



Firefighter Health and Safety

March 2013

Publicity Line

As the professional voice of the UK Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), NFCC understands the obligations of the Health and Safety at Work Act 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.

NFCC therefore supports the use of generic risk assessments supported by 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.

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 and Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 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'. NFCC welcomes the statement but there is still some further clarity required regarding the expectation placed on employers by the Health & Safety at Work Act balanced against the operational reality of the FRS which needs to be fully recognised and understood.

England ✓	Wales ✓	Scotland ✓	Northern Ireland ✓
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NFCC will:

- Promote safe and healthy working practices in and UK Fire and Rescue Services
- Continue to push for greater recognition of the difficult and dynamic circumstances under which firefighters and officers work, and the implications this has on health and safety law
- Learn lessons and disseminate best practice from incidents where safety was compromised in order to help prevent future deaths or injuries for firefighters