



Dear Colleague

### **Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) Project**

This letter updates Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) on the current status of the Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) Project and identifies the arrangements to enable FRAs to participate in the project

FRAs are also reminded that this project is a key element of the National Procurement Strategy (NPS) for the Fire and Rescue Service 2005-2008.

#### Background

Whilst some FRAs have put in place collaborative arrangements for the procurement of breathing apparatus (BA), most continue to procure BA on an individual basis and those in collaboration will eventually need them replaced. The increased national security threat means that there is a greater need to enable the inter-operability of BA and its associated equipment across the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS).

In addition to providing a replacement for standard duration compressed air breathing apparatus, the RPE project will consider entirely new systems of work and the wide range of products required to support them. This work will be vital to ensure that the service can take advantage of technological developments in responding to operational risk and RPE designed for use by an increasingly diverse workforce. It is important that new RPE solutions are based on thorough assessments of risk and that resulting policies, procedures and equipment support resilience and interoperability.

With the establishment of Firebuy it is now appropriate for arrangements to be put in place to take the RPE project forward. Firebuy Ltd was established to drive the NPS forward. Its aim is to put in place arrangements that will enable FRAs to procure BA together with other RPE and associated equipment from a national framework arrangement from 2008 onwards. Any FRAs which are part way through or are about to start a procurement process for RPE in the next two years are required to contact DCLG to discuss ways in which their planned work could dovetail with the national RPE project and procurement process.

## Scope

The range of the equipment and associated material, including guidance on selection, deployment, use and diversity impact assessments etc, that it is proposed be covered within the scope of the RPE project includes the following;

- Breathing apparatus (BA) – standard and extended duration sets including cylinders
- Other respiratory protective equipment e.g. respirators
- Air lines
- BA communications
- Automatic distress signalling units (ADSUs)
- Ancillary equipment
- Telemetry systems
- Compressors
- Protective equipment e.g. gas / chemical tight suits
- Particle protection (low level)
- Air containers
- Means of charging air containers, fixed/mobile
- Stowage
- Maintenance and servicing (managed service)

The key outcomes for the project will be:

- Framework arrangement: The aim will be a national framework agreement to be put in place from which FRAs will be able to obtain equipment, meeting an agreed output performance specification from a number of manufacturers.
- Inter-operability of equipment: The project aims to put in place arrangements to ensure, where appropriate, the interoperability of RPE and associated equipment.
- Telemetry: There is a need to improve the existing methodology for the exchange of information between individual RPE users and control operators outside a risk area. Key examples include cylinder contents/duration, evacuation and distress signals. There is also a range of information that could be used in the future to assist with the management of risk. Examples include the core body temperatures of firefighters as suggested in research work conducted by the Building Disasters Action Group (BDAG). All these issues may be addressed through the use of telemetry. The project would seek to examine the possibilities of developing a common telemetry protocol and associated equipment to enable an improved level of interoperability and data collection

- Equality and diversity: There are a number of issues in this area in which further improvements need to be made. Problems are being experienced by FRAs in ensuring that a proper 'face fit' for the positive pressure BA mask can be achieved for all firefighters regardless of gender or religion. The issue of face fit becomes even more important to resolve when using a wider range of RPE, such as respirators. Addressing these issues and the development of equipment necessary to address the output requirements would require a large investment in both time and resources at a local or regional level. On a national basis this can be addressed for all FRAs without unnecessary duplication of effort.

### Project Management Arrangements

Project Management arrangements have been formulated using Prince II Methodology, and discussions in respect of which elements of the whole project scope can be taken forward, dependent on available resources, are currently underway. The National Procurement Board has appointed CFO Paul Hayden as Project Director.

Project Structure:

Project Director	-	CFO Paul Hayden
Senior User	-	CFOA National Procurement Board (CFO Paul M Fuller)
Senior Supplier	-	Chief Executive - Firebuy (Terry Brewer)
Project Manager	-	To be appointed
Project Team	-	Representatives appointed from: Regions, DCLG, Firebuy Ltd, Service users and suppliers, Industry and representative bodies and employee -and staff (Project Manager & Administration)

The Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) National Procurement Board will provide the conduit to provide regional accountability.

Firebuy will shortly be starting recruitment activity to appoint a Project Manager and Project Co-ordinator to progress the RPE project.

### Project Stages

**Stage 1:** Production of Project Implementation Document (PID) (completed); appointment of Project Executive and agreement of Project and future (in progress).

**Stage 2:** Risk assessment and user requirements. The first stage is to undertake a detailed risk assessment for the project. Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) has already completed much of this work. Arrangements will be made for FRAs to send appropriate representatives to provide input into the risk assessment process to ensure that all risks and mitigation factors are properly identified and then developed into a set of user requirements.

**Stage 3:** Procurement – Firebuy, on behalf of the FRS, will oversee the procurement process working in conjunction FRAs to develop an output based specification. HMFSI will work with the RPE Board, FRAs and Firebuy to complete user trials

**Stage 4:** This will commence as soon as possible and run concurrently with stage 1, 2 & 3. The RPE Board will, in conjunction with HMFSI, oversee the work on the production of new technical guidance and associated documentation to replace Technical Bulletin 1/97 and will work with FRAs and Firebuy on the roll out and implementation of RPE.

#### Further information

A Briefing Day for FRAs was held on 31 July 2006 and a Suppliers Briefing Day is planned for 13 September 2006.

FRAs should notify Anna Wadsworth by telephone on 020 7944 5672, or by email at [fsed6@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:fsed6@communities.gsi.gov.uk) if they need to start procurement for RPE in the next two years

FRAs should notify Colette Carrizales by telephone on 020 7587 6164, or by email [colette.carrizales@firebuy.gov.uk](mailto:colette.carrizales@firebuy.gov.uk) to confirm their intention to participate in the development of the RPE Project.

For further information on Firebuy Ltd please visit the dedicated website ([www.firebuy.gov.uk](http://www.firebuy.gov.uk)).

For further information on CFOA please visit their website ([www.cfoa.org.uk](http://www.cfoa.org.uk)).

For further information on DCLG please visit [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

Yours faithfully

Terry Brewer, CEO Firebuy

Paul Fuller, CFOA