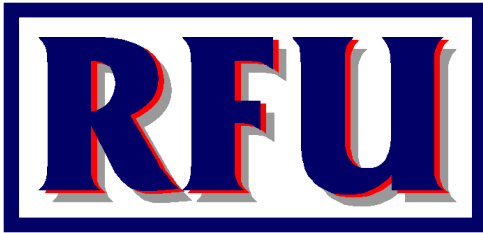


SERVING FIREFIGHTERS



SERVING THE COMMUNITY

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FAO Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service
Steele Close
Eastleigh
Hampshire

Friday, 15 June 2007

REF: Case 14-06-07

To whom it may concern

We have opened the above case based on a recent incident at Wickham Fire Station. The Fire Fighters have approached HRFU and ask that we represent them in promulgating this incident and approach Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service to request that they review the following report and respond accordingly and with haste.

The Fire Fighters are extremely aggrieved by the following incident for reasons specifically noted below and look for a speedy and satisfactory outcome. It should be noted that at this stage they do not wish to make a formal grievance due in acknowledgement that such a procedure could be avoided by swift action from Hampshire Fire and Rescue to read, respond and agree to a number of requests mentioned below. If these can not be agreed then a formal grievance will be considered.

We present the following facts as is best known by the Fire Fighters.

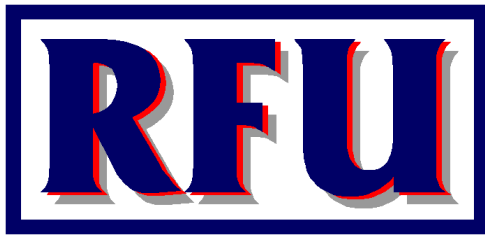
Case 14-06-7

A Firefighter at Wickham Fire Station sent his kit off to Bristol Uniforms for its regular inspection he recognised that it was very old kit and would probably be condemned. On the return of the PPE to the station (approx 29 May 2007) it was found that his over trousers were missing. He reported this and on investigation Bristol advised they did not condemn the kit nor was new kit issued.

This matter was brought to the attention of the Station Officer who escalated the problem.

On the 7th June 2007, (with no prior warning) Andy Kettle authorised Tim Burgess to enter the station and search all Fire Fighters lockers. Later WM Cole (SO) was phoned by Tim Burgess advised that he was following up the fact that WM Cole "had a tea leaf" at the station. An email was then sent which advised that the lockers had been searched and that some kit had been removed,

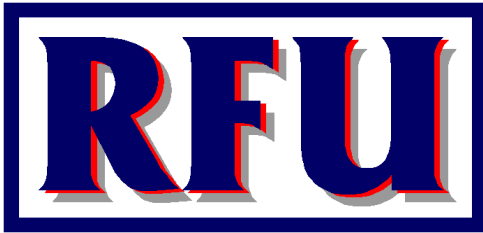
It should be noted that privately owned items were removed by Tim Burgess and have now 'disappeared' - this consists of two coats owned by a FF.



Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union feels that the following catalogues the failures and errors made by HFRS:

- Employees have a moral right of privacy they do not surrender this right when they work for the service - lockers are considered to be for personal use.
- Our employment contract states that "*The Service reserves the right of search of your personal lockers/desks if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a theft or misuse of Service property has occurred.*" We would expect such grounds to be associated with strong evidence and in relation to a major investigation.
(It should also be noted that this statement appears in a paragraph relating to "termination of employment" this is not the case here so no evidence can be found in official documents which supports this action.
- We wish to know what evidence was held that supported "*reasonable grounds*".
- We wish to be advised why every locker was inspected, this alludes to the fact that you considered everyone guilty.
- The fact that the lockers were inspected with neither a formal witness nor a station representative begets the question of evidence or privacy.
 - Firstly if any evidence was found there would be no proof as to its source or the nature of its discovery thus making the action meaningless.
 - Secondly, individuals may hold information in their lockers which they do not want Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service or indeed anyone else to know about.
- Presumption of "innocent until proven guilty" is a basic tenet of our society and a moral right. We look to Hampshire Fire and Rescue to offer any evidence to support its actions and explain why it should treat its employees with such disdain, indeed this treatment by Hampshire Fire and Rescue of its employees reflects a worrying assumption that management have a carte blanche right to treat its employees with such contempt.
- HFRS do not have a robust and auditable system with Bristol Uniforms this has been proven numerous times in the past with brand new kit being repaired etc. We request that all information with regards to the full investigation which we trust was conducted prior to the incident at Wickham station be revealed in full.
- The kit passes through many hands on its way from an RDS station to Bristol and back, it is at no stage 'secure' so pilfering or kit 'relocation' within Hampshire is more than possible from any number of sources – have these also been fully investigated?
- It would have been expected that that management would trust their OIC to, at the least, start the investigation - perhaps by instigating a locker check whilst everyone was present.
- Why was the SO not informed of the locker inspection prior to its occurrence?
- Why was the SO kept out of the investigation?
- Why were items appropriated from the lockers by Tim Burgess and what Service Order gives an Officer the right to carry out such an action?

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Resolution

Following a discussion with representatives at Wickham they have certain expectations which we would like to add to, to resolve the current situation and prevent this happening again:

- A full and frank apology in person by Andy Kettle who (apparently authorised the inspection) and/or Tim Burgess who undertook the inspection or if we have not identified the correct Officers – those involved.
- The immediate replacement of any articles which have been removed by HFRS from individual's lockers or brand new replacements and a letter of apology to the individual.
- Clarification to all employees about lockers and the Services rights.
- A system to be immediately developed within HFRS, underwritten by SMT, which will instruct senior officers as to how to carry out investigations like this and a procedure to inform the individual(s).

We trust that you understand the grave feelings of these particular Fire Fighters and that you understand how deeply offended they feel. Consequently we trust that a quick and mutually beneficial resolution is offered by Hampshire Fire and Rescue.

Should you have any further questions in relation to this incident, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

Rikki Noble
Chair Hampshire Retained Fire and Rescue Service