

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

Tuesday 26 May

NORTH YORKSHIRE FIRE CREWS HIT OUT AT CUTS

North Yorkshire fire crews have condemned plans to cut the number of firefighters on fire engines at a number of fire stations across North Yorkshire. It includes the removal of the firefighter who controls and records the entry of firefighters into burning buildings, a role introduced after several firefighter fatalities.

In future this firefighter could be removed from fire engines and work on a community fire safety van which they will use to get to 999 incidents separately. The Fire Brigades Union says they are considering referring the matter to the Health and Safety Executive.

The role, known as Breathing Apparatus Entry Control Officer, or BAECO, was introduced after several firefighter fatalities. The BAECO is the firefighter who notes how many firefighters have gone into burning buildings using breathing apparatus and which part of the building they are going to.

The breathing apparatus generally only has enough oxygen for 15 to 20 minutes firefighting making the timing of getting relief crews in with fresh oxygen a critical role. The BAECO also performs a critical role when there is a “BA emergency” – breathing apparatus emergency – indicating that firefighters are in very serious danger.

The BA entry control officer is also responsible for observing the burning building for signs of danger, particularly building collapse. If a firefighter is injured and stops moving, the Distress Signal Unit (DSU) will sound an alert and the entry control officer is the one who instigates emergency procedures.

The move has arisen because the fire authority plans to cut the number of firefighters on frontline appliances going to road traffic collisions and house fires. No new guidance as to how the system will work has been produced or discussed with local firefighter’s safety reps.

Sean Atkinson, North Yorkshire FBU Brigade Chair said: “Local managers are being instructed to remove firefighters from operational fire appliances and send them to ride on community safety vans. This places fire crews at a greater risk than they would normally face whilst on duty and we feel that management are ignoring our concerns.

“The role of BA entry control officer is vital to ensure that firefighters are safe when they enter a burning building. Our management believe that this person should hand out leaflets instead.”

Ian Watkins, North Yorkshire FBU Brigade Secretary said: “Controlling and recording when firefighters are going into burning buildings is critical to the safety of firefighters. The role was introduced after firefighters were killed and it cannot simply be removed without us having serious concerns.

“It appears the fire authority intend to deploy firefighters into burning buildings without effective entry control. Until now this type of rapid deployment has only ever used as a very last resort, yet North Yorkshire appear intent on using it as a matter of routine.”

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