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This circular is	<b>For Information</b>	No response required	
This circular is	<b>Relevant to the National Framework</b>		
Status	<b>This circular informs Fire and Rescue Authorities of the joint HSE/DCLG project to enhance sickness absence management in the FRS for England.</b>		

# *Improving Sickness Absence Management in the Fire and Rescue Service for England*

## Issued by:

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Fire & Rescue Service Development Division**

## Addressed to:

**The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority  
The Chief Executive of the County Council  
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority  
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue  
Authority  
The Commissioner of the London Fire and  
Emergency Planning Authority  
The Chief Fire Officer**

## Please forward to:

**Human Resources personnel**

## Summary

**This circular informs Fire and Rescue Authorities that the Department for Communities and Local Government is working in partnership with the Health and Safety Executive to undertake a study of sickness absence management in the Fire and Rescue Service for England. This is to support the FRS as it strives to improve sickness absence management. It is envisaged the first stage of the study will report in spring 2007.**

## For further information, contact:

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## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1** The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006-08 (chapter 5) outlines the need for Fire and Rescue Authorities to take effective steps to improve sickness absence management and reduce ill health retirements.
- 1.2** Effective sickness absence management is embedded in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's public sector efficiency programme and Office of Government Commerce (OGC), National Audit Office (NAO) and Audit Commission public sector performance audits.
- 1.3** Effective sickness absence management is also key to the Ministerial Task Force on Health, Safety, and Productivity's (MTF) aim of reducing working days lost to sickness absence across the public sector by 30 per cent (equivalent to an average of 7.5 days lost per public sector worker) by 2010.
- 1.4** The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006-08 refers to joint proposals from the Health and Safety Executive and DCLG for a study of sickness absence management in the FRS and to design improvements in sickness absence management that are in line with MTF recommendations.
- 1.5** The project will:
  - Explore patterns and causes of sickness absence
  - Assess current sickness absence management systems across the FRS
  - On the basis of the research findings, develop approaches for enhanced FRS sickness management systems and processes, using good practice where possible
  - Develop and evaluate a pathfinder project that trials any enhanced sickness absence management systems and processes with a small number of FRS's
- 1.6** The project will be divided into three phases
  - Phase 1 (Summer/Autumn 2006) - Research by DCLG/HSE and an independent research contractor
  - Phase 2 (Early 2007) - Identify best practice
  - Phase 3 (Summer 2007) - Possible pathfinder project to trial processes developed in phases 1 & 2
- 1.7** The purpose of this Circular is to advise that phase 1 of this study is intended to commence in September/October 2006.

## **2.0 Information on next steps**

- 2.1** In September/October 2006 every FRA in England will be contacted by DCLG analysts and asked to take part in a survey. You will be asked to fill in a questionnaire on sickness absence data collection and the management information systems in place. DCLG will analyse the results from these questionnaires.
- 2.2** Your FRS may then be selected to take part in the next stage of phase 1 research. If so, you will be contacted by an independent research contractor in late 2006. The research contractor will be undertaking in-depth interviews with staff at a sample of FRS's in England. Information staff provide to the independent research contractor will be treated in confidence and will be reported in a way that will ensure that individual staff members and the local FRS cannot be identified.
- 2.3** If you have any enquiries about this circular, please contact either Sheila Ramsamy on 020 7944 6786 or Mark Dunn on 020 7944 4400 ex 15436.

**Linda Hurford**

**Fire and Resilience Directorate**