity.

On drought, UKCIP estimated that summer rainfall would decrease by between 20% and 50% by 2080. The CLG report argued that water shortages would affect brigades’ training and demonstrative capabilities. Water companies are expected to reduce the pressure in their mains supplies to minimise leakage, so firefighters may have to relay water across longer distances from alternative water sources and could expect changes in training, tactics, procedures, and equipment. On wind and storms, the report cited the 1987 storms as examples of what to expect. Firefighters would be expected to rescue people during these events, as well as to removing fallen trees, which will require specialist equipment and training.

The report concluded that as a result of climate change, “for Fire and Rescue Services in the UK there is potential for increased workloads all year round”. It recommended that the UK Fire and Rescue Services “begin to plan for climate change and to have an awareness of climate change when decisions are being made”.

4) The trade union movement and climate change

Since 1989 the TUC Congress has recognised the importance of global warming and called for steep cuts in emissions from greenhouse gases as well as legal rights for environmental workplace representatives. In 1998 the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC) was established by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) as the main forum for consultation between government and trade unions on environmental issues. The TUC supported the Climate Change Act and has been represented at international conferences on the issue.

The TUC is in favour of a balanced energy policy. This includes support for renewables, carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology and nuclear power. There are significant disagreements between unions over the issue of nuclear power.

The TUC supports an integrated transport policy and public ownership and control of the national railway system. Unions have also supported green travel plans such as car sharing, more cycling, travel pass loans and other methods of encouraging the use of public transport. However, there are differences between unions over airport expansion, particular at Heathrow.

The TUC has proposed the idea of a “just transition” to low carbon economy, to ensure that workers do not pay for the effects of climate change or the costs of government policies to deal with it. This would include investment in green technologies and the creation of decent, green jobs connected with energy efficiency, renewables, recycling and other tasks. It would also include a package of retraining, compensation and other benefits for workers adversely affected by climate change and the policies that are implemented to combat it.

5) FBU policy and campaigning

Conference agrees to make climate change an integral part of the FBU’s political and industrial strategy in the coming period and instructs the Executive Council to pursue the following:

Nationally:

- To campaign for the legal rights for trade union environmental reps, with similar powers to safety reps.
- To campaign for the public ownership of major energy sectors, a shorter working week and longer holidays with no loss of pay, as well as a low cost public transport and increased cycling facilities, as part of the transition to a low carbon economy.
- To ensure that demands for a “just transition” involve a substantial element of control by workers in relation to changes to jobs and to the development of alternative production.
- To oppose market mechanisms such as permit trading, higher prices of fossil fuels and regressive taxes, as ineffective means of tackling climate change. These measures merely force working people to bear the costs of change while making huge profits for energy firms.

- To oppose building new runways and terminals at Heathrow and Stansted.
- To oppose the building of new nuclear power stations.
- To campaign for any new coal-fired power stations to be designed ready for carbon capture and storage (CCS) and with a commitment to retrofitting.
- To affiliate to the Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Group and encourage members to take part in its events, conferences, demonstrations etc.

Fire Service:

- To demand an up to date assessment of the risk and uncertainty associated with climate change in the UK and its implications for the Fire Service from CLG, the Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Assembly.
- To campaign for a UK Fire and Rescue Service climate change adaptation strategy with guarantees on staffing, IRMPs, training, equipment and health and safety (e.g. PPE, temperature and heat stress).
- To campaign for a fully funded national capability for flood rescue with Fire and Rescue Authorities playing a leading role, underpinned by a statutory duty (as suggested in Recommendation 39 of the Pitt Review).
- To campaign within brigades to reduce the carbon footprint of the Fire Service.
- To support union environment reps in carrying out green audits and negotiating environmental agreements, in order to improve energy efficiency at work.

Within the FBU:

- To appoint an officer responsible for climate change policy.
- To participate in TUSDAC.
- To provide training for all Union reps on climate change.
- To elect environment reps at Brigade and Regional level.
- To consider how to integrate environmental campaigning within the existing Union structures.
- To carry out an environmental audit of FBU premises.