



## Position Statement

### Firefighter Health & Safety

January 2020

As the professional voice of the UK Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) understands the obligations of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and supports its application to firefighters and the FRS. NFCC believes that no one understands the complexity and implications of those obligations better than our members.

It is a reality that firefighters and officers sometimes have to work in very dangerous and dynamic operational environments. This includes, at times, exposure to dangerous and unpredictable situations when attempting to save life and mitigate other emergencies.

There is undoubtedly a legitimate public expectation that firefighters put themselves at risk to protect others. The FRS also has a duty to protect property and the environment. Emergency incidents can develop at speed and in unexpected ways, so by its very nature, operational activity in the FRS represents significant challenges for the application of health and safety law.

We expect firefighters and officers to respond in a professional manner to all emergency incidents. We believe that health and safety regulation and subsequent guidance should be mindful of the unique challenges presented by emergency response and therefore proportionate in their application.

Training and operational procedures are vitally important but NFCC does not believe it is possible to risk assess and train for every possible scenario that a firefighter or officer might face.

The NFCC supports the FRS migration of generic risk assessments to National Operational Guidance, which should continue to be supported by the use of risk assessments, risk awareness and dynamic assessment along with the safe person concept; right person in the right place, at the right time with appropriate training, equipment and procedures.

We recognise that decisions will need to be made in emergency and dynamic situations that with the benefit of a 20/20 hindsight investigation may not bear scrutiny and question.

NFCC also recognises that firefighters and officers may, on occasion, be faced with the need to act in a situation to save life or prevent escalation before specialist support has arrived.

In 2017 the National Operational Learning (NOL) platform was introduced, aimed at capturing and sharing pertinent operational learning from the UK and wider international FRS sector. NOL forms part of the maintenance process for National Operational Guidance (NOG), playing a vital element of NOG moving forward. FRS must learn proactively as well as reactively to ensure the health and safety of our firefighters.

Health and Safety is of fundamental importance to everyone who works for the FRS. NFCC does not support reckless or unthinking acts and we understand the Police, CPS, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and other enforcing bodies have important roles in the law and health and safety legislation. This must not, however, be allowed to constrain incident commanders when making decisions in dynamic emergency situations.

The HSE has gone some way to recognising the complexities of our operational environment within their policy statement 'Striking the Balance between Operational and Health and Safety Duties in the Fire and Rescue Service'. A welcomed statement, there is still some further clarity required regarding the expectation placed on employers by the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974, balanced against the operational reality of the FRS which needs to be fully recognised and understood.

## **The NFCC will continue to:**

### **1. Ensure the importance of Firefighter safety in the operational environment; by the means of promoting and embedding a positive health and safety learning culture within the FRS Sector.**

This will be achieved by:

- Reviewing significant health and safety events and assessing their implications for the UK FRS sector;
- Continuing to support the National Operational Learning Platform and its aim to embed operational learning within the UK FRS Sector;
- Maintain good working relationships with the HSE and other external agencies to support learning from other Organisations.

### **2. To undertake research and evaluation projects in relation to matters of health, safety and welfare and issue guidance when necessary.**

This will be achieved by:

- Continue to monitor and identify trends in relation to health and safety, within and outside of the UK FRS Sector;
- Establish dedicated Working Group's / Project Boards, where applicable to ensure the appropriate evaluation of such projects;
- To report to the NFCC Board, HSE, Trade Unions or Members of the Health and Safety Committee on health and safety matters raised.

### **3. Support the National Operational Guidance Programme.**

This will be achieved by:

- Continue to provide information, advice and feedback on guidance developed in relation to matters of health and safety.

### **4. Review and support, where necessary, outcomes of any inspection programme and framework within the UK FRS Sector. To support the health and wellbeing of all our Staff.**

### **5. Continue to engage and liaise with other NFCC and / National Working Groups and Committees, Trade Unions and the HSE on matters which have health and safety consideration.**

This will be achieved by:

- Maintain good working relationships with the HSE and other external agencies to support learning from other Organisations.
- Continue to execute the formal existing framework in place for consulting with Representative Bodies on matters of Health, Safety and Welfare. Contributing to the workplace safety standards of their members.

## **Further Reading**

- [Health & Safety Executive – Fire Service](#)
- [Health & Safety Executive – Striking the balance between operational and health and safety duties in the Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [National Operational Guidance](#)
- [National Operational Learning – Good practice guide for fire and rescue services](#)

**Committee  
People**

**Date for Review  
January 2023**