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Firefighters' union calls for cancer compensation on memorial day

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- FBU calls for compensation for firefighters with cancer and other diseases linked to their work
- Call comes on Firefighters' Memorial Day, as firefighters line up outside stations to remember fallen colleagues
- UK "decades behind" other countries on action over fire contaminants and cancer

The Fire Brigades Union has today called on the UK government to introduce legislation to ensure that firefighters with cancer and other diseases linked to their work can receive compensation.

The call comes on Firefighters' Memorial Day (4 May). Firefighters all over the UK will line up outside their fire stations at 12 noon today for a minute's silence.

More than 2,000 firefighters have died in the line of duty. However, if this number included all those who have died of cancer and other diseases associated with firefighting, it would be far higher.

The Fire Brigades Union is today calling for firefighters and their families to have access to compensation when diagnosed with cancer and other diseases linked to firefighting.

So-called 'presumptive legislation' is already the norm for many forms of cancer and some other diseases in the USA, Australia and Canada.

The World Health Organisation declared in July 2022 that firefighting was "carcinogenic to humans".

Independent research conducted by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) this year revealed that firefighters are dying of cancer at 1.6 times the rate of the general population. Firefighters aged 35-39 are three times more likely to have cancer than the general population.

The research also shows the mortality rates for certain types of cancer are significantly higher in firefighters, including:

- Prostate – 3.8 times higher
- Leukaemia – 3.17 times higher
- Oesophageal – 2.42 times higher

Matt Wrack, Fire Brigades Union general secretary, said:

"On Firefighters' Memorial Day, we remember all of the more than 2,000 firefighters who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

"If we include those who have died as a result of cancer or other diseases linked to their work, that number is far higher.

"People join the Fire Service to protect the communities and to help people. Firefighters have the right to expect that everything possible is done to protect their health, and that when they fall ill as a result of their job, help will be there.

"There is ample evidence that firefighters are getting ill and dying as a result of the work they do.

"The USA, Canada and Australia have all faced up to the evidence and introduced legislation to protect and compensate firefighters for cancer other diseases.

"But the UK is decades behind other countries when it comes to this issue. This is a national scandal.

"The Fire Brigades Union has been forced to run its own campaign of prevention and health monitoring – but the fundamental responsibility lies with the government and the employer.

"We will not rest until firefighters have access to the compensation they deserve."

ENDS

NOTES

1. For more information and bids, please email press@fbu.org.uk or ring 07561896809, 07801047610 or



2. The World Health Organisation declared firefighting carcinogenic in 2022. For more information, see here: <https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2022/07/01/world-health-organisation-agency-declares-firefighting-be-carcinogenic>
3. Independent research shows greatly increased risks of cancer for firefighters. For more information, see <https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2023/01/10/firefighters-far-more-likely-die-cancer-and-heart-attacks-public>
4. Another round of research can be seen here: <https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2023/01/10/fire-contaminants-linked-significant-physical-and-mental-health-issues-among-uk>
5. Presumptive legislation - which gives firefighters access to compensation - is the norm in North America and Australia. Details of coverage in North America can be seen here: <https://www.iaff.org/presumptive-health/>. Details of coverage in Australia can be seen here: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/book/comparison-workers-compensation-arrangements-australia-and-new-zealand-2021-28th-edition/chapter-4-coverage-and-eligibility-benefits/table-410-presumptive-legislation-firefighters>



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