

*ATAL AMDDIFFYD YMATEB
PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING*



**Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
Fire and Rescue Service**

RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM (RDS) FIREFIGHTERS

A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

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Foreword from Simon Smith – Chief Fire Officer

The role of a modern firefighter has developed considerably in recent times; all too often we see coverage of firefighters averting natural disasters or being involved in the aftermath of disastrous events. However, in reality, the core activity of a modern firefighter is prevention of fire and education of the community they serve.

Whilst the individual receives the respect of the community for their commitment, it is often overlooked that the service they provide would not be achievable without the support of their families or that of their primary employer.

As the Chief Fire Officer, my aim is to provide a professional, efficient and effective fire and rescue service for all who live, work and travel throughout North Wales. I am acutely aware that in order to do this, we need to secure the cooperation and commitment from local stakeholders.

The Retained Duty System (RDS) is the primary resource provision of firefighters within North Wales. We have over 500 members providing a vital service in protecting our communities from the day to day fire and rescue emergencies which unfortunately occur.

How can you help?

By allowing your employees to respond to emergencies during the working day, you will be contributing to the effectiveness of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the safety of the community, in which your employees and customers travel and reside.

Employing an RDS firefighter may contribute to the safety and efficiency of your premises whilst safeguarding your business at little or no cost to yourselves.

Firefighters working the Retained Duty System are a highly dedicated group of individuals who respond to emergencies during both their free time and by prior agreement from their place of primary employment.* This practice is highly commended and every effort is made to minimise the impact to your business.

For more information, please read the contents of the provided pack or alternatively, contact your local County Safety Office for further information.

Details of all County Safety Offices can be found on the inside front cover of this wallet, or alternatively visit the North Wales Fire Rescue Service web site.

www.northwales-fireservice.org.uk

* To enable an individual to respond to an emergency from their primary place of work they must be able to travel to a fire station within 5 minutes, in accordance with the specified road speed regulations.



Simon A Smith
Chief Fire Officer

2. RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM (RDS)

Retained Duty System Firefighters

Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters provide essential fire cover within North Wales. Of our 44 fire stations, 36 are crewed exclusively by RDS; with further retained crews operating from the 8 shift or day crewed stations. In total, over 500 RDS firefighters are employed across North Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

83% of our front line appliances are staffed by retained duty system personnel, ensuring emergency cover is provided across the Service's area.

Below shows where our stations are situated in North Wales.



RDS Firefighters are men and women from a variety of backgrounds and occupations, Skilled Workers, Supervisors, Teachers, Production Operatives, Production Managers, Office Workers, and many other various trades and crafts too numerous to mention. There are also Housewives, House-husbands and Self-employed people working the retained duty system offering evening, daytime or weekend cover. They work effectively as part of a team using the latest equipment, methods and techniques to undertake a wide range of duties including attending property fires, undertaking community safety initiatives, grass and farmland fires, road traffic collisions, chemical spills, floods and storm damage.

RDS Firefighters are also actively involved in the prevention of fire in the home, undertaking home fire safety checks offering free advice to occupiers on how to eliminate, or where this is not possible, reduce the risk of fire. This work is carried out in their free time.

The role of a firefighter calls for courage, determination, self motivation and above all a desire to serve the community in which they live and / or work.

How does it work?

RDS Firefighters agree to be available for a certain number of hours per week; they carry a pager and must be able to get to the fire station within 5 minutes of a call during their available hours. Many fire fighters respond to emergency calls from work and once their pager goes off, they respond to the station to attend the incident.

Due largely to the changing nature of society, one of the main problems we encounter is that many people simply do not live and work in the same areas. Therefore many Retained Fire Stations are well crewed during the weekends and evenings, but not during the day.

This can lead to the appliance being unavailable to attend an incident in its own area, and whilst an appliance (from another area) will always respond, any delay may allow an incident to escalate and may possibly mean the difference between life and death. **Allowing one of your employees to respond during the day may make the difference.**

The department for Communities and Local Government has developed a toolkit to provide local employers with information about the role of retained (on-call) firefighters.

Its aim is to encourage employers to allow members of staff to be released for on-call duties and to help explain the benefits to businesses and to the local community of having an on-call Firefighter in their workforce.

View the on-call firefighters toolkit at

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/oncallfirefighters>

3. BENEFITS TO YOU THE EMPLOYER

Positive Advertising

Some employers have experienced that having an RDS firefighter as an employee has raised their company's profile. Local press and trade publications are often interested in spreading the word about those companies and their workers who support their local community.

North Wales Fire Rescue Service has a very good public image and local press reports help to build on that image at a local level. Therefore if you are supporting an RDS Firefighter it is more than likely that your public-spirited gesture will not go unnoticed in your community.

Additional Skills

- Firefighters bring skills back to the workplace through training and experiences they receive. Their work is vital to the safety of people and properties in the area and the support of employers allowing their staff to respond is essential.
- The **skills** they bring – A trained Firefighter learns many skills, a lot of which can be useful in any workplace. Firefighters learn to work well in a team, have diversity awareness training, are encouraged to think quickly, take responsibility and use their initiative, to communicate fast and accurately and to remain calm in a crisis.

Employing a Firefighter may save you money

- Trained in First Aid – NWFRS deliver HSE accredited First Aid at Work courses. These skills are widely accepted by employers and can contribute to the requirement under legislation for first aid provision in the workplace, cutting the cost of training.

Typical four day First Aid Course £210 - £250 per person excluding VAT.

Typical one day First Aid Refresher £130 - £150 excluding VAT

Total saving between £340 - £400

- Trained in Manual Handling – All Firefighters are trained by a recognised instructor in the correct procedures to be adopted when lifting or moving items. The training involves learning simple techniques that could prevent injuries occurring, thus potentially reducing time lost at work through sickness or injury. Typical Manual Handling Course £240 excluding VAT
- Help with **Health and Safety** Regulations – Risk assessments and fire hazards are all part of the training for Firefighters so they can support health and safety officers to meet their obligations and improve the safety of all your staff.

Typical 1 day Risk Assessment Course £240 excluding VAT

Occupational Health Support

NWFRS provides its entire staff with a comprehensive Occupational Health package.

The aim of occupational health practice is to protect and promote workers' health, to sustain and improve their working capacity and ability, to contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a safe and healthy working environment for all, as well as to promote the adaptation of work to the capabilities of workers, taking into account their state of health. This is achieved through the provision of support and technical services, appropriate risk assessment, evaluating, treating and limiting temporary or permanent disabilities and assisting employees in controlling personal health.

Retained firefighters are required to pass a pre-employment medical examination which determines fitness levels and fully assesses medical history, strength, pulmonary function and provides a full systematic clinical examination and guidance on lifestyle and health promotion.

During their employment with the North Wales Fire Rescue Service, retained firefighters are also required to pass a periodic medical examination once every three years.

Self referral consultations are available for retained firefighters wanting to seek confidential advice regarding any medical concern relevant to his/her employment. A confidential counselling service is accessible including cognitive behavioural therapy, bereavement counselling, post trauma counselling and Welsh medium counselling.

Under special circumstances, on the advice of the Occupational Health Physician, the NWFRS will fund private referrals for medical investigations and treatments where there is clear financial advantage to the Service, examples of treatments might include, orthopaedic intervention, physiotherapy, specialist psychological treatment.

4. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The **training** is on-going – Firefighters must maintain and develop their skills continuously. Staff that are willing to learn and develop are vital to any organisation. RDS stations hold Training and Development sessions weekly, on a weekday evening for a period of 3 hours.

- **Motivated** staff – Staff who are able to fulfil their ambitions and potential are usually happier and more productive in the workplace. Firefighters must be highly motivated to take on the task and this motivation will help them in everything they do.
- **Committed** employees – Being a Firefighter takes commitment and energy, no one takes on the role lightly. Committed fire fighters responding from work are likely to be committed staff.
- **Trained to deal with emergencies** – Fire fighters must be able to deal with a whole range of situations, they never quite know what they might find when they respond to an emergency, so they are likely to be able to better cope with the challenges of working life.

So although an employee may have to rush off at any moment, and could be away for a period of time, the benefits could make this worthwhile and the employer will have the satisfaction of knowing they are supporting something that could really make a difference.

Having an RDS Firefighter working for you makes good business sense

Firefighters must be well trained, skilled and knowledgeable staff if they are to work safely and effectively in the wide range of operational incidents they are called upon to attend.

Initial training gives trainee fire fighters the necessary basic core competencies to enable them to safely attend incidents. For their safety and for the safety of their colleagues, each must be deemed competent in the use of pumps, ladders and fire fighting equipment and able to wear Breathing Apparatus, safely and effectively, prior to being allowed to become fully operational.

North Wales Fire Rescue Service recognises that RDS staff sometimes take time away from their primary employment to undertake training. For this reason, as much of the basic training as possible is undertaken on station during evening training sessions and weekends, only 15 days of the trainee modules impinge upon the Monday to Friday working week within the first year of service.

The training will only be successful with the full commitment of the trainee, the RDS Watch Manager on station, the County Operations Manager, the Skills Learning and Development Centre and of course, the employer.

To achieve the required competencies, the trainee Firefighter will attend a structured development programme within a 12 week block. The following example demonstrates the timescales involved during their first twelve months of service:

Duration	Firefighter module
7 Days	<p>A course designed to provide students with the Information and Skills required allowing them to work safely and efficiently as a member of an operational crew, with particular emphasis on, Safety, Dynamic Risk Assessments, and Environmental awareness.</p>
Breathing Apparatus module	
10 days	<p>This module is designed as part of an individual's development programme. Following a safe and effective completion, this course will enable firefighters to attend emergency incidents as qualified BA wearers.</p> <p>The course will provide trainees with the opportunity to gain the necessary skills to carry out search and rescue firefighting techniques in a controlled environment, whilst experiencing working in heat and smoke under real fire conditions.</p>
Road Traffic Collision module	
2 days	<p>A course designed to provide students with the Information to allow them to deal safely and competently with Road Traffic Collisions, and apply the recognised Safe Systems of Work at such incidents.</p> <p>Theory input and practical sessions to develop, test and confirm competence in all aspects of extrication and casualty care.</p>

5. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What if my employee is out all night at an incident and is unfit for work the next day?

Fire fighters no longer remain at incidents for long periods. It is recognised that extended periods of exertion can lead to accidents through tiredness and lack of concentration. At prolonged incidents, wherever possible personnel are relieved of their duties after 4 hours of work.

If my employee gets called out, I won't know how long they will be gone for?

Each of the appliances has a mobile phone and your employee is encouraged to use this facility to estimate a return time as soon as they can. For example, in the event of a false alarm call, they may be back within 20 minutes. For illustration purposes an appendix has been included within this pack which details the average calls per week and the average length of each call at your respective station.

What if my employee gets injured while at an incident?

This is a very rare occurrence, as they are trained to a high standard before they are fully operational. If this does happen, the Fire and Rescue Service has policies in place for compensating the employee for any loss of earnings after Statutory Sick Pay.

Our employees are often on call for business. How would this work?

They would not be on call with North Wales Fire Rescue Service if they were on call with you. The primary employer will always have priority.

Employer Support

The Service recognises that on occasions employers may wish to contact us for information, support or reassurance and we will endeavour to assist in any way we can.

Our website, gives more details on how we set out our service delivery approach and commitment to make North Wales a safer place by protecting the community, businesses and the environment from being harmed by fire and other hazards;

www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk

For queries 9am – 5pm from Monday to Friday please contact:

Tel: 01745 535250 and ask to be put through to the relevant Locality Manager for further information.