

Firefighters' anguish as they prepare for their busiest night of the year

An experienced firefighter has told how he feared for his crew's safety after being confronted by a baying mob in a "warzone" last Bonfire Night.



Watch Manager Glynn McAffer and his firefighters had been mobilised to extinguish multiple fires in the Pilton and Craigentenny areas of Edinburgh.

But they were confronted by chaos, attacked – and then ordered by youths to leave the area.

He spoke out as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service launches its hard-hitting #DoNotAttackMe campaign ahead of its' busiest night of the year – condemning the abuse of firefighters working hard to protect communities.

Watch Manager McAffer and Crewe Toll Fire Station's Blue Watch had been mustered to a routine report of a car on fire on November 5, 2017.

He said: "It was like a war zone when we arrived and my first

thought was 'I'm not going in there'.

"We attended, of course, but were confronted by a massive group of around 40 youths who threw fireworks at us and ordered us to go away.

"I had no other choice but to call our Operations Control and inform them that we required a police presence to ensure the safety of our firefighters."

He added: "It's difficult as you are there to do a job and protect the community but there is of course a frustration as you have come to hose down what they call fun.

"I have to think of the personal safety of my crew and – if there are too many of them – we'll just leave.

"For newly qualified firefighters it can be quite a daunting experience – my job is to protect them."

Between 5pm and 10pm that night, firefighters had responded to approximately 330 bonfires across Scotland – while Operations Control was bombarded with more than 800 calls.

And the threat of attack loomed large in the minds of the crews on the ground.

Watch Manager McAffer added: "We were constant as soon as we came on duty until about midnight – and we were told what areas to avoid and where to wait for police back up.

"It's sad because you are basically treating every incident as if you will be attacked.

"One of the police officers was also injured – it's just unacceptable."

Meanwhile, firefighters based at the city's Marionville Fire Station were called to respond to a massive bonfire engulfing five cars.

They also had to stage a tactical withdrawal and call for police assistance after being harangued by a large group of youths – who filmed the firefighters.

Watch Manager Colin Edgar said: “We have policies to keep us as safe as possible which includes not going into known areas of threat, not leaving any crew members on their own and keeping all the windows of the fire engine shut at all times.

“What really bothered me was the amount of the youths filming the whole event on their mobile phone – it’s absolutely ridiculous!

“I know they all use social media but posting abuse of us and the police on these channels is nothing to be proud of.

“We are not trying to ruin their fun but they need to be held accountable for their actions.

“There is no doubt that they are in the minority because most people absolutely value and appreciate our assistance, and we are thankful for that support.”

Firefighters from Bathgate fire station also had to contend with youths who had set multiple fires.

Watch Manager Brett McMahon said firefighters work hard to engage with young people but there is still a minority who display hostility towards crews.

Brett said: “We visit schools in the run up to Bonfire Night to talk about the dangers

“We do everything to protect our communities and ourselves as best as possible – but it doesn’t seem to be enough.

“The crews have in the past had bricks thrown at the window of the fire engine and fireworks thrown at them – I don’t understand why they do it.”

Brett added: "We signed up for this job knowing the risks but we didn't sign up to being attacked or abused.

"I just hope that this year that it stops – we are human and we have families to go home to ... so why would anyone attack us?"

To report abuse against emergency service personnel contact Police Scotland on 101 or alternatively through the anonymous Crimestoppers helpline on 0800 555 111.

For advice on how to stay safe during Bonfire Night, visit – <https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/bonfire-safety.aspx> and on fireworks safety visit – <https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/fireworks-safety.aspx>