

Coroner's Rule 43 Letter Shirley Towers, Hampshire

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Andy Perry, Head of Development, Safety and Risk, on 01743 260182.

1 Purpose of Report

This report sets out the recommendations made in the Coroner's Rule 43 Letter relating to a fire at Shirley Towers, Hampshire.

2 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

3 Background

Under the provisions of Rule 43 of the Coroner's Rules, "a Coroner who believes that actions should be taken to prevent the recurrence of fatalities similar to that in respect of which the Inquest is being held, may announce at the Inquest that he is reporting the matter in writing to the person or authority who may have power to take such action and he may report the matter accordingly".

Following an inquest into the tragic deaths of two firefighters on the 6 April 2010, when fighting a fire in a high-rise block of flats in Southampton, the Coroner K St J Wiseman wrote a Rule 43 Letter to Sir Ken Knight, Chief Fire and Rescue Advisers Unit, Department for Communities and Local Government.

4 Action Taken

Having obtained a copy of the Coroner's Rule 43 Letter, officers of this Service examined existing procedures in the light of the recommendations and are taking steps, where necessary, to implement improvements. The appendix to this report sets out the recommendations and details Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's response to each of them.

5 Financial Implications

Any costs of additional equipment or training required are minimal and can be met from within existing budgets.

6 Legal Comment

The statutory duty to respond to Rule 43 reports rests with those organisations receiving the report. As the Fire Authority was not a direct recipient of the Rule 43 report, it is not required to provide a response to the Coroner. It is, however, good practice to consider the issues raised and address any concerns, as far as is practicable.

The Authority is under a duty of care as employer, under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974, in respect of the health and safety of its employees.

Any national guidance issued will be considered by officers on receipt.

7 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have determined that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

8 Appendix

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service response to recommendations arising from Coroner's Rule 43 Letter, Shirley Towers, Hampshire

9 Background Papers

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

24 April 2013, Agenda Item 11 - Coroner's Rule 43 Letter, Shirley Towers, Hampshire

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service response to recommendations arising from Coroner's Rule 43 Letter, Shirley Towers, Hampshire

This appendix details the specific recommendations made by the coroner in his Rule 43 letter and the current position with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). Whilst the recommendations are not legally binding on the Fire Authority, they are considered to be areas that require appropriate attention.

1 Recommendation

Guidance and clarification is required with regard to search procedures as set out in Technical Bulletin 1/97 (Breathing Apparatus Command and Control Procedures), to ensure that:

a) Thermal imaging cameras are used to search for fire in smoky conditions

SFRS Current Position

1. Thermal Imaging Cameras (TIC) for use in dark and smoky conditions are available on front line appliances. When they were introduced TIC training was delivered in 2004, 2005, and 2006 as part of Breathing Apparatus (BA) Core Skill Modular course. TIC input on modular courses ceased in 2007 and is now carried out on station and included in employees' Individual Development Records on an annual basis.
2. New on-call firefighter recruits have a theory/practical session on TIC as part of the BA initial course.
3. Training note 09/2012 was issued as a result of the introduction of a new Bullard camera. Operational use is similar to that detailed in previous notes and Brigade Order Technical 10 part 1.
4. BA study pack 2013 provides details of TIC operational procedure.
5. Operational expectation is that TIC should be part of all BA initial entry ancillary equipment.

b) Fire-fighters understand the importance of fully extinguishing fires before proceeding past or above the fire scene

SFRS Current Position

1. Instruction to firefighters has been to extinguish any fires as soon as possible. Fire causes most of the hazards, e.g. heat, products of combustion, reduced visibility etc.
2. BA Core Skills Modular Course - Fire behaviour training presentation
3. BA study pack 2013 provides details of fire extinguishment.

- c) **Methodical search patterns are undertaken e.g. area by area, room by room or floor by floor.**

SFRS Current Position

1. Methodical search patterns are taught on the BA Core Skills Modular Course and BA initial course for both basic and domestic search, including two presentations: one for domestic and one for basic.
2. Search procedures are assessed on the BA Core Skills Modular Course, BA initial course and on some Breathing Apparatus Training (BAT) sessions.
3. BA study pack 2013 provides details of search procedures.

- d) **Search patterns are standardised across every fire and rescue service (FRS) in the UK so that there is common understanding and procedure when fire-fighters from different FRSs are engaged in joint working.**

SFRS Current Position

1. This is outside SFRS's responsibility.
2. Planned peer assessment will assist with standardisation between neighbouring fire and rescue services.

2 Recommendation

That a review is undertaken to ensure that the teaching and training of those fire-fighting techniques used to contain and cool compartment fires, fully complement techniques designed to attack and extinguish fires.

SFRS Current Position

1. Instruction is included in the BA initial and BA Core Skills Modular Courses.
2. BA study pack 2013 provides details of firefighting techniques.
3. BA Core Skills Modular Course - Fire behavior training presentation

3 Recommendation

A review should be undertaken into the training provided in relation to the circumstances and manner in which each technique should be used. For example, a pulse spray technique should not be used in a fully ventilated compartment fire, the severity of which will not be controllable by pulse spraying and gas cooling approach.

SFRS Current Position

1. Instruction is included in BA initial and BA Core Skills Modular Courses

2. BA study pack 2013 provides details of firefighting techniques.
3. BA Core Skills Modular Course - Fire behaviour training presentation.

4 Recommendation

That a review is undertaken to ensure the adequacy of teaching and training of tactical ventilation procedures in compartment fires to highlight the effect ad-hoc ventilation can have on fire development and to confirm the associated dangers.

SFRS Current Position

1. Instruction is included in BA initial and BA Core Skills Modular Courses.
2. Positive Pressure Ventilation training is undertaken by wholetime watches.
3. BA study pack 2013 provides details of firefighting techniques.

5 Recommendation

That all FRs should consider the implementation of measures to reduce the risks associated with fallen cables. In particular consideration should be given to:

- a) **Providing insulated wire cutters, or other means of severing cables, to all breathing apparatus teams;**

SFRS Current Position

These are not currently provided. In March the Senior Management Team agreed to provide cutters on each breathing apparatus board and emergency evacuation set. Consideration is also being given to provide all breathing apparatus sets with a set of cutters.

- b) **Modifying breathing apparatus sets to reduce the risk of cables becoming caught between the wearer's back and the cylinder (as introduced by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service)**

SFRS Current Position

A risk assessment has been carried out on SFRS breathing apparatus twin pack cylinders, which are different than the Hampshire single cylinder. This identified that there are also other possible snagging areas, which cannot be removed, so additional control measures, using entanglement techniques are being delivered on the BA initial Course, BA and Resilience Core Skills Modular Courses.

- c) **Training all breathing apparatus wearers in the risks presented by fallen cables and how to reduce those risks.**

SFRS Current Position

1. Awareness presentation and techniques video has been included in the 2013 BA Initial Course, BA and Resilience Core Skills Modular Courses.
2. The Senior Management Team has agreed to provide an entanglement unit for demonstration purposes.

6 Recommendation

That all FRs and social housing providers consider the Rule 43 recommendations made by HM Coroner for Hertfordshire Mr Edward Thomas following the inquest into fire-fighter fatalities at Harrow Court in particular Recommendation 8 made by the FBU which is here repeated for ease of reference:

“8. That SBC should remove all the surface mounted plastic trunking/conduit used to protect and support the Fire Alarm and Automatic Fire Detection System in the Common Areas of all their premises, and replace them with a method of cable support which as a minimum conforms to BS 5839- Part 1 : 2002; clause 26.2 (f);

Methods of cable support should be such that circuit integrity will not be reduced below that afforded by the cable used, and should withstand a similar temperature and duration to that of the cable, while maintaining adequate support.

Note 7. In effect, this recommendation precludes the use of plastic cable clips, cable ties or trunking, where these products are the sole means of cable support.”

7 Recommendation

That Building Regulations are amended to ensure that all cables, not just fire alarm cables, are supported by fire-resistant cable supports. This could be achieved by an amendment to BS 7671 (2008) Institute of Electrical Engineers Wiring Regulations.

SFRS Current Position:

This is outside SFRS's responsibility.

8 Recommendation

Social housing providers should be encouraged to consider the retro-fitting of sprinklers in all existing high rise buildings in excess of 30 metres in height, particularly those identified by Fire and Rescue Services as having complex designs that make fire-fighting more hazardous and/or difficult. It is noted that current legislation requires that all newly built high rise buildings in excess of 30 metres in height must be fitted with sprinkler systems.

SFRS Current Position

There are no high rise premises meeting these criteria within the County. SFRS has, however, reviewed residential accommodation and determined there are no complex “scissor type” layouts, as found in Hampshire fire.

9 Recommendation

That a review of training given to control staff is undertaken by all FRs in UK in light of the guidance given in recent GRAs (generic risk assessments) including GRA 3.2 of September 2008.

SFRS Current Position

Emergency call handling training, incorporating managing callers and fire survival advice, was reviewed in 2012 within Shropshire’s Fire Control. This has recently been revisited, in light of the recommendations made in relation to fires in high rise buildings. Specific details for anticipated behaviours and interrogation of callers, reporting these types of incidents, are now incorporated within this training document. Subsequent awareness and continuation training for all Fire Control personnel has taken place and will continue during 2013. Fire Control Specific Incident Procedure (SIP) 209 – High Rise Building Fires, has been created and adopted in line with Service Policy, Operational Standard Incident Procedure and the Coroner’s recommendations.

9 Recommendation

All FRs should further consider the implementation of measures to ensure that control staff are properly supervised when taking calls and are trained to capture and relay relevant information likely to assist operational firefighters.

SFRS Current Position

1. All emergency calls received within SFRS are monitored and supervised whenever possible. The levels of risk associated with each call is assessed by the supervisor and staff, based on incident type at the time of call. Calls to high rise buildings would warrant increased levels of supervision and monitoring due to the potential complexity of the call and the increased potential of risk to life. Fire Control personnel are trained during initial and ongoing continuation development sessions to capture and relay relevant information to operational firefighters, e.g. floor level of incident, persons involved, barriers to access details etc, the frequencies of which are specified within Individual Development Records.
2. In the event of failure of mobile data terminals on appliances Fire Control have access to associated plans and operational procedures to support / assist Command and Control fire ground resources en route or in attendance.

10 Recommendation

That there should be an obligation to:

- a. **provide signage to indicate floor levels both in stairwells and lift lobbies in high rise premises, to assist the emergency services; and**
- b. **ensure that signage indicating flat numbers and emergency exits in high rise premises are placed at a low level to increase visibility in smoke conditions.**

SFRS Current Position:

This is outside SFRS's responsibility unless Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 is amended. Goodwill advice could be given.