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To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

Contaminants and firefighter health and safety: important new research

Two new peer reviewed studies, commissioned by the Fire Brigades Union and independently carried out by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), that have been published today 10 January 2023.

- *Scottish Firefighters Occupational Cancer and Disease Mortality Rates: 2000-2020* published in scientific journal *Occupational Medicine* <https://academic.oup.com/occmed/advance-article/doi/10.1093/occmed/kqac138/6964909?searchresult=1>
- a 4 part Firefighter Cancer study published in *Nature, Scientific Reports* covering:
 - *Cancer incidence* <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-24410-3>,
 - *PPE & Workplace* <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-25741-x>,
 - *Mental Health* <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-24834-x> and
 - *Culture & Awareness* <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-24845-8>

Both publications are renowned international peer reviewed scientific journals.

The research has found that UK firefighters suffer significantly higher incidences of cancer and mortality from cancer and other diseases when compared to the general public. The findings support the 2022 ruling from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (a body of the World Health Organisation), which says that exposure through working as a firefighter is carcinogenic.

The peer reviewed work of Professor Anna Stec's team at the University of Central Lancashire **is the biggest research project of its kind in the UK.**

The outcomes of the reports are alarming. Key discoveries include that UK firefighters are significantly more likely to die from cancer, heart attack, stroke and several other diseases, and that the contaminants found in fires are linked to increased rates of these diseases and mental health issues among firefighters.

The studies, led by UCLan's Professor Anna Stec, were carried out by both obtaining mortality records from the National Records of Scotland and by surveying almost 11000 operational UK firefighters.

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The findings of the reports included that:

- **The cancer rate in firefighters aged 35-39 is up to 323% higher** than in the general population that age.
- Firefighters have higher cancer death rates at younger age brackets (55–59) when compared to the general population (at the age 70–74).
- Firefighters' mortality rate from all cancers is 1.6 times higher than the general population,
- **The rates for certain types of cancer were significantly higher:**
 - Prostate – 4 times higher
 - Leukaemia – 3 times higher
 - Oesophagus – 2 times higher
 - Where cancer with an unknown origin has spread, the rate was 6.37 times higher than the general population.
- **UK firefighters who had served at least 15 years were almost twice as likely to develop cancer,** than those who had served less time.
- Firefighters have also over five times higher mortality rates from heart attack, and almost three times from a stroke when compared to the general public.

Just over a year ago the FBU launched the ground breaking *DECON: To Protect and Prevent* after Prof Stec's research found 75% of FRS to have nothing in place to raise awareness and training on the matter of contaminants. The campaign provides training and resources to raise awareness of actions firefighters can take to help minimise their exposure to toxic fire effluents.

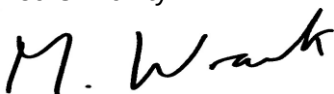
However, the FBU campaign alone is not enough to tackle a safety critical issue of this scale. It is now beyond doubt that Firefighters are dying and becoming ill from these occupational exposures. Unfortunately the wider Fire Sector, including the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Home Office they advise, are relatively silent. The recent IARC categorisation means the UK is now out of step with the World Health Organisation on the matter of occupational firefighter cancer and disease. Yet we still aren't seeing adequate action from employers, the NFCC and Government in response to one of the most significant safety developments in our sector's history.

In light of this new evidence the FBU are calling for:

- Annual health monitoring for all firefighters, to also continue after retirement.
- Adequate monitoring and recording of Firefighter exposures.
- Adequate recording of occupation of Firefighter (or former occupation) in health and similar records, including on death certificates.
- The introduction of effective DECON policies and training across the FRS.
- The introduction of facilities and contracts for appropriate and effective PPE and workwear cleaning across all services and duty systems.
- The introduction of legislation that will ensure that affected firefighters are given the compensation and protection they deserve.

This is a significant step in the union's DECON campaign to protect Firefighters. Please read the reports and do all you can to raise maximum awareness of the reports on your branches. We will now take our demands to Ministers, CFOs and employers and urge all members to attend branch meetings and read all circulars to stay informed on the next steps in the union's FBU DECON campaign

Yours in unity



Matt Wrack
General Secretary

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