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Circular: 2024HOC0451MW

Date: **13/12/2024**

To: **All Members**

Dear Brother/Sister,

Health & Safety Executive DECON Inspections: Important update

We have previously reported to members that the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) is developing an inspection initiative to regulate how FRSs work to mitigate and prevent exposure to cancer and disease-causing contaminants. Following further meetings with the HSE, we can now confirm that these inspections plan to cover a range of procedures and practices spanning from the fire ground to how we launder our PPE any contaminated workwear. This is a significant step forward in the union's DECON campaign.

The FBU has long campaigned for more pro-active HSE regulation and inspection of the Fire & Rescue Service, as we see in some other industries, rather than solely making interventions after an accident, injury or death has occurred. Most recently the union has called for action on the issue of exposure to contaminants as a result of our occupation and we welcome the development of this new inspection regime.

HSE officials have carried out a number of 'fact finding' visits to inform the standards which they plan to inspect against. They have also undertaken a literature review to help understand the effectiveness of contaminant removal from the different laundering practices. The standards will also use occupational hygiene practices commonly found in other industries. These have also been recommended by Professor Anna Stec's research, commissioned by the FBU. Work is currently ongoing in HSE laboratories, following live burn exposures of PPE, to help inform cleaning standards.

The union is monitoring this initiative closely and we are meeting regularly with the HSE to feed in and receive regular updates on progress. In the most recent meeting it was confirmed that the work is on track for implementation from the HSE's April 2025 business plan when initial plans are to inspect services in blocks of 10.

The union welcomes the HSE's ongoing development of this initiative and we await further details. FBU members and officials can be proud of the work and campaigning the union continues to deliver to ensure this safety critical issue remains front and centre for all of those responsible for our health & safety in the sector.

Prevention is just one demand of the union's campaign to protect firefighters from occupational cancer and disease. The FBU DECON campaign additionally calls for regular health monitoring and the required legislation to compensate and support those who receive a diagnosis. The union continue to also pursue these elements and are in ongoing discussions with the various relevant departments. However, reducing and eliminating exposures remains the most important step in preventing firefighters from falling ill in the first place and the new inspection plans announced by the HSE appear to be a significant step forward for the health & safety of firefighters.

Further updates will follow in future circulars.

Yours in unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', written in a cursive style.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary