

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

**26<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2005**

1. **AUTOMATIC FIRE SUPPRESSION SYSTEMS POLICY**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Authority approve the attached policy statement on Automatic Fire Suppression Systems.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to seek the Authority's approval to establish a policy with regard to the Brigade's stance on Automatic Fire Suppression Systems.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Community Fire Safety education and protection programmes have, in recent years, played a significant part in helping to reduce the numbers of persons killed or injured in dwelling fires in the West Midlands.
- 3.2 Sadly, despite this success, there are those within our communities who remain vulnerable from fire. They may be hard to reach, difficult to influence or resistant to safety messages. Yet others may be impaired or unable to react effectively to the danger from fire. It is estimated that these groups account for 30% of society, living in environments that are among the least prepared for, or protected from, fire.
- 3.3 These factors place such people at greater risk to succumbing to fire and, statistically, this is borne out in fire casualty reports year on year. One way of reducing these tragic losses is to provide a safer environment or engineered solutions for these vulnerable persons.

- 3.4 The West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) considers that the installation of automatic fire suppression systems (AFSS) in dwellings is a significant means to protect high risk groups and achieve Government targets for reduction in fire deaths and casualties. The provision of AFSS also forms part of ODPM strategy for their 'Home Fire Risk Check' initiative and this policy will support ODPM aims.
- 3.5 In recent years the cost of fire to society has dramatically increased. Schools appear to be particularly vulnerable to the ravages of fire. It is considered appropriate therefore to promote the use of AFSS in appropriate educational establishments and happily this Brigade has seen some success in this area.
- 3.6 The fire in 2003 at the National Motorcycle Museum in Bickenhill also served to highlight the need to protect heritage sites from the potential catastrophic effects of fire. The WMFS continues to actively lobby to promote the benefits of AFSS and to break down the prejudices and myths that paint a false picture of their capabilities.
- 3.7 For the purposes of this document, the term 'Automatic Fire Suppression Systems' means fire sprinklers, misting and gaseous suppression systems which have potential to protect life, property and the environment from the effects of fire.
- 3.8 In light therefore of the increasing role that fire suppression systems are likely play in future, it is considered essential that the WMFS has clear policy and guidance regarding their use.
- 3.9 Environmental Implications

The adoption of this policy will strengthen the Brigade's stance of improving the quality of the environment. AFSS are proven to reduce the environmental impact of fire in the following ways:-

- By reduction in air borne pollution from fire plumes through their ability to control fire intensity and spread.
- By reduction of polluted fire water run-off as they use less water to control fire.
- By reduction in property damage which would have detrimental community impact.

4. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

The AFSS policy will enable WMFS to target and reduce the risk to those most vulnerable from fire, as identified in the West Midlands Fire Authority Integrated Risk Management Plan and Fire and Rescue Service Circular 46/2004.

5. **CORPORATE AIMS SUPPORTED**

The principal corporate aims supported by the information in this report are as follows.

- 3. Reducing risk in the community
- 4. Working in partnership with communities, other agencies and the Government.
- 8. Contributing to the well being of the environment.

6. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The course of action recommended in this report does not raise issues which should be drawn to the attention of the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

7. **TRADE UNION CONSULTATION**

Local Trade Union Officials were consulted with on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2005 and were satisfied with the policy as set out.

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are expected costs from the provision of appropriate systems to vulnerable persons which are proposed to be funded from the Government's 'Home Fire Risk Check Initiative' grant until 2007/2008. Thereafter, funding would need to be identified from existing Community Safety budgets.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Integrated Risk Management Plan  
Fire and Rescue Service Circular 46/2004

F. J. SHEEHAN  
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

## **WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE AUTOMATIC FIRE SUPPRESSION SYSTEMS**

### **1. POLICY**

The West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority is fully committed to promoting the installation of Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) <sup>1</sup> in all premises where their inclusion will support the vision "Making West Midlands safer".

AFSS are a proven and effective means of affording protection from fire and the WMF&RA will actively promote the benefits of AFSS within the public, private and voluntary sectors of the community.

The WMF&RA will work to achieve a greater acceptance of the benefits of the inclusion of AFSS to protect life and property at National and Local levels.

The Authority will endeavour to work in partnership with interested parties in the research and development of new and innovative systems to protect life, property, heritage and the environment from the effects of fire.

### **2. STRATEGY**

The WMF&RA will target the installation of AFSS where persons or premises are identified as "high risk" in the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan.

In particular the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority will seek to:

- Promote the benefits of AFSS with Education Authorities and actively pursue the inclusion of AFSS in all new and re-furbished schools and education establishments in the West Midlands.
- Work with all housing sector groups to promote and target the fitting of AFSS in residential and domestic premises, where the occupants are identified to be at high risk from fire.
- Promote and encourage the inclusion of residential AFSS in the wider housing market.
- Promote the inclusion of AFSS in commercial premises as an effective control measure to reduce risk and ensure compliance with fire safety legislation.
- Promote the inclusion of AFSS in premises under statutory consultation with Building Control Bodies. The consultation process and procedures adopted will seek to:
  - Ensure the provision of AFSS to meet the requirements of Building Regulations.
  - Promote, where appropriate, the inclusion of AFSS as a compensatory feature when assessing schemes under Planning and Building Regulations.
  - Promote the inclusion of AFSS as a good will recommendation to protect life, property, heritage and the environment.
- Actively work with National and International AFSS Associations and bodies to increase awareness and acceptance of the benefits of AFSS within the wider community.
- Promote dialogue, discussion and debate among all members of the fire protection industry, both active and passive, to make communities safer from fire.

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Note.

Automatic Fire Suppression Systems currently include reference to;

- Commercial and Industrial Sprinkler Systems.
- Residential and Domestic Sprinkler Systems.
- Water Mist systems.
- Inert Gas systems.