



**Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service**

DRAFT PHYSICAL FITNESS POLICY

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Prepared by: **Group Commander Magennis**

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

DRAFT PHYSICAL FITNESS POLICY

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NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

DRAFT PHYSICAL FITNESS POLICY

1 BACKGROUND

HMI Fit for Duty

During 1999 HM Fire Service Inspectorate undertook a review of sickness absence and ill-health retirements in the British Fire Service. This review was prompted by concerns that the high levels of sickness absence were having an adverse effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. In February 2000 a report was issued entitled "Fit for Duty? Seeking a Healthier Fire Service". The report "looks at the extent ... for improving the health of the workforce by developing the effectiveness of occupational health provision".

Health of Employees

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) Occupational Health team is continually striving to create a better, healthier work environment. It is hoped that this will ultimately lead to a healthier, fitter more motivated workforce with fewer days lost to sickness/injury and fewer ill-health retirements. The ultimate aim is to ensure all employees can enjoy a better quality of life culminating in a long and healthy retirement. NIFRS is implementing a 'Fit for Life' Occupational Health Scheme which entails:

- (i) The training of Lifestyle Advisers and the potential development of Fitness Instructors;
- (ii) The purchase, delivery and installation of standardised fitness equipment in each location organisation-wide;
- (iii) The negotiation of favourable membership rates for NIFRS staff at local Leisure / Fitness Centres;
- (iv) The employment of Occupational Health Advisors; and
- (v) The use of Covox Analysis/The Chester Step Test/Multi-stage shuttle run as baseline fitness level indicators.

2 FITNESS ASSESSMENTS

All employees;

The 'Fit for Life' Occupational Health Scheme will be targeted at all employees. The introduction of fitness assessments will be on an incremental basis. In the first instance assessments will be introduced as a pilot scheme on 4 stations, one from each area. To provide a wide basis of consensus it is proposed to run the pilot scheme at a;

Wholetime station- Eastern

Wholetime station –Western

Retained station- Northern

Wholetime-Retained- Southern

The pilot scheme will run for one year and this time will be used as a preparation period to allow personnel to achieve the proposed levels of fitness. As the capacity for assessments increases more stations will be introduced into the scheme and as in the initial scheme, personnel will be given 1 year to reach the proposed level of fitness following their initial assessment.

NB In the cases of Control room and non-uniform staff; fitness assessments will be on a voluntary basis.

Following the 1 year pilot scheme, it will be the Service's intention to introduce the fitness assessments at six monthly intervals in line with the recommendations within the Thematic Review 'Fit for Duty'

To introduce the scheme and assist personnel to reach an attainable standard of fitness, individuals will initially be assessed in categories based on length of service. Through time all personnel will be assessed at the same level (as outlined below).

NB After the introductory year all personnel tested at the 42 ml/kg/min level will be expected to maintain this level until the end of their service.

The introductory levels are as follows:

- Personnel with 25 years service or greater will achieve an aerobic measurement standard of 35 ml/kg/min.
- All other personnel will achieve an aerobic measurement standard of 42 ml/kg/min, or the agreed national standard if introduced.
- Personnel coming into the service will maintain an aerobic measurement standard 42 ml/kg/min, or the agreed national standard if introduced.

Any personnel not reaching the desired level of fitness will be referred to the Occupational Health Advisor to ascertain if a medical condition exists, which prevents this level being attained and appropriate medical advice or assistance will be afforded to that individual.

In circumstances where an individual's medical condition is of a serious nature and the consequence of that condition means that the individual is no longer capable of full operational firefighting duties; one of three actions will then be taken:

- (i) The individual's medical condition falls within the guidelines of the DDA and reasonable adjustments can be made to their role allowing them to carry on in the employment of NIFRS.
- (ii) The individual's medical condition is outside of the guidelines of the DDA, but the individual can be redeployed under the rules of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.
- (iii) The individual will be medically retired.

Where no medical problem is identified that individual will receive an individual fitness assessment and be given a personal fitness programme to assist them to attain the desired fitness level. Any other support such as life style or dietary advice will be given as part of their fitness programme.

In extreme cases where an individual is unfit to an extent where they are a risk to themselves or to others whom they are working with (34 ml/kg/min or lower), those individuals will be taken 'off the run' (off the run in these circumstances for wholetime means going on to the Day Duty System to carry out community safety work, etc) to allow remedial medical intervention or intensive fitness training to take place to enable them to return to operational fitness. This intervention will, if deemed necessary, be paid for under the private medical scheme and will continue until the individual reaches the minimum required fitness standard when they will return to their normal duties. The individual will be expected to carry on with their fitness programme to reach the agreed fitness standard. This action will only take place following advice from Occupational Health professional's i.e. Service Senior Medical Advisor or Occupational Health Advisor.

Regional Control Centre (RCC) and Support Staff personnel fitness standards will be set at a level deemed appropriate after the introduction of fitness assessments to Wholetime and Retained personnel.

Method of Testing and Recording

- *Every six Months*

A fitness assessment will be carried out for each employee at six monthly intervals or, in circumstances where a fitness or well-being related problem has been identified, when appropriate.

- *Chester Step Test/Multi-stage Shuttle Run Test/Treadmill Walk test*

These will be the main methods of fitness assessments to be undertaken by employees. A Covox Analysis fitness test will be used for personnel who do not meet the fitness levels within the agreed ranges. This test requires a longer period of time to conduct, but is more accurate than the above tests.

- *Records and Confidentiality*

Personal attainment/performance records will be kept on station and by the Occupational Health Department and may be accessed by the individual, on request to their line Manager/Lifestyle Adviser. The Line manager/Fitness Advisor (or representative) will arrange to either have these records sent to the individual concerned or the line manager/fitness advisor will contact the individual and provide the information verbally.

Records will be used both for comparison purposes within an individual's personal exercise program and also to compile annual statistical returns to NIFRS Headquarters. Performance/attainment records will remain confidential.

3 SUPPORT STAFF

Support staff who avails of the flexi-time scheme are not permitted to accrue flexi-time for fitness training periods conducted within the flexible time bands. Each member of staff is entitled to two periods of 45 minutes fitness training per week. The 45 minute period includes provision for personal hygiene. In any week the allocation of two fitness periods should be proportional to the amount of time the employee is actually in the workplace (based on days), ie, If an employee takes 2 days leave they would be entitled to 1 fitness training session

Where a line Manager sees that an employee is clearly benefiting from the fitness training, they should consider encouraging the employee to take an extra session per week. Eg, where an individual is recovering from long term illness or injury.

4 LIFESTYLE ADVISERS

NB Appointment of lifestyle advisors will be by an agreed selection process

- *Responsibilities*

Personnel undertaking the role of Lifestyle Adviser will receive all necessary training at the NIFRS Training Centre.

- *Location*

As part of the organisation's strategy for enhancing Occupational Health, physical fitness training and testing will be available to all members of staff throughout NIFRS. An Adviser will be sought and trained on each Wholetime Watch, Retained Section, Control Room Watch and all other Support Staff departments.

- *Suite of Exercises*

A standard suite of exercises will be available to all Lifestyle Advisers to assist personnel to develop individual exercise and fitness programmes.

5 SAFETY

All NIFRS locations should ensure that a clear statement of potential risks attached to any particular activity in a specific location is widely publicised to all relevant employees. There should also be specific procedures/control measures in place for safeguarding against such risks. The following practices should apply in order to promote safety.

- Activities being undertaken should be suitable for the ability, age, and experience of the participant;
- Equipment and facilities should meet the highest standards and be appropriate to the maturity/ability of the participants;
- Where protective equipment is deemed necessary it should be used;
- First Aid should be available for all training sessions, with a First Aid Kit readily accessible; and
- Injuries should be recorded, with a note of the action taken in relation to each injury. Entries should be made in the Station/Department Accident Book as well as a specific incident form as held by the Lifestyle Adviser.

Health Promotion Material

A wide range of health promotion material will be available from Lifestyle Advisers covering many aspects of male and female health advice and will be distributed on the advice and guidance of the Occupational Health Advisors.

Guidance on Fitness Regimes

As already mentioned, a suite of exercises will be available to all personnel. In addition Lifestyle Advisers will be able to supply a personal fitness/exercise regime tailored to individual needs and abilities with the intention of achieving pre-set goals and improving personal health/fitness levels.

Returns to the Occupational Health Department at NIFRS Headquarters

Returns from the Lifestyle Advisers may be sought by the Occupational Health Department at NIFRS Headquarters, from each Station/Department. These returns will not be specific to any individual employee but will reflect an overall picture of fitness levels within their group/department. This arrangement is to facilitate the collation of information that will accurately reflect the organisation's overall level of Employee Health in terms of fitness at any given time.

Referrals to Service Senior Medical Adviser

The Station/Department Lifestyle Advisers will liaise closely with the Occupational Health Advisors where an individual is experiencing particular difficulties with achieving fitness levels. Health assessments where necessary, will be made by the nurses and on their recommendation, referrals will be made to the Senior Medical Advisor.

6 TRAINING TIME

Overall Strategy

The introduction of Lifestyle Advisers and Occupational Health Advisors to the NIFRS forms the initial introduction of the Occupational Health Scheme. 'Fit for Life' training will be continuously developed/evolved, which includes the potential for provision of further items of fitness equipment.

Duties of Managers

It will be the duty of each Departmental Head (Uniformed and Support Staff) to ensure that all staff are allocated time, when possible, to use the fitness equipment as one of the benefits of exercise is increased motivation and quality of work. Due to the anticipated volume of use, exercise periods should be staggered achieving a balance between individual's needs and departmental workloads.

Fitness training is already accounted for in the work routines of wholetime stations and watch managers should encourage physical training on each shift. For other departments a useful guide for training time is two forty five minute sessions per week

A logbook should be provided to pre-book fitness sessions.

Station Routine

It is envisaged that this policy will not have any detrimental impact on the smooth running of operational routine on Wholetime Stations. The position on Retained Stations will be slightly different in that once all work has been completed on drill night, two or three personnel may be released early (alerter response will be maintained) to participate in their 6 monthly fitness assessment.

Use of equipment off-duty is permitted, however personnel (Retained) must inform controls of their presence on station and take all necessary precautions, when using equipment to ensure their health and well-being (See Appendix 3)

Use of Local Sports and Leisure Facilities

The NIFRS encourages ongoing employee personal fitness regimes whether using either NIFRS or other facilities. To this end NIFRS recommend the continued use of sports and leisure facilities in personnel's geographical area of residence.

7 REVIEW

A review of the 'Fit for Life' Occupational Health Scheme will be undertaken, following consultation with the representative bodies, twelve months after the introduction of the scheme. The review will assist in developing and improving the scheme to the benefit of employees' fitness levels and general well-being.

LIFESTYLE ADVISER'S FITNESS STATISTICS RECORD

Copy to be forwarded to the Occupational Health

Department at NIFRS Headquarters
(with original being retained by Adviser)

| COMMAND | STATION-WATCH/DEPT | MONTH |
|----------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| | | |

FROM:

Lifestyle Adviser's Name:

| PERSONNEL BREAKDOWN | AVERAGE |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| UNDER 40s | |
| OVER 40s | |
| OFFICERS | |
| ADMIN/SUPPORT STAFF | |

Information contained on this form will be used to help compile an overall figure of employee health and fitness assisting the Occupational Health Department to determine and analyse ongoing health policies and make improvements where it is deemed necessary. All information therein will remain strictly confidential.

INDIVIDUAL FITNESS TEST SCORING RECORD

Name: _____

Age: _____

Date of Test: _____

Max HR: _____

Aerobic Capacity: _____

Fitness Rating: _____

Remarks: _____

TRAINING EQUIPMENT

Currently NIFRS has provided most stations with the following;

- *Types of Equipment*

Concept II Rowers; Newform “Best” Multigyms; aerobic exercise equipment and Treadmills

- *Maintenance of Equipment*

Routine maintenance and the keeping of associated records, including cleaning and adjustment of equipment with the potential replacement of parts that do not affect warranty, will be carried out by Lifestyle Advisers or persons nominated by them. Defective equipment will be clearly marked with any defects or deficiencies reported to the District Staff Officer, recorded and promptly repaired. All equipment should be wiped down with an appropriate cleaning solution after use to ensure a good standard of hygiene is maintained. It is the responsibility of Districts to ensure suitable cleaning materials are in place at each location.

- *Use of Equipment*

For all NIFRS locations the following instructions regarding the use of the equipment will apply:

- (a) A trained Lifestyle Adviser shall give initial instruction to all personnel on the fitness equipment to ensure its proper use.
- (b) Personnel may use this equipment outside normal working hours, ie, during stand-down time and while off-duty provided permission has been obtained from the Officer-in-Charge on Station and paragraph (a) above is adhered to.
- (c) Retained personnel may be permitted to use this equipment outside their normal drill providing their Watch Commander or District Officers give permission and paragraph (a) above is adhered to.
- (d) Support staff may use this equipment provided they have been trained in its use, have the permission of the Officer-in-Charge of the Station and paragraphs (a) and (b) above are adhered to.
- (e) No Contractors, Agency staff, or visitors are permitted to use any Fitness equipment in Stations/Departments.