Position Statement

Purpose

This position statement/press line has been produced following a media release regarding the UCLAN Research report which was released on the 23rd November 2020. This research highlights risks associated with contaminated PPE and Cancer rates in Firefighters. This has been developed to support FRS to consider the response and provides an NFCC position to support communication teams with any local messaging.

Key Messages

- **NFCC takes the safety of Firefighters extremely seriously.**
- **NFCC are committed to understanding, through evidenced based research, any risks to Firefighters and supports a proportionate response to seek improvements and reduce risk where necessary.**
- **A project board (chaired by CFO Chris Davies MAWW) was established by NFCC in late 2016 to:**
  - **Understand any potential risk to firefighters as a consequence of any retained contaminants within their PPE**
  - **Provide guidance & recommendations to the UK Fire and Emergency Services to mitigate any such risks**
- **There is a vast amount of information/data available on this subject, often confusing and contradictory and therefore NFCC support further detailed longitudinal studies to inform future practises.**

Position Statement

NFCC takes the safety and welfare of firefighters extremely seriously and are committed to supporting evidence-based research, to understand potential risks as well as inform future guidance and recommendations.

As such, a PPE Contaminants project board was established in November 2016 in response to the commissioning of the project which is being delivered formerly by Centre of Applied Science and Technology (CAST) now Defence science and technology laboratory (DSTL) under the auspices of NFCC R&D programme.

The project was commissioned to better understand any potential risks to firefighters as a consequence of any retained contaminants within their PPE and to provide guidance and recommendations to the UK Fire and Emergency Services to mitigate any such risk.

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The project board consists of representatives from NFCC, Home Office DSTL, Health and Safety Laboratories (HSL), the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the Fire Officers Association (FOA), the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU).

The first objective of the project was to produce a full literature review which has now been completed. Unfortunately, due to the current restrictions imposed by the Global pandemic, the project has been unable to continue, all stakeholders are fully committed to this program, aiming to complete the research as soon as possible.

Significant improvements have already been realised across the sector, particularly around the cultural interpretations associated with contaminated PPE. The NFCC, Fire and rescue services, firefighters, Representative bodies and scientific advisors have and will continue to work in partnership, reducing risks to an acceptable level.

The NFCC will identify further opportunities to improve fire fighter safety as new evidence emerges. NFCC believe further detailed longitudinal research should be completed to fully understand any potential risks. Of course, if this identifies a problem with our PPE or current decontamination procedures, we would want to provide our Firefighters with the best protection available.

To ensure that FRS's reduce the risk so far as reasonably practicable:

- Every Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) must have fully risk-assessed decontamination procedures (en-route to, during and after fire incidents), and ensure all relevant staff are trained in implementing these procedures.
- All FRS personnel should receive regular and up-to-date training on the harmful health effects of exposure to toxic fire effluents, and how these exposures can be reduced, minimised or eliminated.
- All FRSs should have policies in place for the routine care, maintenance, inspection and professional cleaning of PPE.
- Establishing and strictly maintaining "designated zones" within the fire station must be a priority for preventing cross-contamination. PPE should never be worn in areas of the station designated a clean zone (e.g. kitchens, living quarters etc.) and should be stored away from personal items.
- To reduce secondary exposures, appliance cabs and equipment from emergency response vehicles should be cleaned and decontaminated on a regular basis, especially after incidents where exposure to any combustion products occurred.