

Fire and Rescue Service Matters

Crews of three: Dangerous for public safety, hazardous for firefighter safety

February 2026



- When fire and rescue services send firefighters out with crews of three on a fire engine, **they are putting lives on the line**, the FBU is warning.
- Fires and other emergencies require sufficient numbers of firefighters to arrive swiftly to rescue people and limit property damage.
- **Public safety is at risk** – including loss of life – by sending crews of three.
- **Firefighters are also put at greater risk** of injury and death.
- The Westminster government must **invest in the fire and rescue service** to ensure resilience and safety.
- Fire engines must be crewed by five firefighters, to ensure public safety and firefighter safety.

Warning

The FBU is warning politicians that lives are at stake because of a dangerous policy of crewing fire engines with only three firefighters. **The union is campaigning for a safe standard of five firefighters on every fire engine**, backed by investment from central government to ensure the speed and weight of response.

Firefighting is a hazardous occupation, carried out by trained, skilled professionals. To successfully tackle any incident, there must be an incident commander, appliance driver, and other firefighters to carry out particular tasks. These include readying equipment for a potentially life-threatening incident requiring urgent intervention. It includes back up personnel if things go wrong. Firefighters follow strict safety procedures to keep themselves and the public safe.

Firefighting

Fire engines are designed to carry five firefighters. This design is deliberate. Each firefighter has an important job to do while responding to calls and on arrival at an incident.

Firefighters don breathing apparatus (BA) to enter a burning building, fight fires and undertake rescues. A basic BA crew is made up of two firefighters who enter the fire and a third outside to monitor air consumption and undertake safety protocol. They may break into locked premises or enter confined spaces. They put gallons of water onto the fire, using lengthy hoses attached to appliances, risers and hydrants. Firefighters carry equipment to affect rescues of vulnerable people.

Firefighters work together as a team to ensure people are safe and they can get out of the situation unscathed.

Crews of three

Firefighters attend more than 200,000 fires across the UK every year. More than 30,000 are serious dwelling fires. To intervene safely requires a minimum number of firefighters.

Fire and rescue services use worst case planning scenarios to work out the minimum number of firefighters required for a range of common incidents. The FBU uses critical attendance standards (CAST).

The minimum number of firefighters needed for a domestic house fire is nine firefighters – see the CAST standard overleaf. Additional firefighters are needed for more complex rescues.

Cuts Kill

After decades of austerity cuts, some chief fire officers are trying to introduce crews of three on fire engines. FBU officials from Staffordshire, Cambridgeshire, Merseyside and other brigades have reported and campaigned against efforts to introduce this dangerous policy.

The FBU is aware of incidents in recent years where crews of three have been deployed to fires in flats, hotels and other premises. February 2026 is the thirtieth anniversary of the tragic Blaina fire, when two firefighters and a child died at a house fire. The investigation found that there were initially too few firefighters to intervene safely.

The FBU has launched a national campaign 'Cuts Kill'. **The FBU demands central funding for fire and rescue services** to ensure sufficient firefighters can serve our communities. The FBU calls for a **national standard of five firefighters on a fire engine**, to ensure the right numbers attend every incident and can intervene safely. This means ending crews of three.

Critical Attendance Standard (CAST)

Fires: Dwellings:

Single Occupancy 2 to 4 casualties involved rescue via internal staircase Firefighting on ground floor. 2 to 4 casualties trapped on upper floor and visible on arrival. Initial entry via ground floor, and rescue via stairs.

Task	Sequence and personnel requirements	
1	Initial information gathering	1x IC
2	General fire ground liaison	1x IC
3	Incident command	1x IC
4	Cause establishment	1x IC
5	Provision of hose reel branch	2x FF
6	Provision of hose reel branch	2x FF
7	Provision of water from hydrant to pump/tank	2x FF
8	BA Entry Control	1x FF
9	Provision of water from pump/tank – high pressure pump	1x FF
10	Gaining entry to premises with breaking in gear	2x FF
11	Firefighting/Rescue 2 Firefighters BA – hose reel branch	2x FF
12	Firefighting/Rescue 2 Firefighters BA – hose reel branch	2x FF
13	Remove casualty to external opening – 2 x BA	2x FF
14	Remove casualty to external opening – 2 x BA	2x FF
15	Isolation of services	1x FF
16	Remove casualty to place of safety	2x FF
17	Remove casualty to place of safety	2x FF
18	Ventilation of other areas – 2 x BA	2x FF
19	Firefighting/Rescue 2 Firefighters BA – hose reel branch	2x FF
20	Casualty treatment	2x FF
21	Cutting away – 2 x BA	2x FF
22	Liaison with ambulance	1x IC
23	Ventilation of premises – fire compartment – 2 x BA	2x FF
24	Salvage	2x FF
25	Fireground servicing – 2 x BA	2x FF
26	Turning over – BA – thermal imager	2x FF
27	Damping down – 2 hose reel – 2 x BA	2x FF
28	Debris/water removal – with salvage equipment	2x FF
29	Fireground servicing – 6 x BA	6x FF
30	Resource replenishment water	1x FF
31	Make up equipment	1x FF
32	Make up equipment	6x FF
33	Debrief	1x IC

1 Incident Commander (IC) and eight firefighters (FFs)

9 TOTAL

EQUIPMENT

70mm Hose x 3, 9/105 Ladder x 1, BA Board – Complete x 1, BAECO Tabard x 1, Barriers/Cones/Tape x 1, Breaking in Gear x 1, Breathing Apparatus – Standard Division x 6 (SDBA), First Aid Kit x 1, Hose Reel and Branch x 2, Hydrant Standpipe (Single) Key and Bar x 1, Pump with High Pressure Capability x 1, Radio Comms x 9, Resuscitator x 2, Salvage Equipment x 2, SDBA – Spare Cylinder x 8, Set of Hose Ramps x 2, Small Gear x 2, Specialist First Aid Equipment x 1, Thermal Imager x 1, Turning Over Tools x 1, Water Tank – 1800 Litres.



For more information, please contact Tillie Muir: Tillie.Muir@fbu.org.uk 07966722433