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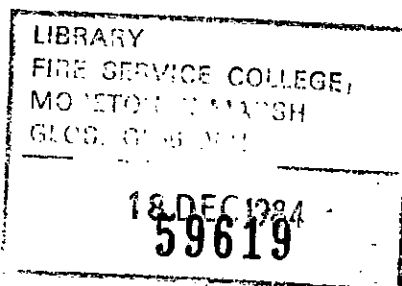
Switchboard: 01-213 3000

Our reference: FIR/75 619/3/44

Your reference:

27 September 1978

To all Chief Officers



Dear Chief Officer

57/1978

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ETC ACT, 1974

OPERATIONS ON THE FIREGROUND

1. Fire Service Circular No 29/1978 which issued to Fire Authorities on 7 July last, outlined in paragraph 9 the special arrangements which had been agreed with the Health and Safety Executive for the maintenance of liaison between their Inspectorate and the Fire Service Inspectorate with respect to any issues arising from training and operations in the fire service.
2. At a recent meeting with a senior member of the HSE Inspectorate the question was raised whether "systems of work that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe" were being followed by the fire service where a fire was being fought from inside rather than from outside a building simply to save property.
3. During the discussion the following points were made and accepted by the Health and Safety Executive:-
 - a. It is rare for the officer in charge of the fire fighting to be able to accept that a building is unoccupied even when assured of this by someone in authority. Experience has shown that ordinary occupiers do not search adequately when faced with a fire emergency. They forget such places as toilets, cupboards, etc; they may be unaware of the presence of members of the public (with authorised or unauthorised access); contractors carrying out repairs, etc; etc.
 - b. If fire fighting is to be carried out effectively, buildings and other enclosed spaces have to be entered. Firemen have to continue to work inside them until the fire has been dealt with, or until such time as the officer in charge decides that the fire is not being held or his men are at risk, at which point he withdraws them and tackles the fire from the outside. This decision usually results in heavy damage to, if not total loss of, the building and its contents.



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c. Every member of the fire service is given instruction on the signs which indicate an imminent collapse of part of a building, and also instruction on construction materials and the structure of the various types of building, and their stability under fire conditions. He is also trained to evacuate a building speedily and safely at a predetermined signal.

d. Training is also given on a variety of risks inherent in the use of a building, and such training is frequently given in the building itself.

e. Firemen fighting fires are trained to recognise and to minimise the risk of the unpredictable in fire fighting, and accept that some risk is inherent in their job. Their guidance booklets and their training courses are continually amended in the light of experience; activities at any fire of consequence are the subject of report to the Home Office; and operational activities are monitored by the Fire Service Inspectorate. Operational practices are under constant review by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council and its various standing committees (the CFBAC is made up of representatives of all employers and employees in the fire service together with the Home Office, and technical and research bodies).

4. It will be seen that the discussion with the Health and Safety Inspectorate recognised that risk is inherent in the firemen's job and that he cannot carry out effective fire fighting without the possibility at times of placing himself in jeopardy. At the same time there was an awareness of the fact that firemen's training, and the procedures and practices promulgated to the service on behalf of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, ensure an appreciation of all the risks involved, every endeavour is made to ensure that exposure to them is restricted to a level which is reasonable in the circumstances of each case.

5. The introduction of the above legislation has not as far as I am aware changed the traditional role of a fireman to protect life and property to the best of his ability and to accept reasonable, calculated, risks to himself in doing so; or the responsibility of the officer in charge of an incident to ensure that safe practices are followed in fire fighting and other activities and that so far as is reasonably practicable in the circumstances risks to the personnel under his command are if possible eliminated, or if not, reduced to the minimum commensurate with the needs of the task.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Hollan

DEAR CHIEF OFFICER

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