

Scottish Resilience

Scottish Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit

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Chief Officers



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Dear Chief Officer

DEAR CHIEF OFFICER (SCOTLAND) LETTER 6/2009

BREATHING APPARATUS

1. This letter provides an update on the operational guidance on the provision, use and training for Breathing Apparatus (BA) by Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) and reaffirms the currency of the existing guidance.
2. Technical Bulletin 1/97 'Breathing Apparatus Command and Control Procedures' (TB1/97) is currently under review and a UK working group has been set up to take the review forward. The guidance on BA training contained in Fire Services Circulars 8/1970, 8/1971 and 6/1981 is also covered within the review. However, until completion of the review, the existing guidance remains extant and FRSs should continue applying the advice contained within the extant centrally issued guidance until such time as it is either replaced or consolidated into new guidance.
3. It is recognised that, with the introduction of Workforce Development, Career & Contribution Management and competence based training, FRSs may have differing training strategies in place that ensure operational staff are able to maintain competence. It will be for the FRS to demonstrate that its training strategies and training delivery models meet the principles set out in current guidance.
4. In particular, FRSs are advised that the following principles contained within the existing guidance should be maintained.

5. The Incident Commander should conduct a dynamic risk assessment, using appropriate information, to ensure that safe systems of work are adopted for the commitment of BA wearers. Within this process the Incident Commander is expected to identify, analyse and assess the risks and select the appropriate BA procedures for controlling the risks, prior to committing crews wearing BA. FRSs should ensure that all managers who carry out the role of Incident Commander have received suitable training, including evidence of maintenance/assessment of command competence. Risk assessments should only be undertaken by a competent person.

6. One of the key elements of control at an incident is the correct selection of the appropriate Stage of BA Control (Rapid deployment, Stage 1 or 2 and BA Main Control) to ensure that suitable and sufficient BA support and emergency arrangements are in place. There have been many advances in equipment and technology since 1997 and the revision of TB 1/97 will identify the recommended standard of emergency arrangements for the future. However, until new guidance is in place it is expected that FRSs will follow existing guidance on provision and equipment for BA emergency teams as a minimum.

7. The role of the Breathing Apparatus Entry Control Officer (BAECO) is essential to the safe control and support of BA operations. The skills and knowledge to carry out the BAECO role in terms of maintaining proper records on the entry control board, communicating with BA teams, and the briefing and de-briefing of BA teams, are an integral part of 'core' BA training.

8. Training for the role of BAECO (to monitor the safety of deployed BA teams within risk areas) should include the limitations of the current calculation of air usage and create the operational understanding that the calculated time of whistle is only for guidance based on the average consumption of air. Whilst BA duration tables were historically based on approximately 40 litres per minute, FRSs are reminded that research has shown that the actual average consumption rates could vary between 40 -72% greater than this figure, dependent on work rate and conditions. 'Air usage' and 'volume of air remaining' even if monitored through telemetry, are not sufficient control measures in their own right for ensuring safe deployment of personnel. BA duration tables are not the sole measure of ensuring BA wearer safety, FRSs should consider the use of appropriate air consumption figures in BA training and at operational incidents having taken this into account and ensure that sufficient control measures are in place to eliminate the risk associated with the inability to accurately calculate actual air consumption. Future guidance will reflect any change in BA duration tables.

9. The most appropriate way of ensuring a consistent approach to BA wearing and command and control procedures at all incidents is to ensure that knowledge of BA procedures is coherent throughout each FRS. Each FRS is responsible for ensuring that the appropriate policies and procedures are in place to ensure that a level of consistency in relation to BA training and assessment of competence, is maintained and that the policy is delivered.

10. Initial and refresher training and assessment should be undertaken by personnel who are deemed competent as BA instructors. These instructors should have undergone additional training to fulfil the particular requirements of the role and been appropriately assessed. The maintenance of competency within the role should be subject to regular assessment and instructors should be required to maintain a portfolio of evidence to enable them to demonstrate the maintenance of their competence. FRS-wide co-ordinated training should be in addition to and not replace, effective station based assessment and training which supports the maintenance of skills.

11. The wearing of BA is a safety critical control measure in hazardous operations. Therefore, all operational firefighters expected to wear BA as well as those who direct and supervise BA operations need to be able to demonstrate competence in the relevant practices and procedures which they will be expected to undertake. Whilst wearing BA at operational incidents assists in maintaining competence, it may not in itself be considered sufficient to demonstrate continuing competence.

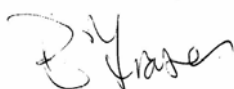
12. Workplace assessment is the recognised framework for ensuring competence of all firefighting personnel. Due to the broad range of activities and complexities associated with the wearing of BA, the safety critical implications of the activity and the difficulties of monitoring all aspects of such operations, assessment through simulation will continue to form an important and integral part of ensuring competence.

13. Fire Service Circular 8/1970 recommends that BA wearers attend a 2-3 day refresher course at two-yearly intervals, and that any firefighter who has not worn BA at a fire during any period of 12 months should have refresher training in heat and smoke. Since the publication of the guidance there have been significant advances in the provision of BA training and the introduction of the IPDS which has enhanced the maintenance of competence within the fire and rescue service. However, until such time as the Fire Services Circulars are reviewed, the guidance they contain remains extant.

14. There has been widespread introduction of fire behaviour training within Fire and Rescue Services to enhance firefighter safety when involved in compartment firefighting operations. The published guidance for the planning, implementation and delivery of fire behaviour training is contained in Fire Service Manual - Volume 4: Fire Service Training: Guidance and Compliance Framework for Compartment Fire Behaviour Training. This is currently being revised.

15. The Fire Service Manual identifies the learning outcomes for fire behaviour training; however BA refresher training may be distinctly different. Whilst compartment fire behaviour training could be combined with BA refresher training, it is important that the aims and objectives for both topics are adequately identified and delivered.

Yours faithfully



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