A stakeholder says…

The best vehicles, the best equipment, the best protective clothing, the best price, the best tools and protection is key. This must be the priority. There needs to be a clear strategy for the future of the fire and rescue service.

The future of the fire and rescue service

General fire safety law in England and Wales will change from 1 October 2006.

The most significant change being introduced by the new legislation will be placing the onus on the responsible person. As part of the Government’s commitment to reduce death, injury and damage caused by fire, the new law will apply to most places except private dwellings. The main emphasis of the reform is to move towards fire prevention, the reform designed to make the law easier to understand and comply with. Separate reforms are being made in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRFSO) consolidates necessary requirements from current laws into one regime.

This will make the law far more coherent and accessible, and enable businesses to adopt the new legislation after a period of familiarisation through a series of eleven guides. These guides aim to make it easy for someone with little formal training or experience to comply with the new regulations. The guides can be downloaded free from www.firesafetyguides.comunities.gov.uk, or visit the website at fire.safetyreform@communities.gov.uk. Enforce-ment for the RRFSO will, in most cases, be done by the local fire and rescue authority. If they are not satisfied that the fire precautions are adequate they will advise the responsible person. Each premises will be required to take action. In serious cases they can restrict or prohibit the use of the premises until serious dangers have been addressed. A new type of notice, called an alterations notice, can be served if the premises are considered to be high risk after any changes to their usage or fire safety provisions. The enforcing authority will have to be informed if any changes were proposed. For further information please contact DCLG at fire.safetyreform@comunities.gov.uk or visit the website at www.firesafetylaw.comunities.gov.uk.

BARS on fire stations

There is a group of people who meet once a month with the aim of improving the working life of people in the fire and rescue service. One of their achievements is to get BARS on fire stations.

Going for promotion can be stressful and having BARS will help people relax. But the BARS are not just on stations – wherever you work in the Service, you can access one of the BARS at any time.

Firebuy will not, of course, be able to achieve its goals alone. It will work very closely with the LGA, Regional Management Boards, FRAs and CFOA to identify needs and with industry, through FIRESA, to identify solutions.

For a general public which is more knowledgeable than ever about the use of public money, this can only be a positive step and one which shows the FRS supporting firefighters to be and look as professional as possible when they arrive at an incident or when undertaking community fire safety work. By procuring national contracts which FRAs can use, the FRS is showing those who pay for the service – the public – that a consistent approach, with the best research and development together with the highest professional standards, will give them a very good value for money service indeed.

The best advice we can give is to use the BARS and make sure they are used.

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Welcome to FRS 19

This edition of FRS looks at the Regulatory Reform Order and a further move towards prevention. It includes a look at the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team’s positive contribution at collapsed scaffolding in Milton Keynes, where they worked closely with firefighters. Also in this edition is a feature about the new Chair of the Arson Control Forum and the good work being done with multi-agency partnerships and with a high level of local support.

We are always interested in hearing your views and finding out what issues you would like to see covered in future editions. If you have any initiatives or good news that you would like to share with the whole of the fire and rescue service, please email us at frs@communities.gsi.gov.uk

The Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team from Beaconsfield made a vital contribution to the rescue operation which followed a scaffolding collapse in central Milton Keynes in mid-April. FRS explains how the incident was handled.

Up to 200 workmen were at the hotel building site on 11 April when 14 floors of scaffolding came down. Three construction workers were injured, one of whom died in hospital three days later.

**Major incident**
The first call to the incident was received at Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service control room at 12.37 pm. Crews and appliances from Great Holm, Broughton and Newport Pagnell were first at the scene. They undertook an immediate rescue operation to locate casualties within the collapsed structure.

A major incident was declared and the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team was mobilised in support. Up to 60 fire and rescue staff were at the scene at its peak, including supporting appliances and firefighters from Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire fire and rescue services.

**Locating the casualties**
Three thermal imaging cameras were used to search the site and the locations of the trapped casualties were swiftly identified. The decision was taken to ‘rapidly extract’ all three casualties from the unstable structure, and the first crews at the scene carried out the initial rescues.

**Rescuing the casualties**
Three workmen, all seriously injured, were located close to the top of the large pile of collapsed scaffolding. The rubble pile was unstable and surrounded by hanging debris. They were carefully manoeuvred to safety using longboards and paraguard stretchers. Firefighters talked to the casualties before and during the rescue to reduce the risk of them losing consciousness. A ‘human chain’ was formed by firefighters and ambulance staff to move the casualties to a safe protected area within the inner cordon. They were handed over to paramedics for expert medical care and attention, and airlifted to hospital.

**Search equipment**
The technical search equipment used included ‘searchcams’ mounted on extendable telescopic poles, and bendable ‘snake eye’ cameras. Both of these relayed pictures to remote screens monitored by colleagues, allowing about 70% of the area to be searched.

**Handover**
The search dogs were then returned to the site to search the remaining 30% of ‘non-survivable’ voids and check areas which would otherwise be inaccessible. No further casualties were found and, at this point, Thames Valley Police, who had set up the cordon at the site, confirmed that all persons had been accounted for. The scene was formally handed over to the police and the Health and Safety Executive at 08.30 the following morning for further investigation.

**Media interest**
There was enormous local and national media interest in this incident. Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service provided updates and statements, including at least 20 live interviews, to more than a dozen media organisations during the afternoon. The incident was given “breaking news” treatment on Sky News and BBC News 24.

**Role of New Dimension**
This incident illustrates how search and rescue skills, experience and equipment are able to complement and support the skill, procedures and equipment that firefighters bring to a major incident. And it underlines once again the value of the New Dimension equipment, not just at high profile incidents such as Buncefield or the 7 July bombings, but in the day-to-day response of the service.

**Complementary skills**
The fire and rescue crews were at the incident in minutes. They were able to carry out a successful rescue and a preliminary search of the site with thermal imaging cameras. The USAR crew were then able to provide a comprehensive follow-up search. Firefighters acted as safety officers while the USAR searches were carried out. Once again, both incident command and operational response rose to the challenge.

Des Williamson, Assistant Fire Chief of Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, praised the effort of all those involved in the rescue. He said: “Our firefighters constantly have to rise to this sort of challenge and I would like to thank them and congratulate them for what they did.”
The campaign, sponsored by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), is about raising awareness rather than recruitment and was developed because fire and rescue services have found that many women do not even think about becoming a firefighter.

Research shows that one of the key reasons is the perception that it is a job requiring great physical strength.

To show women that this can be a job for them, the photographs focused on women firefighters as they worked within mixed teams. The message was simple – becoming a firefighter is about your potential to do the job, given the training and development, not about who or what you are.

What was clear to those on the sidelines was that firefighters, no matter whether they are women or men, what their background might be or what fire and rescue service they are from, can come together as an effective team whatever the need, even if it is just for the camera!

The Fire Service College pulled out all the stops to make sure that the photographer was able to capture a wide range of shots and to ensure all the volunteers were kept fed and warm between takes!

The result of the day’s shoot was a huge quantity of film from which the best shots were selected for the campaign.

The campaign was formally launched on 16 May at two events. The first was at London Fire Brigade’s training centre at Southwark, where Angela Smith, the DCLG’s first female Minister for Fire, was treated to an impressive demonstration of operational activities by a group of women firefighters from around the country.

The second event, held at Portcullis House opposite the Houses of Parliament, included an address from Angela Smith and presentations from a number of high profile speakers including Baroness Margaret Prosser OBE – Chair of the Women and Work Commission, Don Cowper for Business in the Community, and Tina Henderson, a Suffolk firefighter and one of the faces of the campaign.

The launch saw the campaign off to a flying start and over the following week posters appeared in gyms, bars and cinemas across the country with ads in a range of women’s magazines including Cosmopolitan, OK, Pride and Asian Woman.

The adverts encourage readers to go on to the DCLG website which has information about being a firefighter. Those who register an interest are sent a DVD which gives information about the firefighter role and are provided with contact details for their local fire and rescue service. Once in contact with their local Service, women are able to take part in any special events organised locally such as ‘have a go days’, fire station visits or workplace shadowing to help them to decide whether this might be the career for them.

The response to date has been very encouraging. It is hoped that fire and rescue services will take the opportunity to use the national materials to raise awareness in schools and colleges in their local areas and ensure that the next generation of women looking for a rewarding career can include ‘firefighter’ in their list of possibilities.

Our thanks go to the ‘Moreton models’, to everyone from the Fire Service College who made the shoot possible, to London Fire Brigade for hosting the launch and to the very many people across the Service who have given their time and support to the campaign.

For further information, please contact Sharone Collins: sharone.collins@communities.gsi.gov.uk or 020 7944 8142.
Cleveland Fire Brigade has teamed up with Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust to develop an initiative to help reduce the number of accidental house fires caused by smoking.

In the past 12 months there have been 26 house fires in Cleveland caused by smoking, 16 of which were in the Middlesbrough district where the new scheme is being piloted.

The Brigade currently fits vital fire safety equipment such as smoke alarms for free as part of its Home Fire Safety Checks. The new scheme identifies, through the checks carried out by the Brigade and through other agencies who visit people’s homes in Middlesbrough, those who would benefit from having non-combustible bed packs and chair throws. These are only a control measure and the safest and healthiest option is to give up smoking altogether.

Ed Parrish, Community Safety Liaison Manager, says: “We have teamed up with Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust to help reduce the number of fires in the home caused by smoking. “Middlesbrough PCT has provided the funding for a limited number of bed packs and throws that are flame retardant. We will be donating these packs to those who we feel are most at risk. These include those smokers who are bedbound or in a wheelchair and have limited mobility. “This initiative is a pilot, but hopefully if it proves to be successful we will be able to extend it throughout Stockton, Hartlepool and Redcar, if we can get enough funding. “The bed packs and throws are a preventative measure against fire and we believe they will help save someone against injury or possibly death caused by a fire. If it wasn’t for partners such as Middlesbrough PCT, schemes like this would not be possible.”

Sue Barnard, Tobacco Control Lead for Middlesbrough PCT, says: “This pilot project is invaluable in helping to prevent house fires caused by smoking. People at risk can also be offered information about giving up smoking and the harmful effects of second-hand smoking in the home.”

For more information, please contact
Ed Parrish on 01642 30697 or email eparrish@clevelandfire.gov.uk