



# ***ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS***

## **Information Guide for Employers**



**South Yorkshire  
FIRE & RESCUE**

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## WHAT ARE ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS?

On-call firefighters provide emergency cover to 90 percent of the United Kingdom. There are over 14,000 on-call firefighters in England, protecting our towns and rural communities and they are responsible for operating 60 percent of all fire engines.

They are trained to the same high standards as full-time firefighters but, as the name suggests, operate on an 'on-call' basis. This means that they carry a pager and respond to emergency calls from home, or another place of work.

On-call staff could technically be classed as part-time firefighters. Part-time or not, though, they become professional and important members of our team as soon as their pagers go off. They are recruited from all areas of society and could be full-time parents, office staff, manual workers or any profession you can think of.

Whilst on-call firefighters are ordinary men and women, they do an extraordinary job for the UK fire and rescue service and there is nothing 'part-time' about their commitment.



### Where do we come into this?

Traditionally, many of our on-call staff have worked full-time in industries where they work shifts and, as such, are able to offer themselves up to be on-call and respond to emergencies at all times of the day.

More recently, however, we have seen a decline in this kind of work that has made recruiting on-call firefighters – who can be available at different times such as between 9am and 5pm – a challenge. This is where you come in.

Services right across the country have started to develop partnerships with local companies in recent years where members of staff are allowed to stay 'on-call' during their normal working day. They are just like any other employee, but could be called out to emergency incidents from their workplace for some or all of their working hours.

This doesn't always have to be a huge commitment – given that our on-call staff are only called out two to three times a week on average (day and night) – but it does require support and buy-in from a firefighter's primary employer.

By allowing a member of staff to respond to emergencies from work, when needed, you would not only be supporting us, but supporting your community too. There's also a range of other benefits to having an on-call firefighter within your workplace.

## ***COULD YOU RELEASE SOMEONE?***

We know that releasing an employee to become an on-call firefighter is an important decision. It could not happen without your agreement and you need to know how it would work for you to make an informed decision and feel confident about supporting your community in this way.

It may be the case that, as an employer you have sufficient flexibility to enable staff to be released to attend emergency incidents during the working day. However, we do realise that some employers do not have the capacity to commit to consistent hours for release of their staff. Your local on-call fire station will be able to discuss the alternative possible options available to support on-call firefighters in your employment. For example, flexibility to enable on-call firefighters to attend scheduled training.

This information guide aims to provide you with enough information to decide if this is something you could consider doing for your community. Your local on-call fire station is available to discuss this further if you need more information.

They would first and foremost be your staff member, but be available on-call to help and protect the local community when needed.



## WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

On-call firefighters are highly trained professionals who can bring added value to your organisation at no cost to you. They gain many useful transferable skills which could be useful in any workplace.

Businesses have found that the benefits offered by allowing their staff to be on-call have far outweighed any inconvenience caused by their employee responding to an emergency. These benefits include:

- ✓ Recognition from South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue which can be used to promote your business and demonstrate corporate social responsibility
- ✓ Additional personal skills for your team member such as leadership, teamwork, quick thinking, problem solving, taking responsibility, communication and keeping calm
- ✓ Emergency skills for your team member – incident command, first aid and trauma care, dealing with hazardous materials, as well as health and fire safety knowledge
- ✓ Education, qualifications and new skills – our on-call firefighters are encouraged to gain nationally recognised qualifications that are often transferable
- ✓ Improved fitness, health and wellbeing – we are committed to supporting our firefighters' physical and mental health meaning they are fitter and healthier
- ✓ Large goods vehicle training – many on-call firefighters are trained to drive fire engines which means they will get a LGV license

## WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

On-call firefighters are usually only called out two or three times a week at any time of the day or night, usually for about an hour. This commitment will vary depending on station. Of course, we are unable to predict exactly how often an individual firefighter might get called out and it also depends on their hours of availability.

They can choose to be available during the evening, daytime or weekend. However, the system can be flexible so should a busy week at work arise, or urgent deadlines loom, then your business takes priority.

Your employee might have to rush off to attend an emergency at very short notice and contractual arrangements may need to be recorded to reflect this in accordance with current employment legislation. We feel the additional skills on-call firefighters bring to your workplace will make this worthwhile and what's more, as an employer you can feel proud that you have played a vital role in making the local community safer.

There are a range of businesses both small and large across the country who currently release employees to be on-call firefighters, including Royal Mail, B&Q, Howdens, Tesco and Sainsbury's.



## OUR ON-CALL FIRE STATIONS

One crucial element of on-call firefighting is that the firefighters must live or work within five minutes of their fire station. The map below shows the location of the on-call stations we have across South Yorkshire, which may help you see if you could support us.



- **Askern** – Moss Road, Askern, Doncaster, South Yorkshire, DN6 0JX
- **Birley Moor** – Moor Valley, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S20 5FA
- **Cudworth** – Tumbling Lane, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S71 5SA
- **Dearne** – Manvers Way, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, S63 5DN
- **Penistone** – Sheffield Road, Penistone, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S36 6HN
- **Rossington** – West End Lane, Rossington, Doncaster, South Yorkshire, DN11 0PQ
- **Stocksbridge** – Manchester Road, Stocksbridge, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S36 1DH

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Do I have to release staff to attend emergencies if it doesn't suit us on that day?**

No. Employees are only available for duty when they book on-call as available. If they say they are available, they will be expected to respond to the call. Therefore, it is essential to agree when you have capacity to release staff before they log in as available. Your needs as the primary employer will always be a priority.

### **What will it cost me?**

There are no direct costs to supporting an employee to be an on-call firefighter. However, there may be some indirect costs to your business. It's up to you how you deal with the on-call firefighter absence – some employers do not pay the employee when they are absent, others expect them to make their hours up later.

### **Will training take place in working hours?**

Most training takes place on weekday evenings and at weekends. However, initial training may be a consolidated period encompassing weekday daytimes. Any training that must be completed during business hours is planned well in advance to allow employees to make arrangements with employers.

### **What support is available should I have any questions?**

Each on-call station has a management team who will be your point of contact and help support you through the early days of appointing your employee, as well as providing on-going support and assistance as and when required.

### **What happens if my employee has been at an incident all night, will they still be in work the next day? If not, am I expected to give them paid leave?**

We would not expect this to be a frequent issue, but this is something you would need to clarify with your employee before you agree to release them for on-call duty. If you don't want to pay them for any absence due to the fire and rescue service, then that is your decision.





## **How long will my employee be away when called out on duty?**

Typically, on-call firefighters are called out two to three times per week, usually for about an hour. This can be afternoon, evening or in the middle of the night – so it may not even affect your business. The incident table on our website ([www.syfire.gov.uk](http://www.syfire.gov.uk)) will show you predicted call volume at any given station but, essentially, it's a flexible arrangement, depending on the needs of your business.

On-call firefighters can work with the fire and rescue service to agree the cover they wish to provide. They could opt for evening, daytime or weekend cover, your employee will be able to provide you with their on-call rota. Rest assured your needs and requirements as the primary employer will always have priority and we are committed to ensuring our employees have a healthy work-life balance.

## **What sort of training and development will my staff undergo as part of their role as a firefighter?**

All firefighters go through a rigorous training and development programme. They will develop skills in risk management, communication, team working, leadership, self-discipline, first aid, trauma care, health and safety, and much more. They will bring this training and experience back to their workplace.

## **How long will my employee be required to take time away from work for training?**

Firefighters must be well trained if they are going to work safely and effectively in the wide range of operational incidents they have to tackle. The fire and rescue service recognise that some on-call firefighters might need to take time off from their primary employment to undertake training. We aim to keep the impact on the primary employer to a minimum by providing basic training at fire stations on drill nights and during weekends, reducing the time required for training during weekdays. However, during their first two years of employment our on-call firefighters will have to attend essential training, of which some will be during weekdays

## **What if my employee gets injured while at an incident?**

On-call firefighters are trained to a high standard before they become fully operational, so this is a rare occurrence. In the event this does happen, we offer support services to help firefighters get fit again if they do get injured. For example, local occupational health services and comprehensive physical and psychological rehabilitation arrangements.

All firefighters undergo regular fitness and medical assessments to assure their continual health, safety and wellbeing.

## **Are there any implications for me or my business as a result of employing an on-call firefighter?**

Like all employers, fire and rescue services have to comply with current legislation around employment rights, health and safety and working time. Depending on the number of hours they are contracted to their primary employer, on-call firefighters may have to sign an Opt-Out agreement under the Working Time Regulations. Details of any legislation and its impact can be obtained from your local on-call fire station.

## **What benefits do I get as an employer for releasing a member of staff to be an on-call firefighter?**

The main benefits for employers are listed above. However, many find the biggest reward is the knowledge that their company is undertaking a vital role in protecting the local community. By allowing one of your employees to become an on-call firefighter you know you'll have made a difference every time they respond to an emergency.





