

# THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

MEDIA RELEASE: 13 FEBRUARY 2006

## ABSOLUTE MADNESS: 999 CALL HANDLING CAPACITY OF REGIONAL FIRE CONTROLS WOULD RESULT IN RAPID MELTDOWN

Government plans to shut every 999 fire service emergency control room in England and move to only 9 regional controls by 2009 should be halted immediately, says the Fire Brigades Unions. The call comes after a Parliamentary Answer showed the number of 999 calls regional controls could handle at the busiest times would be disastrously low.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: “We are stunned by how few 999 emergency calls a regional control could handle in a busy period. Only one regional control outside London could handle more than 200 calls an hour and most far less than this.

“Many single brigade controls have to handle this number on their own during busy periods in their own fire service area. Yet these regional controls are meant to handle the work done by up to 9 existing control rooms across vast regions.

“These figures will send a shudder down the spine of anyone who has any understanding of the real life strains being placed on the fire service. They have not just got this disastrously wrong, this is bordering on criminally wrong.

“In normal conditions handling this number of calls across a region might be just about adequate. But many times in the last year local fire controls have had to cope with higher volumes than this on their own, never mind across a region.

“These new controls are meant to be better at handling major incidents. On these figures only one major incident could swamp a regional control room in minutes.

“The fire service plans to be able to deal with three major incidents at the same time. The regional controls – on these figures – would simply collapse.

“In recent weeks severe weather has hit several regions at the same time. With only a single control for each region every one would have hit capacity quickly with no ability to take overflow calls from others.

“Regional controls might be able to deal with the desktop scenarios dreamt up by management consultants, but not with real life. Not only will they not make things better, on these figures they will be much worse when the public need them most.

“The Government is trying to run 999 emergency command and control rooms like call centres. The public don’t want to be on hold listening to Vivaldi’s Four Seasons as the smoke is flowing into the room.

“The Government seems determined to press ahead with these plans. For the sake of firefighters and the public they must stop now and re-assess, because these figures show it will not work.”

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## McDonnell, J - Firefighting

House of Commons - Written Answer

### Summary

The following question was answered on 02 February 2007.

### Contents

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the (a) typical or average hourly call handling capacity and (b) maximum hourly call handling capacity is expected to be of each of the regional control centres proposed under the FiReControl project. [111173]

Angela E. Smith: The regional control centres are designed to meet or exceed the current Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA) performance targets for call handling. These are:

85 per cent. of calls answered within 7 seconds;

95 per cent. of calls answered within 10 seconds;

98 per cent. of calls answered within 20 seconds.

**The capacity of each RCC depends on the number of staff and the shift pattern at any given time. Based on the current indicative staffing numbers and shift patterns, the call handling capacity of each RCC is shown in the following table:**

	08:00-16:00	16:00-20:00	20:00-23:00	23:00-08:00	24 hours	Annual
London						
Hourly	240	300	210	150	—	—
Period total	1,920	1,200	630	1,350	5,100	1938150
South East						
Hourly	150	195	150	105	—	—
Period total	1,200	780	450	945	3,375	1,286,625
South West						
Hourly	135	165	135	105	—	—
Period total	1,080	660	405	945	6,090	1,127,850
East of England						
Hourly	135	165	135	105	—	—
Period total	1,080	660	405	945	3,090	1,127,850
East Midlands						

Hourly	135	165	135	105	—	—
Period total	1,080	660	405	945	3,090	1,127,850

West Midlands						
Hourly	150	195	165	120	—	—
Period total	1,200	780	495	1,080	3,555	1,297,575

Yorks and Humber						
Hourly	150	195	165	120	—	—
Period total	1,200	780	495	1,080	3,555	1,97,575

North East						
Hourly	120	150	135	105	—	—
Period total	960	600	405	945	2,910	1,062,150

North West						
Hourly	225	285	195	135	—	—
Period total	1,800	1,140	585	1,215	4,740	1,730,100

Network						
Hourly	1,440	1,815	1,425	1,050	—	—
Period total	11,520	7,260	4,275	9,450	32,505	11,864,325

| Notes: 1. These figures do not represent the projected requirement. 2. Assumes that a person working a 12 hour shift has the capacity to answer calls for nine of 12 hours. 3. Assumes an average call handling time of three minutes per call (taking account of all call types—emergency, administrative and additional assistance calls).