

Top fire officer condemns attacks of firefighters



Attacks on firefighters who are working hard to protect communities during Bonfire season will not be tolerated – says a top fire chief.

Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) Lewis Ramsay hit out after crews were last year targeted by missiles and fireworks in the course of their duties.

In one case, a team of firefighters in Ayrshire was targeted twice – within several hours.

The attacks came on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's busiest night of the year.

Firefighters across the country responded to 970 incidents on November 5, 2016 – including 326 unofficial bonfires – while Operations Control dealt with hundreds of calls.

ACO Ramsay is the SFRS's Director of Response and Resilience.

He said: "Our firefighters' main purpose is to save lives. You can rest assured that they will always be there and standing on the front line to help at times of emergency.

"And these firefighters are your father, mother, brother or sister – someone's family. It is beggars belief when I hear that they have either been physically assaulted or verbally abused when trying to assist their communities.

"But be left in absolutely no doubt that it is often down to a very small minority of individuals within those communities.

"I would like to take this opportunity to stress once again

that this will not be tolerated because our firefighters absolutely do not deserve to be met with such behaviour.”

AC0 Ramsay warned that such criminal action would be taken extremely seriously and vowed to work with police partners to ensure those responsible are identified and held to account.

Recent stats show a firefighter is attacked in Scotland every three days – in the last six years there have been 590 incidents where staff have been physically or verbally abused or had objects thrown at appliances.

Last year, an appliance in Ayrshire was hit by objects thrown from a crowd when firefighters attended an unorganised bonfire at St Margaret’s Road, Ardrossan.

Police had to escort the crew to extinguish the fire.

No injuries were sustained by the firefighters but damage to the appliance was discovered on return to the station.

The same crew was attacked at a similar incident two hours earlier in the town’s New England Road.

AC0 Ramsay said: “Attacks on emergency responders are completely unacceptable and I am sure the public would be outraged by incidents where their firefighters have been targeted while working to protect people and property.

“This type of behaviour not only prevents our crews from bringing any emergency to a safe and swift conclusion but it can impact on our emergency service colleagues including the police when they have to escort us at the scene.

“This cannot be condoned.

“The communities of Scotland are all fantastic and they appreciate greatly the work of the fire service, and we would urge the majority of law abiding residents to alert the police to any such reckless activity.

“We will also work to identify those responsible and we will pass that intelligence to our police partners which can result in a variety of consequences – and potentially affect future employment prospects.”

He also told how firefighters continue to serve at the very heart of their communities as role models. They also support the most vulnerable people to stay safe at home.

AC0 Ramsay said: “We do everything we can to protect communities and that includes our Home Fire Safety Visits where we will visit properties and install or check smoke detectors as well as provide general safety advice to residents.

“All of this therefore begs the question as to why anyone would abuse a firefighter.

“They work hard to keep people safe by preventing danger from arising – and they will enter the most challenging and hostile environments to reach people at times of significant emergency.”

To report such incidents contact Police Scotland on 101 or alternatively through the anonymous Crimestoppers helpline on 0800 555 111.