

Emergency workers on call over Christmas

Thousands of emergency service workers on duty yesterday have been thanked by the Scottish Government for helping keep the country going. Ministers have highlighted the contribution made to keep essential police, fire and ambulance services going as normal, including:

- * More than 700 Scottish Ambulance Service staff
- * At least 3,300 fire fighters, retained fire fighters and fire control room staff

Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon and Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill have publicly thanked the blue-light staff for helping to keep Scotland's key services on track during the holidays.

Mr MacAskill said:-“The snowy and icy weather over the last few weeks has shown once again just how committed our police officers and fire fighters, their support staff and ambulance service colleagues are. Yesterday they gave us all even more reason to be grateful.

“Thousands of police, fire and ambulance staff were hard at work yesterday, maintaining essential emergency services on a day when most of us were lucky enough to be able to enjoy a day off at home enjoying ourselves.

“We all know just how much we rely on them all year round but I think this Christmas in particular our blue-light workers have really been sustaining Scotland.”

Ms Sturgeon said:-“At any time of year our emergency services staff do an amazing job and over the last few weeks they've shown extraordinary dedication in coping with the extreme weather.

“For most of us Christmas Day is a time to stay at home with our families enjoying a peaceful and relaxing day, but for these 999 staff it’s been another day at work. They left their homes and families yesterday to make sure the rest of us were as safe and well looked after as possible.

“Coping with the weather and working over the holidays, the contribution of our police, fire and ambulance service staff has once again given us all reason to be grateful to them.”

The Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) will increase its resources by up to 20% at peak periods over the festive period to cope with the surge in 999 calls as the Christmas party season reaches full flow and revellers celebrate Hogmanay.

The SAS is warning that this year could pose even more of a risk for revellers, as they party in what are predicted to be sub zero temperatures.

During the festive period last year (2 December – 2 January) the SAS coped with an increase of around 15% on the normal monthly average for emergency 999 responses across Scotland – almost 6,000 extra incidents, which were mostly alcohol related.

Pauline Howie, Chief Executive, Scottish Ambulance Service, said:-“This is a time when most people enjoy parties, as well as spending time with their friends and families, but with forecasts of freezing conditions returning until the New Year, we would ask people to drink sensibly and make sure that they are properly dressed for the weather. By doing so, they will help us make sure that we are sending ambulance crews to those who really need our help, rather than people who have simply had too much to drink.

“We have put in place contingency plans to deal with the expected surge in 999 and this is also the toughest time of the year for our ambulance crews and control room staff. Not only are they working harder than ever before, but because

most of the calls involve alcohol, they will unfortunately face a higher level of abuse from some patients. “

Last year the Service responded to 45,547 emergency calls during the festive period between 2 December and 2 January.