



# SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

Monday, 19 September 2005

**HRFU**  
Serving the local community

## The View From Here

In mid August, representative bodies, a cross section of active fire fighters and senior managers spent three days discussing how the fire service could make better use of its major resource – fire fighters. This workshop considered duty systems and had many discussion topics based around working ‘smarter’. There will no doubt be many other discussions based around the subject but optimising the use of RDS personnel is current. The ODPM driven Retained Review Team asserted that if RDS personnel “are not fully engaged in CFS they will become increasingly anomalous and marginalised.” The RRT report goes on to say that CFS is an integral part of the RDS role as detailed in the IPDS role maps.

As everyone should know by now HFRS is transferring resources to proactive fire safety. Strategies such as installing a fire alarm in every house by 2010, community projects and anti-arson initiatives are all being highlighted as a way in which the fire service can be a major contributor to making Hampshire safer.

However, these initiatives are currently fundamentally flawed because RDS personnel, who provide emergency fire cover to 70% of the geographical landmass of Hampshire, have no significant identified resources available for community centred pro-active fire safety work. Pilot schemes have been completed that confirm that RDS personnel are more than able and willing to engage in this work for the benefit of their communities.



Hampshire Fire and Rescue is starting to work smarter, using its WDS compliment to undertake CFS activities. Maybe not as efficiently as possible (see page 3) but at least progress is being made. WDS undertaking CFS is essentially a free service to HFRS, excepting the cost of the actual smoke alarms. 10% of resources are being moved to CFS, its time that these resources are being used within our rural communities.



Hampshire’s commitment to safety should be county wide and non-conurbation specific. The risk outside of a city is the same as within and the county taxes paid are often more. All local communities need CFS and we look forward to Hampshire delivering this county wide soon.



**Note:** If you do use email at home and want to monitor your HFRS email account then we have a great trick.

Visit our website at [www.hrfu.org.uk](http://www.hrfu.org.uk)

and look for the ‘Outlook Email Rule’ in the ‘Toolbox’ section on the left hand menu.



**The RFU newsletter—designed to educate, inform and entertain.**

**RFU** *part of the solution not the problem*



## HRFU CFS Working Proposal

Those of you who keep an eye on our website may have noticed that we recently posted a working proposal for RDS personnel undertaking community fire safety initiatives. This proposal was offered to HFRS as a starting point for further discussions. It identifies our current position and clarifies our member's thoughts. The proposal is derived from various discussions and meetings we have had with members over the last few months:

- 1) HRFU fully supports the HFRS CFS initiative aimed at raising the profile of the preventative message throughout the community and specifically through aiming to install a smoke alarm in every household in Hampshire by 2010.
- 2) HRFU seeks to work with HFRS to enable all RDS staff to fully participate in CFS activities within their own communities.
- 3) As with all Hampshire Fire Fighters spreading the Fire Safety message, HRFU will expect RDS personnel to be remunerated in line with current grey book conditions.
- 4) HRFU do not currently support lone fire fighter working - before we would consider this we would expect full consultation and documentary proof that HFRS would offer full support to any personnel requiring it.
- 5) HRFU will expect HFRS to allow local stations to self manage their own CFS programmes if desired (within defined criteria and protocol) and recognised time to be provided for this.
- 6) HFRS will ensure that full and easily accessible logistic support will be offered to RDS personnel that recognises the prevailing time constraints.
- 7) HFRS will ensure that an active feedback system is provided. We would recommend by e means e.g. email or database.
- 8) CFS should not at anytime interfere with front line fire fighting operations.

In response to this proposal we have had initial discussions with SDO Raynor. Following on from this discussion we can report that by January 06 all stations will be trained and equipped to undertake post-incident CFS activities. (Note this is incident not necessarily fire). If you have identified a risk then you will have the resources to catch the risk at source and undertake a HFS visit. This may be a start, almost certainly unworkable, but we still have some way to go before Hampshire RDS personnel could remotely be classed as fully engaged.

## CFS—The Facts

**This month we do take some pot shots at Community Fire Safety. We offer no apologies but place no blame, it just seems that things are moving very, very slowly. But let us consider the problems for HFRS.**

- The RDS Pilot schemes have all been deemed "successful"
- As a retained fire fighter, HFRS contractually only require you to train and attend incidents. They have no power to demand additional help for CFS activities so effectively, cannot bank on it.
- GDA's currently manage 9 Home Fire Safety visits a day (45 minutes each for a lone worker). This highlights Firefighters as relatively inefficient.
- It is recognised that local RDS Firefighters are best placed to identify local risks.
- Community Fire Safety is an integral part of the RDS role as detailed in the Integrated Personal Development System role maps.
- There are 502,706 households in Hampshire
- British crime surveys estimate that 90% of Hampshire properties have smoke alarms (that's 50270 households theoretically need smoke alarms).
- HFRS are however finding that current initiatives reach easy to reach households but not the harder to reach.
- The 2003 APU survey revealed that the time spent on CFS activities by RDS personnel was; 44% spent no time, 40% spent 1– 3 hours and 10% spent 4-6 hours.



## CFS the true story

Personnel on Retained Fire Stations must frankly be starting to feel a little stressed by all the talk surrounding Community Fire Safety. We have had promises of massive resources and challenging targets to reach to improve the safety of our communities. But as time goes by what resources have we seen actually “at the coal face,” very, very little.

There have been some pilot schemes undertaken at a number of RDS stations. These pilots have been extremely successful and showed that RDS personnel are more than willing and able to undertake CFS work in their own communities. But these pilots have now been completed and, in contrast to other initiatives where the pilots when proved successful just continued, these RDS CFS initiatives have been parked up. Why run a pilot if you knew that in the future resources would not be available?

We have had the opportunity to talk to SDO Raynor about future initiatives. He has been frank and is aware that RDS firefighters must not be disenfranchised if community fire safety is to be truly successful throughout Hampshire. But with all the talk of the great move of resources he has been given a paltry budget that just cannot be spread thinly enough. Where is all the money going that should be produced by the implementation of the modernisation agenda? Or is the phrase “modernisation agenda” a euphemism for no fundamental change?

Our feedback tells us that nearly every RDS station understands the CFS initiative and not only wants to be involved, but wants to start now!

Our request to SMT is, please move the resources to the CFS department to ensure that RDS firefighters can start CFS initiatives alongside and on an equal footing to our wholetime colleagues. RDS personnel can make Hampshire safer for **every** visitor and resident in Hampshire – not just those covered by wholetime stations.

## Home Fire Safety checks - Lone Working

Obviously HFRS see lone working as a way to make the minimal resources go that much further. Assuming RDS stations get the resources for HFSC we need to start the debate on how we approach the risks to personnel. The pilot schemes all employed dual working. Was this efficient use of resources or could it have been done a better way without compromising staff.

Lone work does present a greater potential for harm and may require more stringent precautions to comply with the Law.

At the very minimum, prior to authorising lone working HFRS should conduct a risk assessment of the work, taking into account the potential lone aspect of the activity. The risk assessment should take into account at least the following points.

- Can one person safely handle all of the plant, substances and goods involved in the work?
- Is there a risk of violence?
- Are women especially at risk in the lone work?
- Are young workers especially at risk from working alone?
- Is the person medically fit to work alone? Some medical conditions make sufferers unsuitable for lone working. Special arrangements should be made for persons with impaired mobility who work alone if it is necessary to ensure their safety. - i.e. personnel on light duties
- What training is needed to ensure competency and safety? Lone workers need to be experienced enough to understand risks and precautions fully.
- What level of supervision will be appropriate and how will this be organised?

Measures should be implemented to ensure that the lone workers are no more at risk than other workers. Precautions should take account of normal work and of foreseeable emergencies e.g. fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. It is recommended that in addition to the logging in and out procedure the following be implemented as a minimum where people are working alone.

- A mobile telephone is readily available to the lone worker.
- If possible lone worker alarms should be used, where these are not available an alternative system of control must be used. This could include, for example two-way radios, telephone checking systems requiring users to report at agreed intervals to Control.

National RFU policy is that lone working is not undertaken. What are your views?





## REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES

Last year 48,00 flights with approximately 7.2 million people travelled through 200,000 square miles of airspace covered by one IT system. £3 trillion in payments were handled (without losing a single payment) through BACS. The 20th successful kidney transplant was carried out by a 'robot' and indeed even this text was written on an aircraft somewhere above France where, all going well technology will place me gently into Southampton airport.

The fact is that IT permeates and successfully runs many parts of our society, like it or not IT can often provide efficiencies and a more robust system than the replaced human system. A correctly designed system will never tire, never make a mistake and never feel under pressure. In fact the only time we really appreciate how much IT does is when it goes wrong.

It cannot be argued however that things can and do go wrong in the most robust of systems but the effects can be minimised by employing both automatic and manual fail safe strategies. For example; The Swanwick NATS system slowly reduces the numbers of aircraft handled by each operative if a failure is experienced until ultimately the operatives use hand written tickets to control aircraft movements. The most important component of any designed system is that the safety components have been accurately and precisely scoped and resources are properly identified and budgeted for at project inception to ensure the expected deliverables are met and even exceeded.



Is technology the panacea for society? Not at all, but using our own fire service as a microsystem if employed properly it can make us more efficient, get the correct resources to an incident most efficiently and then let Fire fighters carry out their tasks of old (though possibly with more safety systems.)

Has enough time been allowed for developing the project and has it been scoped so completely that the costs are guaranteed? I very much doubt it and expect that many of the great incentives which sold the system to the purchasers will start to evaporate as the true costs of these start to reveal themselves. History shows us that almost certainly the project will overrun and be massively over budget however, it can however be argued strongly that it will work and will lead to a more efficient fire service, just at what price?



### From the RFU website...

Due to the timescales of local IRMPs/Safety Plans the UK Fire Service is witnessing the proposed closure of a number of Retained Fire Stations in various brigades. It is interesting to note that at present these specific stations have no RFU members, being made up of either non-union or alternative union personnel.

We suggest you keep a close eye on the development of these proposed cuts specifically in relation to how hard the reductions are fought. The reason for this is to highlight the fact that the RFU has no conflicts of interests in that we represent only personnel with a RDS contract. This means that should a Retained station be proposed to close due to the gain of another duty system, the RFU would still provide

100% support to fight any reduction.

Non-RFU Retained stations need to think long and hard as to whether they are really better off without our backing. The proposed cuts are a wake-up call that arrives too late for some.



To fall back on RFU support you need to be in the union sooner rather than later!

**You Have Been Warned!**