

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES
FLAMMABLE SUBSTANCES SUBCOMMITTEE
PETROLEUM WORKING GROUP**

ODPM Fire and Rescue Service White Paper

To Members of the Petroleum Working Group

1 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has recently published a White Paper concerning the future of the Fire and Rescue Service. An extract of Section 4 of the paper is reproduced below:

“The Government will set national objectives for the fire and rescue service, although we will not dictate matters that are best decided at regional or local level. The current structural arrangements of the service are in need of reform. Many functions are currently not carried out in a cost-effective way. For example, the cost of local-level control room cover can be as high as £168 per incident handled, compared to £18 per incident in London. In addition, there are some roles, including preparing for possible terrorist attacks, that are clearly better carried out at a different level. And, as the new approaches to fire cover and to human resources set out in this White Paper are developed, it will become increasingly difficult for many fire authorities, particularly smaller ones, to cope with the expectations of the public. In those areas where elected regional assemblies are set up, we will establish new, larger, fire and rescue authorities on a regional basis. These authorities will be more efficient and will be better able to discharge their responsibilities for dealing with non-fire emergencies. In the meantime, fire authorities will remain within local government and will be accountable for the service to elected local authorities. However, it is essential to ensure that the regional efficiencies are delivered quickly. The fastest way of achieving this will be for local fire authorities themselves to establish effective regional management arrangements so that control rooms, resilience, procurement and many human resource functions are delivered regionally from an early date. We will discuss with existing authorities, the Local Government Association and other stakeholders this system of regional management to ensure that it meets national objectives. We will strengthen our powers to combine fire authorities on a compulsory basis, if the voluntary regional management solution does not deliver. Responsibility for fire policy has already been devolved to Scotland and Northern Ireland; we now intend to devolve it to Wales.”

2 A full version of Section 4 is available at:
http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_fire/documents/page/odpm_fire_022968-07.hcsp#P278_51198

3 The regional management arrangements for the fire services mentioned above are likely to be developed in the near future. The arrangements for Regional Assemblies will also develop over the next two to three years. Given that these changes are likely to have a significant affect on how both the fire services and local authorities are organised in the medium term, it would seem prudent to retain the status quo for Petroleum Licensing Authorities enforcement arrangements, at least for the time being.

4 HSE will be in contact with ODPM as the fire service proposals develop. Members will be kept informed about significant developments.