



OVERVIEW OF CURRENT POLICY, PRACTICE AND AWARENESS SURROUNDING CONTAMINANTS AND DECONTAMINATION IN UK FIRE STATIONS



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BACKGROUND

Firefighters are exposed to carcinogenic substances both during firefighting activities, and from their ambient workplace environments. Recently studies have shown that firefighters are at greater risk of developing certain cancers than the general population.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study was to gain a comprehensive overview of policy and practice within UK fire stations by collecting policy documents from all brigades around the country related to training firefighters receive on health risks associated with combustion products, cleaning and decontamination methods used for PPE, and how PPE is stored in stations.

METHODS

Policy documents have been requested from all brigades across the United Kingdom related to PPE. Additionally, a survey is currently available to all firefighters across the UK to evaluate actual exposure to carcinogens, and attitudes towards soiled PPE, washing, and health. Together, the summary of all policies and the nationwide survey will be used to gain an understanding of where quick, easy and effective changes can be made to improve the safety of firefighters throughout the UK.

Report on nationwide fire and rescue service policies

Nationwide survey on current practice and awareness within fire stations

Sampling at stations to identify best practice to be shared between brigades.

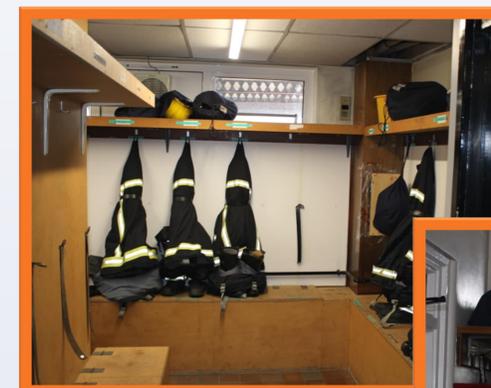
Shared best practice for safer firefighters based on brigade policies, firefighter input and laboratory testing.

RESULTS

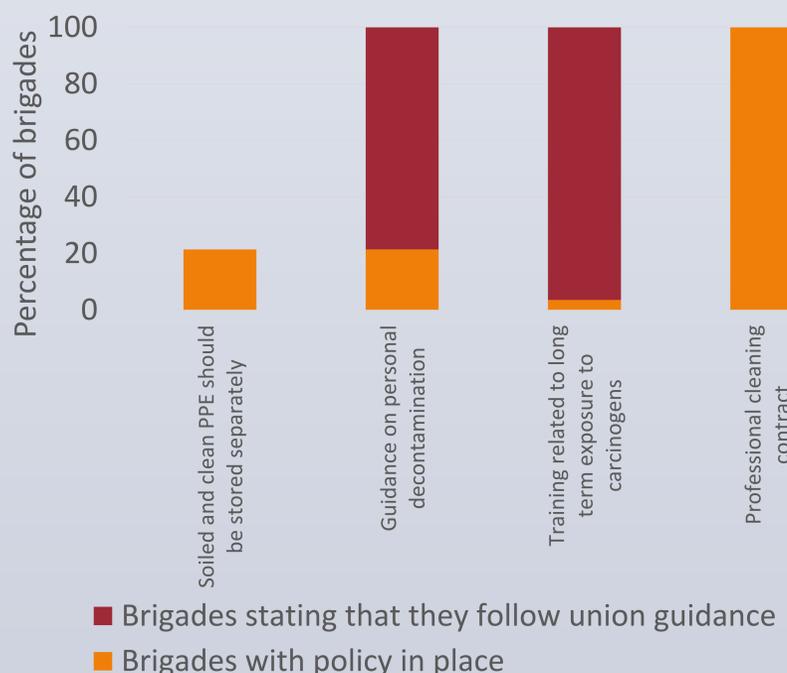
The results that follow are from an interim report based on policy responses from 60% of brigades (2).

There are a number of results from the report on current policy that will help to shape a revamp of best practice and future testing:

- The washing procedure for gloves has been identified as an area to consider to ensure all contaminants are removed effectively.
- Some stations separate clean and soiled PPE, where others store them together. Analysis can determine whether separating clean and soiled PPE is a cost effective way to reduce cross contamination.
- Responses from the policy report and the survey are showing that many firefighters are enthusiastic about an improved approach to training, with long term toxicants considered in more depth for a greater understanding of the risks across the force.
- Personal decontamination methods differ, and there is uncertainty about the most effective methods.
- There is no guidance or policy provided by any brigade on the washing of undergarments.



Guidance given by brigade policies and union guidance



CONCLUSIONS

It is known that firefighters are at an increased risk of exposure to carcinogens. What this work aims to identify is to what extent exposure can be reduced by changes in policy and attitudes amongst firefighters and management.

It will never be possible to eliminate exposure to effluent completely. By the very nature of firefighters' day to day activities there will always be some exposure. This work aims to reduce exposure and help to protect firefighters from cancer and other effluent related illness.

REFERENCES

- (1) Occupational Exposure to Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons and Elevated Cancer Incidence in Firefighters, A. A. Stec et al. 2018
- (2) Initial findings from survey of current policies and documentation in UK fire brigades: Interim report, A.E.P. Clinton, 2019 (Unpublished)