

Definition: Violence at work is defined as '...any occurrence in which a member of staff is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of or in the course of their employment... (as defined by the HSE and adopted by the Violence Against Fire Fighters Working Group, CFOA Operations Committee)

The Trend

Violence Against WMFS Personnel Reports 1st April 2007 - 30th September 2011

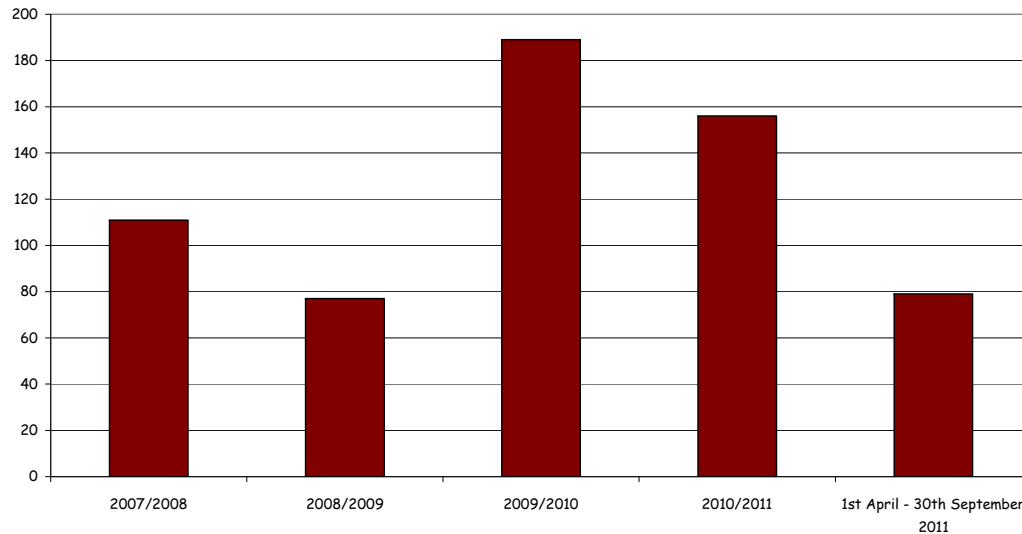


Figure 1: Violence Against WMFS Personnel reported to the Safety, Health and Environment Team 1st April 2007 – 30th September 2011

Violence Against WMFS Personnel 2010/11 and 2011/12 Comparison

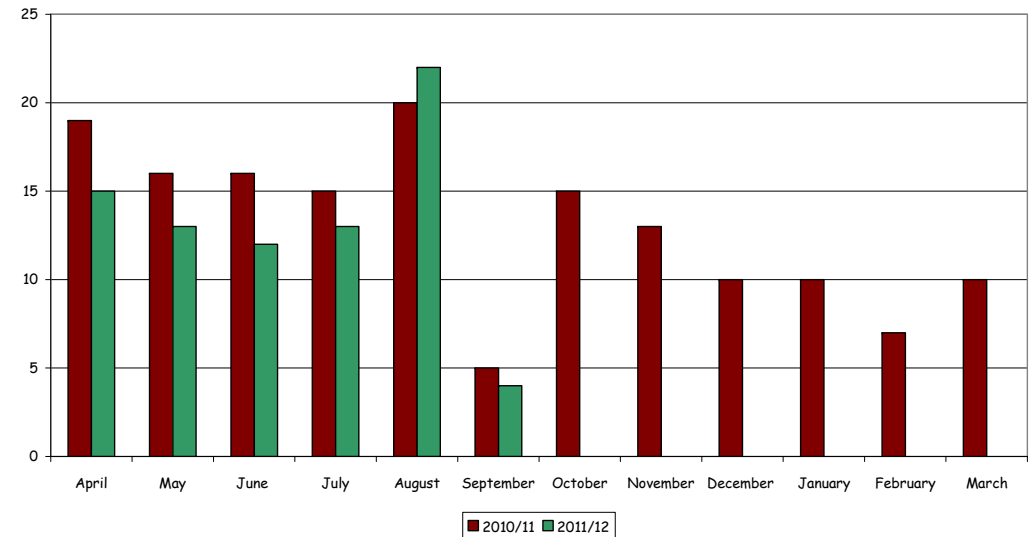


Figure 2: Violence Against Fire Fighters Reported to the WMFS SHE Team 1st April 2010 – 30th September 2011 Annual Year to Date Comparison

The Statistics

- After a 145% increase in incidents of violence of at work reported to the Safety, Health and Environment Team in 2009/10 (compared to the previous year), levels reported in 2010/11 had reduced by -17% although numbers were still significantly higher than those recorded in 2007/8 and 2008/9. Reported violence against WMFS personnel 2011/12 year to date is showing a -13% decrease when compared to the same time period in 2010/11.
- Levels in August 2011 rose when compared to the same months in 2010, largely a result of the civil disturbances that took place across the West Midlands at the beginning of the month.

- In terms of the time that reported violence against WMFS employees occurs, no seasonal, monthly or daily pattern can be discerned. The **peak time** for offences to occur however is between **18:00 – 22:00 hours**.
- Over 75% of reports of violence at work over the period analysed consisted of **verbal assaults (47%)** or **missiles** such as stones, bricks and bottles being thrown at crews (**30%**). Approximately 5% were more serious in nature involving **physical contact, injuries or guns or knives**.¹
- **Over 80% of all reports of violence** against WMFS personnel **occurs while at attendance at an incident**. **Verbal assaults** directed at **Fire Control or Fire Safety Staff** and account for **4%** of all violent reports, incidents occurring on the **station ground** account for approximately **6%** of total violence reports respectively whilst **5%** occurs during the conduction of **prevention based activity**.
- Over the period analysed, **Police** were in **attendance** at an average of approximately **39% of reported incidents** of violence against WMFS personnel. **68% of Police attendance** has been to reports of **verbal abuse (32%)** and **throwing of missiles (35%)**

¹ It should be noted that this equates to very small numbers that are reducing year on year

The Story Behind the Trend

A number of factors have contributed to the rise in reported violence against West Midlands Fire Service personnel, the most obvious and significant being the introduction of the 'Incident Recording System' from the 1st April 2009. The integration of violence reporting into the incident recording system has increased ease of reporting, pushing levels up.

Indeed, it may well be that the 145% increase experienced in 2009/10 is an *underestimation* of true levels of reported violence. Evidence gathered through focus groups indicated that some operational staff did not report all violence as a certain level was 'to be accepted'. Minor verbal abuses appeared to be tolerated as 'part of the job'.

The civil disturbances, experienced across the West Midlands at the beginning of August have served to push levels of reported violence up in August 2011. Such incidents however tended to occur at isolated, short-term geographical hotspots. Conversely, longer term hotspots have been identified, each with its own unique causation factors.

Current Initiatives Aimed at Improving the Trend

A steering group, composed of key stakeholders (including the SHE Team, Youth Services, FBU, and West Midlands Police) has been created in order to identify solutions to some of the problems described and deliver appropriate interventions. Initiatives include:-

- Reminder to operational staff of the importance of reporting violence at work, as well as the correct channels to do so
- Engagement campaign with West Midlands Fire Service operational staff to ascertain opinions regarding violence in the workplace in order to increase understanding and shape interventions
- Design and delivery of appropriate training to help mitigate the effects of violence in the workplace
- Adoption of a sustained multi agency approach in key, strategic hotspot areas
- Built in review process to monitor progress and evaluate effectiveness of any initiatives introduced
- Reinforced links with the CFOA 'Violence Against Fire Fighters Working Group' in order to share learning and facilitate best practice