

Scottish Resilience, One day RDS Conference, Dunblane Hydro 13th June

This important event was attended by all the major shareholders in the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland, with nearly 200 RDS staff and employers. Jim Smith (who for those who don't know him is the advisor on RDS matters at the Scottish Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit) deserves a great deal of credit for an excellent job in directing the speakers and keeping everyone on time.

Mr Fergus Ewing the Minister for Community Safety delivered the opening address and very refreshingly for a minister stayed throughout most of the day, making himself available to discuss issues with other delegates. He stated that he was very pleased to attend the first ever national RDS Conference and to see that so many firefighters, senior fire service managers and elected members had put time aside to be there, especially on a weekend.

Mr Ewing went on to recognise the skills, professionalism and dedication of the firefighters who make up the Retained Duty System in Scotland for without them Scotland faced a major challenge to the provision of its fire and rescue cover.

Scotland is gearing up to make progress that will help to build a stronger, flexible and more dynamic RDS that will be well placed to face future challenges.

There was a general consensus that a one size fits all solution would not work in Scotland, given the incredible diversity of RDS stations across the country, some doing 2000 calls a year in an urban environment, whilst others have to wait for their second pump to arrive on a ferry.

The Scottish Assembly have already made a huge investment upgrading nearly 100 volunteer units to RDS stations, this has generated a massive improvement in community safety as these units now carry out paid prevention work in addition to providing fire and rescue cover. RDS stations are now helping to support remote rural communities, sustaining traditional lifestyles and protecting Scotland's national heritage.

Scotland has all the traditional problems facing the RDS across the whole of the UK, there are also some specific ones, travelling is a great challenge because of the vast distances involved. A one day course at a centralised training centre can mean a firefighter being away from home and work for 5 days.

It was also interesting to find out that Co-Responder schemes are beginning to be evaluated; these have the potential to further enhance the service provided from RDS stations, especially in more remote areas.

The afternoon was spent mainly in a number of break-out sessions, capturing the delegates' impressions and opinions on the challenges and opportunities for future development and improvement.

Social Networking sites – Be aware of the Pitfalls

There is a growing interest in the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. A simple way to keep in touch with your circle of friends and visited by over 17 million people a month.

However there are pitfalls which you need to be aware of as some of our members recently discovered. Few people realise that by posting pictures, opinions and revelations on a website could possibly land them in hot water with their employer, there is always a risk that someone could be 'offended'.

In a fire and rescue service context, any picture which links the user to their employing FRS and if accompanied by other pictures or comments which could be interpreted as sexist, racist, crude or similar can result in a disciplinary investigation and action being taken.

Be aware that someone who knows you, perhaps with an 'axe to grind' or an 'old score to settle' could visit your site, seize the opportunity and report you to the service with potentially serious consequences, especially if you use a service PC to access the site.

RFU claims Victory in keeping the Individual Opt-Out

The RFU welcomes the news that the status-quo will remain due to a lack of an agreement. This news is without doubt a major victory for the UK Fire & Rescue Service and Retained Duty System personnel in particular. After months of hard work undertaken by the RFU, lobbying MPs and MEPs it is without precedent that we obtained cross-party support to challenge the proposal; it would appear that common sense has prevailed at last.

However, we are not naive enough to believe that this problem has gone away for good, we are fully aware that the European Parliament will look to submit further proposals to amend the Working Time Directive sometime in the future.

However, having now raised awareness within the political parties that without the individual Opt-Out, the Retained Duty System, which is the backbone of the UK Fire & Rescue Service, would struggle to function. Our local communities would suffer in terms of the provision of fire cover which is currently provided by Retained personnel.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer our sincere thanks to all those who have supported our campaign over the past 4 months; we hope we can count on your valuable support should this issue be raised again in the future.

Operational Guidance: Breathing Apparatus Command and Control Procedures - Review and refresh of Technical Bulletin 1/97

The project group met in April to begin to narrow the Scope of the Project and determine the composition of both Project Board and Working Group(s). This Project was identified by the Chief Fire & Rescue Advisors (CFRA) unit as one of the eight priority Operational Guidance themes at the Practitioners' Forum in October 08.

The Composition of Project Board: (*Main Board*) consists of CFRA, APFO, CFOA, RFU, CLG, FBU, FOA, FSC, & NRT. Adam Moore (Notts FRS) is the RFU's representative on the board.

There is also representation from the devolved administrations and a Lead Contact Point for each English FRS Region.

Copies of the minutes and papers are available to RFU members on request and if you have any points to make please contact us on rfuhq@rfuonline.co.uk