

# **DON'T SQUEEZE OUR FIRE SERVICE DRY**

**CUTS WOULD RESULT  
IN THE LOSS OF 1 IN 5  
FRONTLINE FIREFIGHTERS**

**PROTECT OUR FIRE AND  
RESCUE SERVICE**



**FIRE BRIGADES UNION**

# Summary

- The Fire Brigades Union believes we have now reached a significant turning point in the history of the UK fire and rescue service<sup>1</sup>. Savage cuts to the service now will put members of the public at great risk. People will die unnecessarily and suffer injuries which could have been avoided. Homes and businesses will be destroyed. We are raising the alarm – to protect the fire and rescue service.
- Firefighters do an irreplaceable job tackling every kind of emergency – fires, road traffic accidents, civil disturbances, terrorist incidents, floods and many more. The fire and rescue service is a service to be proud of – and a service worth defending.
- Around **1,500 frontline firefighter jobs** were lost between 2011 and 2012. Further cuts on this scale will put lives at risk, ruin more homes and businesses, and increase insurance costs. Politicians need to think again before the next round of central government grants are determined.
- Professional bodies throughout the fire and rescue service, including the Fire Brigades Union and the Chief Fire Officers Association, are warning of the dire consequences of further cuts. These could **cut 1 in 5 firefighters** compared with 2010 levels. Fewer firefighters, fire station closures and fewer appliances will devastate local communities.
- More cuts will mean slower response times to emergencies, putting life and property at greater risk. Response times are almost **two minutes** slower on average than a decade ago – and this masks even slower responses in some areas and to some incidents. Many fire and rescue services are missing their own targets for the arrival of the first and second appliance.
- The recent reduction in fires and fire deaths are welcome, because it shows how effective the fire prevention work done by firefighters can be. But the risks are still there and without firefighters to carry on doing this work, further improvements cannot be guaranteed. And firefighters tackle a range of growing risks, such as floods. It's about risk and resilience.
- The fire and rescue service costs around **£50 per person per year** – exceptional value for money for a world class emergency service.
- Cutting some fire and rescue services more harshly than others, is not the answer. The whole service needs funding commensurate with the huge range of risks we face. Investment, not cuts is the answer.

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<sup>1</sup> The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) represents 42,000 committed professionals in fire and rescue services across the UK. We are the most significant and representative stakeholder in the sector and we bring an important perspective to policy.

# A service to be proud of

The fire and rescue service has much to be proud of. The service is a real success story when it has the personnel and the resources to do the job. Firefighters have been lavishly praised by politicians after major incidents, such as the civil disturbances in 2011, recent floods, the 7/7 terrorist attacks and countless other incidents.



*Firefighters "fantastic and professional" response during the 2011 riots*



*"Magnificent" and "heroic" response to recent floods*



*Coroner commended firefighters "courage and composure" during 7/7 terrorist attacks*

# It's about risk and resilience

The fire and rescue service is an irreplaceable service. It is ready and willing to tackle every kind of emergency, **24 hours a day, 365 days a year**.

The UK fire and rescue service has around ten thousand professional firefighters on duty at any one time and prepared for any emergency. We have over **50,000 specially trained firefighters** capable of deployment in the event of major incidents, from fires to floods, terrorist attacks or industrial explosions.

## *It's about risk*

Firefighters protect the public and businesses from a wide range of risks, including:

- Fires
- Road traffic accidents
- Floods and storms
- Terrorism
- Riots
- Chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear (CBRN) incidents
- Industrial incidents

## *Rescues and emergency intervention at fires*

Firefighters continue to carry out very high levels of rescue from fires. The FBU gathered data from individual fire and rescues, which indicated that over seven thousand people were rescued from fires in the UK in 2009-10. In England alone over five thousand people were rescued from fires. CLG has not published figures on rescues over the last decade. The last set of published figures for the UK, in Fire Statistics UK 1999 recorded just over five thousand rescues for the UK, and nearly four thousand in England<sup>2</sup>.

## *Fire prevention work*

There has been a remarkable fall in the number of fires and fire deaths over the last decade. The number of fires in Great Britain fell by a third, from 445,000 in 2000-01 to 287,000 in 2010-11. Casualties at all fires fell from 554 in 2000-01 to 388 in 2010-11<sup>3</sup>. These improvements are not simply the result of social, economic and technical changes. They are the result of conscious fire safety and prevention work carried out by firefighters.

## *Wide range of rescues*

Firefighters don't just rescue people from fires in homes and businesses. Firefighters rescued **over 3,000 people** during the 2007 floods – and responded to around 20,000 people in flood incidents last year.

Firefighters helped rescue **700 injured people** and led hundreds of victims to safety during the terrorist attacks in London on 7 July 2005, when 52 people were killed by bus and tube bombers.

Firefighters helped rescue people during the M5 crash in 2011, when seven people were killed and over 50 injured.

The Buncefield explosion was the largest European peace time fire. It caused widespread damage and left 43 people injured. It took more than one thousand firefighters from 33 fire and rescue services several weeks to extinguish the blaze.

The Stockline factory collapse was one of the largest industrial incidents in the last decade. Nine people were killed and 60 injured. Some 14 appliances including a heavy rescue vehicle attended the scene to bring the incident under control. Firefighters tackled the Selby train incident, when 10 people died and 40 were injured.

There are also countless other examples of road vehicle rescues, river rescues, mudslides and all manner of other emergency where firefighters have responded magnificently to save life and limit damage.

## *New risks*

The fire and rescue service is tackling known risks and preparing for new risks. Government warnings about **climate change** will have a big impact on the UK<sup>4</sup>. The fire and rescue service will have to deal with more grassland and wildfires, more floods and storms, and more droughts affecting water availability. Firefighters can adapt to these challenges – but only if we have the personnel and equipment to do it.

<sup>2</sup> Home Office, Fire Statistics UK 1999, Table 13

<sup>3</sup> CLG, Fire Statistics: Great Britain, 2010–2011

<sup>4</sup> Defra, The CCRA UK Government Report, 25 January 2012

# Frontline firefighter job cuts

The fire and rescue service is recognised as an efficient service. It did not experience a "golden age" under the last government.

Spending on the fire and rescue service in the last decade barely kept up with inflation. However **cuts of 25% over four years** were announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010. The results of the first round of cuts have been a devastating cut in the number of frontline firefighters.

Headcount figures obtained by the Fire Brigades Union indicate the scale of job cuts between April 2011 and March 2012 in all 57 fire and rescue services in the UK<sup>5</sup>. This is the first year (of four) of cuts imposed by the coalition government.

## Firefighter job cuts (2011-12)

	Wholetime	Retained	Control	Total fire-fighters
ENGLAND	-821	-255.5	-126.5	-1203
SCOTLAND	-54	-50	1	-103
Northern Ireland	14	-1	-3	10
WALES	-65	-92	-4	-161
<b>UK</b>	<b>-926</b>	<b>-398.5</b>	<b>-132.5</b>	<b>-1457</b>

Some stand out findings:

- Some 1,457 frontline firefighter jobs have been lost in the last year (2011-12) in the UK
- Some 2,172 jobs were lost from the fire service as a whole – so two-thirds (67%) were frontline jobs
- Some 926 wholetime firefighter jobs have gone
- Almost 400 retained firefighter jobs have gone
- Over 130 control jobs have been lost – 7% of all control jobs in 2011
- Some 821 wholetime firefighter jobs in England were lost
- Retained firefighters in Wales were especially hit (92 jobs cut)
- Northern Ireland and London were the only regions where firefighter jobs increased

- Metropolitan brigades have been hard hit, with GMC the worst hit (143 wholetime jobs)
- Lancashire, Essex, Humberside, Nottinghamshire and South Wales have also suffered around 30 wholetime job losses
- At brigade level, there were small increases in a few places e.g. Cornwall, Hereford and Worcester, Central Scotland
- Support roles have also been hit (715 jobs)

These figures have since been confirmed in official publications<sup>6</sup>. The previous year (2010-11), over one thousand firefighter jobs were cut across the UK. And the number of wholetime firefighter jobs has been reduced since the turn of the century.

## The threat from cuts

The Comprehensive Spending Review 2010 said cuts would be "backloaded". This means the worst planned cuts would come from 2013. If the government implements these cuts, there will be a terrible loss of fire cover.

The FBU believes that cuts on this scale over the next two years will amount to a reduction of at least 6,000 firefighter jobs over the four years (2011-15), and perhaps as many as **10,000 firefighters** overall. This would be **1 in 5 of all firefighters**.

The FBU is not the only fire service stakeholder warning of disaster. Chief officers are also arguing that cuts will severely reduce the number of firefighters, fire stations and appliances<sup>7</sup>.

## Potential impact of cuts in England to 2015

	Firefighters	Fire stations	Appliances
CFOA	4,050	60	150
AMFRA(six English metropolitan services, excluding London)	2,543	31	104

Professionals from across the service are warning of the dire consequences of cuts to the fire and rescue service. These should be heeded by politicians.

<sup>5</sup> FBU Freedom of Information request to all 57 FRs in April-June 2012. The request was for details of jobs for 31 March 2011 and 31 March 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government, Fire and Rescue Services Statistics, Scotland 2011-12.

CLG, Operational Statistics Bulletin for England 2011-12.

<sup>7</sup> Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), The Impact of Austerity on English FRs, September 2012.

Association of Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities (AMFRA), Potential Impact of the 2012-15 Financial Settlement, July 2012.

# It's about time: cuts mean slower response times

Fire response times across the UK will get worse with cuts. Official figures show that appliances are taking longer to get to fires now than a decade ago. In 2009, CLG published a report called *Fire and Rescue Service response times*<sup>8</sup>. It showed how average response times in England slowed between 1996 and 2006, with response to dwelling fires **down by 18%**. The report predicted the effects of slower response times:

- **13 additional fatalities** in dwelling and other building fires each year
- Possibly **65 additional deaths** in road traffic collisions (RTCs) and
- An **£85m increase** in other buildings fire damage

Further evidence gathered from the official statistics has shown that response times continued to worsen in 2007 and 2008. For England alone, if these figures are added to those in the CLG report, response times for dwelling fires increased by **22%** between 1996 and 2008. They have also worsened in Scotland and in Northern Ireland.

Aggregate response times in England have stagnated in the last few years, according to a recent CLG report<sup>9</sup>. However this is attributed to reduced traffic levels and other factors during the economic downturn. The FBU believes counting the arrival of smaller vehicles (not equipped like regular fire engines) make overall response times look better than they are.

More importantly, the recent CLG report shows that minute-by-minute response times have continued to slow in recent years. Previously appliances tended to arrive within 4-5 minutes, whereas now it is 5-6 minutes. These figures also mask wide variations, particularly in rural areas where people often wait a very long time for a fire engine to arrive.

Breaking down the figures further, just five years ago firefighters were able to reach one in three of incidents in 5 minutes or less. In 2011-12, **only one in six incidents** are reached in up to 5 minutes. At the other end of the scale, more incidents than before take 10 minutes or longer before an appliance arrives.

Firefighters believe rapid response times are vital and that cuts will slowdown our emergency intervention. Firefighters want to intervene swiftly – to make that difference to whether someone lives or dies, whether they are temporarily overcome with smoke or maimed for life, or whether someone loses their home and their possessions. In an emergency, "every second counts".

Response times should be improving. But the fire and rescue service requires the funding and resources to make these improvements.



## A FIRE DOUBLES IN SIZE EVERY MINUTE

<sup>8</sup> CLG, *Fire and Rescue Service response times: Fire Research Series* (Greenstreet Berman Ltd), 2009

<sup>9</sup> CLG, *Fire Incidents Response Times, England, 2011-12*

# Frequently asked questions

## *Q. Isn't the fire and rescue service expensive?*

A. The fire and rescue service costs less than £3bn a year. That's around **£50 a year per person** and represents exceptional value for money for 24/7, 365 emergency cover. The fire service also contributes indirectly to improving education, youth services, road transport, reducing anti-social behaviour and reducing business insurance costs.

## *Q. Now there are fewer fires and fire deaths, surely we don't need so many firefighters?*

A. Firefighters actively help to prevent and reduce fire and fire deaths through our public safety work. Without that work, fires and deaths could go up again. **The risks are still there** – the service has become more efficient at reducing risks. And there are many other incidents firefighters tackle – road traffic incidents, floods and terrorism. We need to maintain national resilience.

## *Q. Response times are irrelevant!*

A. Response times matter most to the public. The public rightly expects a rapid response when they have an emergency and dial 999. **Response times are nearly two minutes slower than previously**, and the government's own research states this costs lives. Fewer firefighters mean a slower response – more people will die and be injured.

## *Q. Was the fire and rescue service bloated before 2010?*

A. In the fire and rescue service, there has been **no golden age of huge investment**. We have fewer wholtime firefighters than we had ten years ago. Too much public money has been wasted on private consultants, ill thought out projects such as emergency fire control regionalisation and on principal manager salaries. But most fire service expenditure is spent on firefighters' salaries and our vital equipment.

## *Q. Has the frontline been protected?*

A. David Cameron promised firefighters at Carlisle fire station on the eve of the May 2010 election that the frontline would be protected. But **fire cuts have already hit the frontline**. There has been no protection of frontline services in fire and rescue.

## *Q. Should metropolitan areas be protected?*

A. Metropolitan fire and rescue services were hit hard by the last round of cuts. They contain many of the most deprived communities in the UK and rightly receive additional funding from central government. But the county council and combined authorities have also been squeezed – and they too have communities at greater risk. The answer isn't to single out some services for bigger cuts. The whole fire and rescue service needs more **investment** to function effectively.

## *Q. Surely some cuts should be made?*

A. The Fire Brigades Union states clearly to the Westminster government that there is **no room for cuts** to our service. Cuts on the scale proposed by the government are simply not possible while maintaining any semblance of a modern and professional fire and rescue service.



# FIRE CUTS ARE OUT OF CONTROL



The Fire Brigades Union  
Bradley House  
68 Coombe Road  
Kingston upon Thames  
KT2 7AE  
Tel: 020 8541 1765



[WWW.FBU.ORG.UK](http://WWW.FBU.ORG.UK)