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29 May 1987

To all Chief Officers

Dear Chief Officer

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Yours sincerely

R D H DOYLE
Chief Inspector

The Fire Service
College

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WHOLE-TIME FIREFIGHTERS RECRUITMENT BOOKLET

A copy is attached of the new recruitment booklet "... AND WE ALSO FIGHT FIRES - A CAREER IN THE FIRE SERVICE" for the whole-time service which has been produced to replace the present leaflet "Fire-fighting Rescue Fire Prevention - A Career in the Fire Service".

2. The new booklet is made available as a supplement to any locally-produced recruitment information which informs applicants of conditions of service in the authority concerned, and to support usual recruitment activities or locally organised recruitment campaigns. The general theme of the booklet is the very varied and demanding range of duties with which the modern fire service is concerned.

3. There is no charge for the booklet and brigades are invited to send their requests for copies of it in writing to Mr M P Johnson, Room 942, Home Office, Fire and Emergency Planning Department, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT.

4. There are no financial or manpower implications arising from the issue of this item.

Reference: FIR/85 595/10/5

Contact Number: 01-213-5083

DRIVERS HOURS - EXEMPTION FOR FIRE BRIGADES

Chief Fire Officers will wish to note that the Department of Transport has confirmed that fire service exemptions from drivers' hours regulations does extend to drivers employed by private companies when undertaking emergency work at the request of a fire brigade, for example the transportation of additional supplies of foam or hose to an incident.

The fire service exemptions are by virtue of Section 102(4) of the Transport Act 1968 which exempts vehicles being used for fire brigade purposes and EEC Regulation 543/69 which exempts "vehicles used by fire brigades". Full details of the rules governing drivers' hours can be found in the Department of Transport's leaflet "Goods Vehicle Drivers' Hours and Records" (GV 263) available from Traffic Area Offices.

This note is for Chief Fire Officers' information. There are no financial or manpower implications.

File reference: FIR/84 18/36/1

Telephone number of contact: 01 213 5307

FIRES INVOLVING PESTICIDES

A. Background

1. Technical Bulletins 1/1975 (England and Wales) and (Scotland) provide technical advice on the nature of pesticides and the method of dealing with incidents involving such chemicals. That advice has now been reviewed and updated by the Joint Industries/Authorities Working Party on fires involving pesticides. This group was set up by the British Agrochemicals Association and comprises representatives of the industry, MAFF, HSE, the National Farmers Union, water authorities and CACFOA.

2. Pesticides are designed to destroy or control harmful organisms, or to preserve plants or their crops. There are, in addition, a range of "Farm Chemicals", such as animal medicines, dairy hygiene products, fertilizers and food preservatives, commonly found in storage, which can safely be considered as suitable for being dealt with as pesticides, in the absence of other information.

B. Storage

3. Pesticides are used as an essential part of efficient modern farming. Their use is partly seasonal with much larger stocks being encountered in farm stores in the spring and autumn.

4. The manufacturers of pesticides produce and store these chemicals on their premises, often with storage being remote from manufacture. Fire brigades should be aware of such premises from their 1(i)(d) inspections within their areas, and will have considered the feasibility of pre-planning to deal with any incident. The British Agrochemicals Association has a Code of Practice for its members which includes stringent standards for all safety provisions.

5. Subsequent distribution will be through a network of distributors who will normally be registered members of the British Agrochemicals Standards Inspection Scheme Ltd (BASIS). The premises of such distributors are notified to fire brigades and are required to comply with the safety provisions of the scheme, not only in respect of the storage of these chemicals, but also whilst they are in their care in transit. Full details of the Registration Scheme for

Distributors are contained in the BASIS handbook, available from the British Agrochemical Standards Inspection Scheme, Bank Chambers, 2 St John Street, Ashbourne, Derbyshire DE6 1GH.

6. Although it is generally distributors who provide the products to the farming industry, third party warehousing (an intermediate tier of distribution) can also be encountered. Such premises are subject to the same standards as those of BASIS and are notifiable to fire brigades by the British Agrochemicals Association.

7. Pesticides may be found as solids (in the form of granules, grains or powders) and as liquids. Liquid pesticides may be either water based or formulated on flammable solvents.

8. They are normally stored, distributed and used in comparatively small containers typically from 1 litre up to 25 litre capacity in the case of drums, or in bags or in sacks up to 25Kg. Pesticides may also form bulk loads either by road or rail haulage. Containers are marked with the name of the chemical and considerable other information. It should be noted that some containers may be marked by four-digit identification numbers. These markings do not indicate any form of action code, but only the approvals identification and should not be confused with the substance identification number used with the HAZCHEM scheme.

9. In storage or in use, pesticides can be considered in the same light as all other potentially dangerous chemicals. The risk to firefighters when dealing with incidents involving pesticides is no greater just because they are pesticides. The risk, however, is generally very much greater to the environment.

10. Although earlier products often had low flashpoints in concentrated form, flashpoints in excess of 45°C are now more usual. A typical solvent content would be about 50% of the whole formulation. The solvents may be either hydrocarbon or alcohol based, but in both cases emulsifying agents will ensure ready miscibility with water and so pesticides will not react adversely when in contact with water. (See footnote at Section E however).

11. Dear Chief Officer Letter no 3/1985 (Section F) gave information about a voluntary scheme for marking of buildings containing pesticides. This came into effect in October 1985 with the aim of warning firefighters that pesticides may be in storage on the premises. The following paragraphs provide additional information.

12. The necessary signs for marking these buildings can be made available to pesticide users through the British Agrochemicals Association and use of the sign is recommended and supported by all the organisations mentioned in paragraph 1 above.

13. Those using the signs are encouraged to seek the advice of their local fire brigade on the positioning of the signs and their use. It is recommended that fire brigades should take this opportunity to give advice and obtain information as above.

14. In addition to farm stores, provision is also made for the marking scheme to be used at warehouses or manufacturing plants. In these cases specialist emergency action codes (HAZCHEM) may be added to the sign after local consultation with the fire brigade.

C. Legislative Control and Safety Data

15. The supply, storage and use of pesticides is controlled by regulations and codes of practice under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. Regulations under the Health and Safety at Work Act are also relevant. Product safety data and information for emergencies is made available by manufacturers to the Chemical Emergency Centre, Harwell, and to the National Poisons Information Service.

D. Operational Procedure

16. The nature of this risk requires special attention to be paid before incidents. Knowledge of such a risk is essential if the brigade is to deal effectively with any incident. Inspections under section 1(1)(d) of the Fire Services Act 1947 are essential in order to obtain information and for contingency planning for emergencies. Attention is drawn to the information contained in Fire Service Circular No 9/1984 dealing with 1(1)(d) inspections. The local Environmental Health Officer should always be made aware of any possible environmental health risk.

17. Although in large quantity pesticides do provide a fire risk, this is not the major hazard during firefighting operations. Every effort should be made to contain any pesticide which may spill or be leaking, and any water used for firefighting. The importance of this containment cannot be over-stressed. The implications of any pollution can be very far-reaching, potentially involving risk to human, animal, fish and botanical life, and can involve expenditure of enormous resources to combat the hazard produced after containment has failed.

18. At all times fire brigades should, therefore, concentrate their efforts on containing the chemicals and any water necessary for firefighting. Water fog or spray should be used in order to reduce the need for containment. The water authority must be informed at the earliest stages and any advice given by them should be very carefully considered. Where effective control of an incident is not possible without the use of large quantities of water, and where containment may be at risk, serious consideration should be given to allowing the chemicals and the storage building to burn under control, whilst protecting surrounding risks.

19. In many cases this course of action may be extremely difficult to follow, particularly where large clouds of products of combustion may be seen as a serious risk. However, experience to date has indicated that in the conditions of a fire only limited risk exists from such a cloud, although it is appreciated that it may be extremely difficult, faced with such a circumstance, to take the desirable action of ensuring containment as a high priority. In making any decision, advice both from the user of the premises and from the water authority will be invaluable. Even where the decision is taken to allow a storage building to burn out, due consideration would need to be given to the containment of water used to protect adjacent property.

20. The firefighter will be adequately protected provided chemical protection suits and breathing apparatus are worn. No higher level of personal protection is necessary for agrochemicals.

21. Once the immediate emergency of an incident is concluded, it is important that containment and control of the fireground is maintained. The Fire Brigade should remain on site until overall control can be properly handed over to the water and local authorities and it is important that this hand-over is carried out formally by the brigade. The debris and spillage left after the incident

still presents a major hazard to the environment, and loss of control and containment would nullify the previous efforts of the brigade. Similarly the need for standard decontamination procedures should be considered if contamination of firefighters has occurred.

E. Cymag - A Greater Risk

22. The information in this letter and the advice on procedures applies to all pesticides. Only CYMAG can be considered to present a greater risk. This chemical reacts with water and produces hydrogen cyanide gas. There are only five main stores in the United Kingdom, where the chemical is kept under special storage conditions. The five stores are known to the local brigades. Otherwise storage is in very small quantities of boxes containing 8 x 2 kilogram tins. In any incident where this chemical is involved in isolation, the use of water should be avoided. Should extinction be necessary dry powder is the appropriate medium. In practice however, this chemical is unlikely to be encountered in isolation in an incident and where it is involved within a larger incident positive pressure breathing apparatus and chemical protection suits give the appropriate personal protection.

23. This note is for Chief Fire Officers' information. There are no cost or manpower implications.

FEP/86 61/64/1

Telephone number of contact: 01 213 5352

DCOL

5/1987

AMENDMENT TO DCOL 3/1987 ANNEX A

The dates given for the Brigade Physical Education Advisers Course (Phase III) were incorrect.

The dates should read

4-29 January and

8 February-4 March 1988

Please amend your copy of DCOL 3/1987 accordingly.

File Reference: FIR/86 610/26/1

Telephone number of contact: 01 213 4150