

<b>REPORT REFERENCE NO.</b>	<b>AGC/25/4</b>
<b>MEETING</b>	<b>AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>20 JANUARY 2025</b>
<b>SUBJECT OF REPORT</b>	<b>PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) AUDIT AND CONTAMINANTS UPDATE</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	<b>Assistant Director, Corporate Services</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<i>That the report be noted.</i>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	The report provides information on key aspects of the provision for structural fire-fighting Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), an update on the outstanding actions from the PPE Audit from 2021-22 and a progress update on contaminants. This is provided as a result of further assurance requested by the Committee at its meeting on 29 November 2024 (Minute AGC/24/16 refers).
<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	Resources and funding have been established.
<b>EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS</b>	ERBA in place within the policy and procedure for PPE and Contaminants.
<b>APPENDICES</b>	None
<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	None

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. At the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee on 29 November 2024, the Committee sought further assurance in respect of overdue, outstanding actions emanating from the audit of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) undertaken in the 2021-22 financial year (Minute AGC/24/16 refers). Further assurance was also sought in respect of the delays associated with the Contaminants Project.
- 1.2. The particular concerns surrounded whether the Service was putting firefighters at risk with ill-fitting PPE and not providing appropriate training or management intervention. The issue of storage of PPE and segregation to avoid contamination was also raised.
- 1.3. Both of these matters are addressed within this report.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. In 2021, a PPE Audit was commissioned by Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) on structural fire-fighting PPE. The report identified that the provision of PPE was appropriate, met relevant standards and that the policy and procedure, value for money and availability of PPE was in place. The report made recommendations on the training provision, management practices and storage of PPE on stations. The report did include references and observations regarding non-structural fire-fighting PPE. This matter was linked to issues regarding contaminants upon which separate recommendations were made as set out below.
- 2.2. A project board of Service representatives was established which meets monthly to implement the recommendations from the UCLan (University of Central Lancashire) report on contaminants. Phase 1 of the project has been completed and Phase 2 has been scoped with funding provided to implement in 2025. Work on implementation of Phase 2 deliverables is in progress. The National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC) guidance on contaminants is due to be published in April 2025 and a further review will be undertaken.

## **3. STRUCTURAL FIRE-FIGHTING PPE**

- 3.1. The Service currently provides two sets of personal issue: tunic, trousers, gloves and single-issue helmet and boots as part of the structural fire-fighting provision. These garments meet the relevant standards and there is a cleaning and laundry provision in place. PPE pool hubs are established for replacement items. Policy, procedures and guidance support the use, care and replacement of PPE.
- 3.2. The audit included the recommendation to have an auditable e-learning package in place for the whole PPE provision, currently only e-learning on structural helmets is available. This recommendation is fully supported.

- 3.3. The plan within the Academy is to commence the PPE e-learning package in April 2025. A sizing and measuring guide is available and this has been updated to ensure it is accurate. Materials to develop a training package are available, however, the resources to convert this into an e-learning provision have been engaged on other priorities including contaminants.
- 3.4. Premises audits are undertaken on station where any storage considerations for PPE can be captured and managed by relevant departments. During the fleet replacement plans any structural PPE stored within the appliance bay have been relocated.
- 3.5. A sizing exercise for water rescue PPE was undertaken in 2023 and an extended range of sizes will be made available. Alternative options and sizes for gas tight suits are being considered as part of replacement plans.
- 3.6. Whilst not part of the PPE audit recommendations, a new structural fire-fighting glove has been introduced that is made of synthetic materials and can be laundered to reduce the impact of contamination.
- 3.7. Moving forwards, a scoping document has been developed for participation in the NFCC National Framework Agreement for PPE. Service personnel, including the Technical lead for Operational Assets and the Commercial lead for Procurement, are actively collaborating with Kent FRS as lead Service and other fire and rescue services to deliver a new national procurement framework for PPE. New PPE standards are also being published. Costs for PPE replacement have been included within the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

#### **4. CONTAMINANTS**

- 4.1. In 2020, a report by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) summarised the research of Professor Stec et al., which aimed to investigate rates of cancer and other diseases in UK firefighters; understand the long-term health effects of fire contaminants; and find ways to reduce exposure to contaminants in fire and rescue service work.
- 4.2. In 2022 the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) declared exposure through working as a firefighter as carcinogenic (Lancet Oncology report).
- 4.3. The UCLan report provides many recommendations to fire and rescue services, as interim best practice, explicitly:
  - using respiratory protective equipment (RPE) more effectively;
  - avoiding cross-contamination wherever possible;
  - enhancing cleaning regimes for vehicles, equipment, clothing and workspaces; and
  - mandating personal hygiene and wash arrangements and facilities.

- 4.4. Phase 1 of the contaminant's project is complete. This phase has introduced a new fire-ground hygiene procedure and process with e-learning and equipment provided. PPE pool stock has been introduced for those undertaking Breathing Apparatus (BA) training to avoid heavy contamination of the personal issue PPE. This phase has focussed on minimising contamination in the workplace, reducing risk to staff, improved compliance with health and safety legislation and the UCLan report.
- 4.5. Phase 2 was developed through re-evaluation and gap analysis against the scientific recommendations following delivery of phase 1. Any gaps have been grouped into themes and structured stakeholder sessions held to determine requirements. High impact solutions that can be delivered in a relatively short time frame will be progressed through the Contaminants Board and longer-term solutions will be considered by an ongoing working group as further research and guidance is made available.
- 4.6. Solutions for delivery in 2025 are:
- Provide technicians with hygiene-processes, protective clothing and equipment;
  - Provide technicians with greater incident-based controls;
  - Add hygiene consumables to technician inventories, to support operational incidents and personal decontamination;
  - Install zone signage within workplaces, to control further cross-contamination;
  - Provide hygiene-considerate processes for cleaning-controlled areas of workplaces as well as operational and logistical support vehicles;
  - Monitor and, if necessary, improve air quality in workplaces;
  - Replace permeable furnishings to control surface contamination within high-risk areas of hot-fire training venues;
  - Mandated showering at training centres and stations following a hygiene process with the provision of towels and appropriate shower gel and update procedures;
  - Provide purpose-built machines for periodic deep cleaning of non-launderable PPE such as breathing apparatus sets and helmets;
  - Develop and implement a means of recording and reporting exposure for operational staff, training instructors and fireground technicians;
  - Replace leather helmet cradles, and any fabric elements of personal issue facemasks, with Nomex to enable a complete personal decontamination;
  - Provide greater health and wellbeing education, cancer awareness and Systematic Nomenclature of Medicine Clinical Terms (SNOMED) code advice; and
  - Review, refine and enhance risk-assessment arrangements for new or expectant mothers, to ensure adequate protection from exposure to contaminants.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1. The structural fire-fighting PPE provision within the Service is fit for purpose and supported by policies and procedures with teams in place for the ongoing management of the supply arrangements. The Service has been working towards participation in the NFCC National Framework Agreement for PPE, which is expected October 2025, and will be undertaking the replacement of PPE thereafter. Financial provision has been included within the Medium Term Financial Plan (as revenue expenditure).
- 5.2. An e-learning package for PPE will be provided by the Academy to support Service Delivery training for end-users in the use, care and maintenance arrangements.
- 5.3. Work on contaminants continues to progress well and funding has been provided to deliver phase 2.

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