

Deliberate fire setting in West Lothian still a concern



Deliberate fire setting in West Lothian is still a concern according to the latest figures released by Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Local Senior Officer (LSO) of West Lothian, Gary Laing, presented the third quarter performance report to members of the local Services For The Community Policy And Development Scrutiny Panel today (Tuesday 19 April).

The figures relate to the period between 1 October 2015 and 31 December 2015.

Urging the public to do what they can to prevent fire, LSO Laing said: "West Lothian has seen a 32 per cent increase in deliberate fires from the same period last year.

"Deliberately set fires are dangerous; they waste time and money, and keep SFRS crews away from real emergencies. Such incidents place an unnecessary burden on SFRS resources, in what is already a busy time of year for firefighters.

As well as potentially delaying attendance at a more serious incident, fire setting can result in injury, property damage and environmental pollution.

SFRS work together with partner agencies Police Scotland and Crimestoppers Scotland to prevent fires and support Police Scotland in highlighting the need to report fire offending.

LSO Laing said: "We shall continue to work with our Police Scotland colleagues and other community planning partners to reduce deliberate fire setting.

“We ask local residents and businesses to ensure that rubbish does not accumulate outside their property and that wheelie bins are stored in a safe and secure area until collection. Bin and rubbish fires can quickly take hold and spread to buildings and vehicles, posing a major risk to life and property.

“Anyone with information on deliberate fires can contact Police Scotland on 101 or anonymously through Crimestoppers on 0800 55 111.”

The largest type of this incident is small outdoor fires including scrubland/grass and refuse/bin which accounts for 80 per cent of these incidents.

LSO Laing added: “Intelligence is shared regularly as part of the multi-agency tasking and co-ordinating meetings and also the fire related anti-social behaviour group where discussions have led to a number of actions being taken to address this issue. In conjunction with the social work department we continue to work with a number of youths in our ‘Cool down’ and ‘Phoenix’ intervention programmes which aim to educate youths against the dangers of fire setting.”

“Early indications are that this group has already delivered improved outcomes and a full evaluation will be undertaken in due course.”

The number of accidental dwelling fires dropped to 103 for this period compared to 127 for the same period the previous year.

LSO Laing said: “The biggest cause of these fires are cooking related. Our Home Safety Visit (HSV) programme is aimed at increasing the safety of our communities by preventing fires as well as improving the level of smoke detector ownership and maintenance which promotes early detection of fire and reduces the likelihood of occupiers suffering injury and limits any damage caused to property.

“We continue to work with partner agencies to identify those most vulnerable to the effects of fire in order that we can properly target our initiatives and HSV’s. The intention being to ensure improved targeting of prevention activities to those deemed most at risk.”

Crews regularly visit houses and provide free Home Fire Safety Visits which helps to reduce the number of casualties and fatalities through early intervention which is instrumental in contributing to safer communities.

LS0 Laing added: “Partnership working and the delivery of Home Fire Safety Visits are both crucial in reducing the number of accidental dwelling fires. SFRS continues to improve its performance with 1356 visits delivered this year to date, which 500 of these were classed as high risk.

“We continue to develop our partnerships to ensure those who are most vulnerable or at risk from fire or harm in the home are identified and that appropriate risk reduction measures are put in place.”

To register for a FREE Home Fire Safety Visit call the SFRS freephone number: 0800 0731 999, or visit the website at www.firescotland.gov.uk

There were also fewer false alarm calls with unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS) down 44 this year to date when compared with the same period last year.

LS0 Laing said: “Although UFAS has fallen from the previous year, false alarms continue to make up 50% of all calls. We continue to work closely with duty holders and, where appropriate, improving management arrangements within premises to reduce the number of UFAS events.”