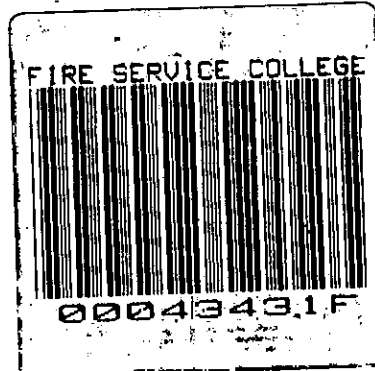


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HOME OFFICE
ORSEFERRY HOUSE, DEAN RYLE STREET
LONDON SW1P 2AW

To: All Chief Fire Officers

26 September 1994

Dear Chief Officer

DEAR CHIEF OFFICER LETTER 8/1994

This letter deals with a number of matters which are summarised below. More detailed information is contained in the relevant items attached to the letter.

A RECRUITMENT OF RETAINED PERSONNEL

2. This item reminds brigades of the advice contained in an earlier Dear Chief Officer Letter about recruiting practice and policy affecting retained personnel.

B PERIODIC INSPECTION AND TESTING OF FIRE SERVICE EQUIPMENT: TECHNICAL BULLETIN 1/1994

3. This item informs Chief Fire Officers of the introduction of a new Home Office Technical Bulletin which gives guidance on the inspection and testing of fire service equipment.

C RADIO INSTALLATIONS IN FIRE SERVICE VEHICLES

4. This item informs Chief Fire Officers about the Fire Service Vehicle Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) and Equipment Handbook. The Handbook has been produced by the Home Office Radio Frequency Communications Planning Unit (Validation and Installation Design Group) and contains guidance for fire service personnel who are responsible for the specification, procurement and installation of radio equipment into motor vehicles used by brigades. It is intended to promote a high degree of safe practice. A copy of the Handbook is enclosed for each brigade.

D CITIZENS CHARTER COMPLAINTS TASK FORCE: DISCUSSION PAPERS

5. This item informs Chief Fire Officers about the work of the Citizen's Charter Complaints Task Force and the discussion papers it has issued on "Access to Complaints Systems" and "Simplicity and Speed".

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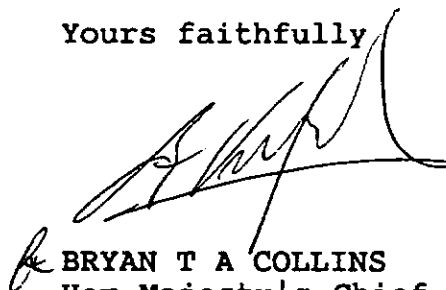
E AMENDMENT TO ITEM C OF DCOL 2/1994: THE CHEMICAL (HAZARDS INFORMATION AND PACKAGING) REGULATIONS 1993 (CHIP)

6. This item contains an amendment to paragraph 2 of Item C of DCOL 2/1994 concerning the Chemical (Hazards Information Packaging) Regulations 1993.

F AIRBAGS: THE USE OF RADIO

7. Item A of DCOL 4/1994 informed Chief Fire Officers about the possible activation of vehicle safety airbags by radio transmissions when brigade personnel attend road traffic accidents (RTAs). Since this DCOL was issued, a number of enquiries have been received from brigades and this item is intended to clarify the position about the use of radios at RTAs and in general day to day use in vehicles fitted with airbags.

Yours faithfully



**BRYAN T A COLLINS
Her Majesty's Chief
Inspector of Fire Services**

PLEASE NOTE: DCOL 6/1994 dated 22 July and DCOL 7/1994 dated 18 August concerned recruitment to posts in HM Inspectorate of Fire Services and were issued on a limited distribution.

RECRUITMENT OF RETAINED PERSONNEL

1. The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council met on 17 May 1994 and considered a report from an informal working group which looked at issues surrounding recruitment and retention of the retained. A number of possible reasons for the current shortfall in retained establishment were identified, and ways in which the shortfall could be redressed.

2. Dear Chief Officer Letter 11/91 reported the results of some research on the subject of retained recruitment and drew attention to the continued need to ensure that recruitment efforts are maintained and focused in the most productive way. The recent working group endorsed most of the previous research findings, and the advice in that Dear Chief Officer letter still stands. The following are additional points which Chief Officers will wish to bear in mind when formulating brigades' recruitment policies.

A The eyesight requirements laid down in paragraph 5 of the Fire Services (Appointments and Promotion) Regulations 1978 do not apply to the retained. There is also discretion for a Chief Officer to accept in certain circumstances a retained firefighter who does not meet the usual height requirements. The Chief Officer should be satisfied that this is justified by the remoteness of the retained station and that the height difference can be accommodated without impairing the operational efficiency of the brigade. Other physical and medical requirements in the Regulations apply to both wholetime and retained, and a good overall standard of fitness is needed at all levels.

B Brigades should be actively attempting to recruit women as recommended in DCOL 11/91.

C In some areas the unemployed form a large pool of potential recruits, and may have considerable skills to offer. Applications from the unemployed should be considered on their merits, and it should not be assumed that an unemployed person who subsequently obtains full time employment will automatically leave the service.

It may be difficult to attract applicants who are unemployed, particularly as those who are receiving Income Support may find that much of the money they could earn as retained firefighters would be deducted from their benefit. Calculation of benefit entitlement can be complex as individuals' circumstances may vary and entitlement has to be calculated separately in each case. The Home Office has been in contact with the Department of Social Security, who already acknowledge the important role of the retained in the community. The DSS has provided the information in the attached annex on the benefits for which an unemployed retained firefighter may be eligible.

D In some rural areas particularly, it may be possible to extend response times for retained personnel without adversely affecting the call-out time of appliances. Where this is possible it will increase the chances of finding recruits who are able and willing to meet the requirements of retained duties.

3. Brigades who have adopted the policies outlined above have in some cases reported a dramatic improvement in retained recruitment. Above all, successful recruitment will depend on a flexible attitude on the part of the brigade and a willingness to make the retained service attractive to potential candidates.

Telephone contact number: 071 217 8753

ITEM B
DCOL 8/1994

**PERIODIC INSPECTION AND TESTING OF FIRE SERVICE EQUIPMENT
TECHNICAL BULLETIN 1/1994**

1. This item informs Chief Fire Officers of the introduction of a new Home Office Technical Bulletin which gives guidance on the inspection and testing of fire service equipment.
2. Technical Bulletin 1/1994, Periodic Inspection and Testing of Fire Service Equipment, contains recommendations which are a revision of and replacement for the "Standard Tests" previously contained in the Fire Service Drill Book which is being superseded by the Fire Service Training Manual.
3. The inspections and tests contained in this Technical Bulletin will not be included in the Fire Service Training Manual as they are not intended to provide an opportunity for familiarisation or training on the equipment. Their purpose is to ensure that the equipment is in efficient and effective working order and is safe for its intended purpose.
4. Further copies of the Technical Bulletin can be obtained from HMSO price £4.50 each.

Telephone contact numbers:	Administrative	071 217 8745
	Technical	071 217 8720

Social Security Benefits - Part-Time Fire Fighters

ANNEX TO ITEM A
DCOL 8/1994

Social Security legislation refers to Part-Time Fire Fighters as a person who performs a duty in a fire brigade maintained in pursuance of the Fire Services Acts 1947 to 1959. Unemployed people are required to be available for and actively seeking work. However when performing duties as a Part-Time Fire Fighter a person is deemed (treated) as being available for work.

Unemployment Benefit

Unemployment Benefit (UB) is a taxable cash benefit which is paid for up to a year to people who are out of work and are capable of available for and actively seeking work. You must have paid a set amount of Class 1 National Insurance contributions in the relevant Tax Years.

Your right to personal UB is not affected by your savings or your partner's earnings. There are however two UB earnings rules; UB is not payable for any day on which you earn more than £2, nor is it payable in any benefit week in which you earn £57.

However the earnings that you receive when performing duties as a part-time fire fighter duties are ignored and will not affect your entitlement to UB. Any monies that you receive as a retainer will count as earnings. Monies paid as a retainers will be averaged over an appropriate period and taken into account.

To claim UB you should phone or visit the nearest Unemployment Benefit Office or Employment Service Jobcentre on the first day you are unemployed.

Income Support

Income Support is an income related benefit. It does not depend on National Insurance contributions. Normally you cannot get Income Support if you or your partner are working for 16 hours or more per week on average. However, time spent working as a part-time fire fighter will not count towards the 16 hours. Your savings and earnings, and those of your partner, will be taken into account and could affect your entitlement.

When you are engaged in duties as a part-time fire fighter a weekly sum of £15 of your earnings will be disregarded. The maximum amount of earnings that can be ignored for a couple is £15. Earnings for part time Fire Fighters consists of payments for drills, services and retaining fees. If the earnings you receive fluctuate then the amount of income may be calculated by means of an average. This can be a recognisable cycle, 5 weeks or any other period as would enable a more accurate weekly amount to be classified. You may wish to inform the adjudicating officer if your earnings have been distorted by seasonal or other factors eg crop fires, November 5th etc.

The first £3,000 of capital held is ignored. Capital of a value between £3,000 and £8,000 will be taken into account by assuming a weekly income of £1 for any part of each £250 of capital over the £3,000 level. If your capital exceeds £8,000 you will not be eligible to receive Income Support.

To claim Income Support you will need to obtain a form B1 from the Unemployment Benefit Office. The form should be returned to your local Benefits Agency Office

Family Credit

Family Credit (FC) is a regular tax free cash payment for working people with children. It does not depend on National Insurance contributions. The amount you can get depend on the number of children you have, how old they are and how much money is coming into your home at the time you claim.

To qualify you must be responsible for at least one child under 16 (under 19 if in full-time education). You (or your partner if you have one) must work for at least 16 hours a week. The work may be in more than one job and may be done by either partner; but you cannot add together the hours worked by both you and your partner to achieve the minimum requirement of 16 hours. Work as a fire-fighter counts towards the 16 hours.

You can obtain a Family Credit pack FC1 from any Post Office or Social Security Office. The claim pack includes a claim form. When you fill in the form, you will be asked for information about your earnings. You must include details of your earnings as a part-time fire fighter.

For more information about Family Credit, telephone the Family Credit Helpline on 0253 500 050.

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Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

Housing Benefit (HB) is a social security benefit to help people on low incomes to pay their rent. Council Tax is the way in which local residents pay for local services. Council Tax Benefit (CTB) is available to people on low incomes to help meet these costs.

These benefits (HB) & (CTB) are administered by the local authorities. They are not dependant upon National Insurance Contributions. You can claim when you are in work and when you are unable to work. You will need to provide details of the rent you pay and any other people who live in the same household. You will also be asked to provide details of all your income and savings. You will not be entitled to benefit if you have savings of over £16,000. HB cannot help a person with mortgage repayments.

You can obtain a claim form for HB or/and CTB from your local council. You will be asked to provide details of your income and savings. This will include details of the monies you receive for undertaking duties as a part-time fire fighter.

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For further information about Social Security Benefits, you can also ring ***Freeline Social Security*** on ***0800 666555***. You will not be charged for the call. The person will not have your personal papers but will be able to give you general advice. For further information please see leaflet FB 26 called Voluntary and part-time workers. This leaflet may be obtained from your local Benefits Agency Office

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This information sheet gives general guidance only and should not be treated as a complete and authoritative statement of the law.

June 1994

RADIO INSTALLATIONS IN FIRE SERVICE VEHICLES

1. This item informs Chief Fire Officers about Home Office guidance concerning the installation of operational equipment into motor vehicles used by or on behalf of the Fire Services of England and Wales. The Fire Service Vehicle Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) and Equipment Installation Handbook has two main aims:

- (a) to help fire service personnel involved in the specification, procurement and installation of vehicle mounted, electrically powered operational equipment to understand the concept of electromagnetic compatibility and the factors by which it can be controlled, in respect of vehicle installations.
- (b) to inform fire service personnel who are responsible for the installation of equipment on vehicles about potentially hazardous areas and to promote a high degree of safe practice in vehicle installations.

2. Brigades are required by Health and Safety at Work legislation to ensure that precautionary measures are implemented when radio communications equipment is installed in fire service vehicles. It is essential that the equipment does not, under normal operational conditions, cause any physical injury or other hazard to users of the equipment. The Handbook contains a comprehensive set of commonsense rules which, if universally adopted and implemented, should ensure a high degree of safety.

3. It is recommended that all personnel, whether directly employed or working for a contractor, who are physically engaged in the installation of operational equipment into fire service vehicles should read the Handbook carefully, make sure they fully understand its implications and implement its proposals.

4. A copy of the Fire Service Vehicle Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) and Equipment Installation Handbook is enclosed for your brigade's use. Please note that the Home Office Radio Frequency and Communications Planning Unit (RFCPU) will be issuing updates and amendments to the Handbook as well as other guidance on general matters relating to vehicle installations and specific advice on particular vehicles.

5. Chief Fire Officers are therefore asked to nominate an appropriate contact, by name or post, within the brigade to whom future updates to the Handbook and other guidance should be sent. Details of the name, address and telephone number should be sent to:

Ms S Dawson
HM Fire Service Inspectorate
Home Office
Horseferry House (Room 608)
Dean Ryle Street
LONDON SW1P 2AW

6. The implementation of the safety guidance contained in the Handbook is unlikely to have any financial or manpower implications for the fire service.

Telephone contact number: 071 217 8270

CITIZEN'S CHARTER COMPLAINTS TASK FORCE DISCUSSION PAPERS

1. The Citizen's Charter Complaints Task Force was set up in June 1993 to undertake a wide-ranging review of public sector complaints systems, to ensure that they operate in line with Citizen's Charter principles.

2. The Citizen's Charter Complaints Task Force is producing a series of discussion documents. Two copies of the first two in the series, "Access to Complaints Systems" and "Simplicity and Speed" are enclosed. The purpose of these documents is to offer all organisations an opportunity to test the effectiveness of their own complaints handling systems against the set of principles which the Task Force believes is widely applicable.

3. The remaining discussion papers, "Fairness and Confidentiality", "Attitude and Motivation", "Redress and Compensation" and "Information: learning from complaints" are to be circulated with later DCOLs.

4. Any enquiries about this item should be directed to Mr Pillai (G1 division) at the number below.

Telephone contact number: 071 217 8750

ITEM E
DCOL 8/1994

AMENDMENT TO ITEM C OF DEAR CHIEF OFFICER LETTER 2/1994:
THE CHEMICAL (HAZARDS INFORMATION AND PACKAGING)
REGULATIONS 1993 (CHIP)

1. Item C of Dear Chief Officer Letter 2/1994 gave some brief details of the Chemical (Hazards information and Packaging) Regulation 1993 (CHIP).

2. There was an error in paragraph 2 of that item which should now be amended to read:

"Under these regulations, substances (ie chemical elements and compounds) will be classified on the basis of physico-chemical, health and environmental properties and preparations (ie mixtures of substances) will be classified on the basis of physico-chemical and health properties."

3. This revised paragraph reflects that substances and not preparations (as indicated in DCOL 2/1994) will be classified on the basis of environmental properties.

Telephone contact number: 071 217 8745

AIRBAGS: THE USE OF RADIO

1. Paragraph 3 of Item A of DCOL 4/1994 has given rise to a number of enquiries from brigades. This paragraph, which mirrors advice given to the police, is intended to deal with emergency situations following a road traffic accident; it does not seek to offer general guidance on the use of radios or telephones in cars fitted with airbags.

2. The purpose of this item is to clarify the position regarding the use of radio in the vicinity of a vehicle involved in a road traffic accident, where an airbag fitted to the vehicle has not activated. Additionally, because of the apparent confusion within some brigades, this item also seeks to clarify the general position regarding the use of radio in vehicles fitted with airbags.

Emergency situations

3. The possibility referred to in the DCOL of a fire service radio activating an airbag is very remote.

4. Radios should not be used within or in the vicinity of a vehicle at an emergency incident if the airbag has not activated. A 10 metres exclusion zone should be maintained. Advice from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Limited indicates that after disconnection of the vehicle battery, it is possible that an airbag fitted to the vehicle will remain armed for a significant period. It is therefore recommended that a radio exclusion zone of 10 metres should be observed throughout the incident.

Generally

5. Manufacturers recommend that radios or cellular telephones should only be used within the confines of a vehicle when properly connected to an external aerial. Provided that radio equipment is properly installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, the likelihood of its causing accidental activation of an airbag is extremely remote. There has been no reported instance of accidental actuation of an airbag by radio equipment fitted in this way. Properly installed fire service radio equipment should not create the conditions whereby an airbag might actuate inadvertently. No handheld or cellular radio should be used within the confines of a vehicle fitted with an airbag unless fitted to an external aerial system.

6. Paragraph 2.4 of Item A of DCOL 4/1994 says that unexpected actuation of an airbag is unlikely to occur due to fire. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Limited advises that many airbag systems are designed to self-deploy when the internal temperature exceeds 150°C (300°F).

7. This item is for the information of Chief Fire Officers. There are no cost or manpower implications.

Telephone contact number: 071 217 8746