



## **Safest People, Safest Places**

### **Combined Fire Authority**

**20 January 2025**

### **Bonfire Campaign Evaluation 2024**

---

## **Report of the Director of Community Risk Management**

---

### **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the 2024 Bonfire Campaign and provide an overview of the activities conducted by the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS).

### **Background**

2. The original version of the Joint Bonfire Delivery Plan was developed in 2021 to establish a formal process for the Emergency Response, Community Safety and Arson Reduction Team, Communications Team, and key partners. The plan outlines specific activities, designated outcomes, and target dates for task completion and data returns.
3. It is reviewed annually and circulated both internally and externally for consultation. Feedback is sought from end users based on their experiences with the previous year's plan, enabling continuous improvement through lessons learned.
4. Much of the original plan remains valid and effective, with minor adjustments made to enhance interoperability among diverse partners. These partners include Housing Associations, Schools, Trading Standards, Environmental Service teams from Durham County Council (DCC) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC), as well as Durham University.
5. A key benefit of collaboration is the ability to amplify bonfire safety messages within the wider community, including targeted groups such as young people and families. This collaboration emphasises the advantages of attending

organised displays and raises awareness about the potential dangers of bonfires.

## **Scope**

6. This evaluation report will only cover activities conducted as a result of the Joint Bonfire Strategy 2024 which is live from the 24<sup>th</sup> of October until the 7<sup>th</sup> November.

## **Bonfire Strategy Actions Delivered**

7. As part of the preparations for the bonfire period, police 999 operators were based in the CDDFRS Control Room to enhance coordination between Durham Constabulary and CDDFRS during the bonfire period.
8. The Emergency Response crews conducted:
  - 151 Environmental Visual Audits (EVA). EVAs are targeted patrols in 'high likelihood' areas, where there is fuel in this area which could be used to build an illegal bonfire, it is reported to the local authority and it is removed that day.
  - 215 Blue Route Patrols (BRP). BRPs are high visibility patrols in areas where we have experienced nuisance fires in the past, these patrols are undertaken on the days and times where we have experienced the previous fires and the presence of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) vehicles is intended to be a visual deterrent to prospective fire setters.
  - 24 school educational sessions aimed at educating young people on the dangers of fireworks and deliberate fires.
9. Our social media campaign is divided between the formal media provision by the Communications Team and Emergency Response crews who disseminate social media content on platforms such as TikTok.
10. On Instagram, the Fireworks Safety Video received 51 likes and 1,101 views, with a total watch time of 1 hour, 41 minutes, and 45 seconds. The Sparkler Safety Video performed slightly better in views, accumulating 2,106 views and 49 likes, with a significantly higher total watch time of 4 hours, 24 minutes, and 31 seconds.
11. On Facebook, the Fireworks Safety Video achieved 71 likes, three comments, and eight shares, with 6,123 total views and approximately 8 hours of watch time. The Sparkler Safety Video outperformed it with 154 likes, 12 comments, and 24 shares, 10,902 views and around 25 hours of watch time. Additionally, the Firefighter Attacks Warning Release post, accompanied by a photo, reached 4,806 people, generating 58 likes and 11 shares. The Bonfire Night Attacks Post-Event Release, featuring an image of a damaged fire engine, was

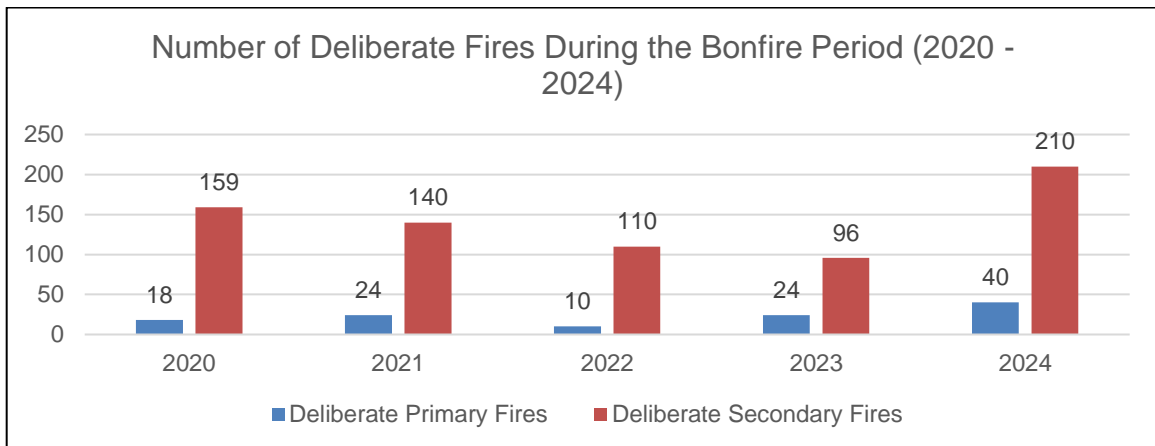
the most impactful post, reaching 46,126 people and generating 1,238 likes, 339 comments, and 208 shares.

12. On TikTok, the Fireworks Safety Video accumulated 2,895 views, 156 likes, six shares, and 12 saves, with a total play time of 5 hours and 52 minutes, while bringing in four new followers. The Sparkler Safety Video was a standout success, amassing 194,000 views, 8,640 likes, 230 comments, 493 shares, and 572 saves, with an impressive total play time of 904 hours and 12 minutes, leading to 378 new followers. Lastly, the Firefighters Attacked Post-Event Message achieved 13,000 views, 339 likes, 27 comments, 20 shares, and 34 saves, with a total play time of 27 hours and 58 minutes, resulting in six new followers.

### **The Bonfire Period 2024**

13. In the run-up to and during the Bonfire Period in 2024, weather conditions were predominantly dry, contributing to an increased fire risk. October experienced only 7 days of significant rainfall, delivering an average of 1.8cm of rain across County Durham and the Borough of Darlington.
14. In contrast, the same period in 2023 saw 21 days of significant rainfall during October, with an average of 6cm of rain. This wetter weather in 2023 ensured that much of the accessible flammable material was damp, reducing the potential for fires.
15. As November 2024 began, temperatures remained mild, ranging from 14°C to 11°C, accompanied by minimal rainfall. The first week of November saw just 0.6cm of rain on average, leaving flammable materials dry and more readily available for ignition. By comparison, the first week of November in 2023 experienced 5.5cm of rainfall, alongside high winds and lower temperatures, which further reduced fire risks.
16. This year we recorded:
  - 40 deliberate primary fires which is an increase from the previous year and the highest number in the last 5 years (Table. 1).
  - 210 deliberate secondary fires which is an increase from the previous year and the highest number in the last 5 years (Table. 1).
  - 9 violence at work incidents against operational crews whilst responding to incidents which is an increase from the previous year and the highest number in the last 5 years (Table. 2).

Table. 1 – Number of primary fires and secondary fires during the bonfire period (24<sup>th</sup> October – 7<sup>th</sup> November) for the previous 5 years.

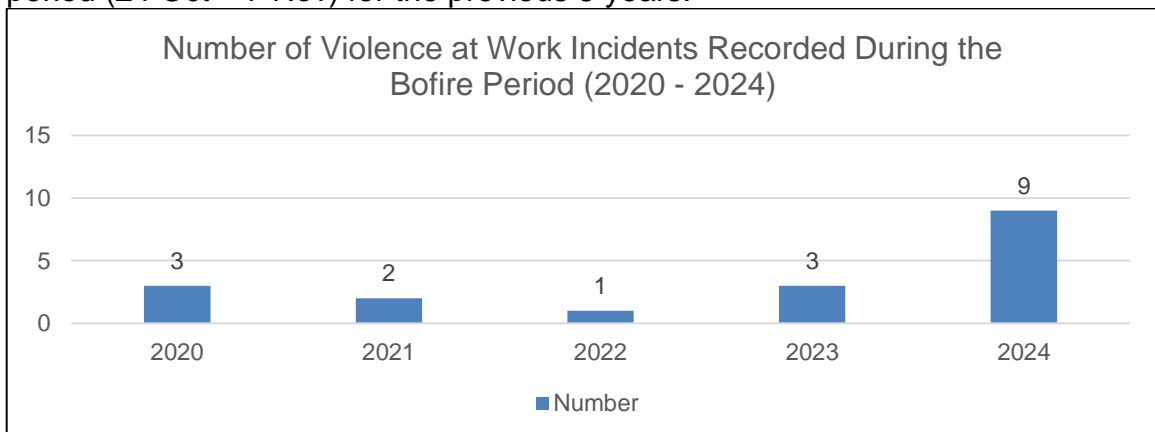


17. Whilst the increase in fire incidents over the bonfire period and on bonfire night, the environmental conditions mentioned earlier would have invariably played a significant role in this. Also, whilst there were several organised bonfire displays in 2024 which proceeded without issues, feedback indicated a lack of formally organised events in the East area of County Durham.

18. Unfortunately, there were 9 instances of violence against CDDFRS staff during the bonfire period in 2024, this is a significant increase from previous years (Table. 2). In all cases, projectiles (primarily fireworks) were thrown at operational crews. Although no injuries to staff were reported, fire service vehicles sustained significant damage, including a smashed windscreen and a smashed side window rendering them temporarily out of service.

19. All incidents were reported to the police for action. Where available body worn camera and CCTV footage was utilised and passed to the Police to assist with investigations. This highlights the reasoning for the services approach to increasing body worn camera usage for staff safety and to assist with potential prosecutions where attacks on emergency workers occur.

Table. 2 – Amount of violence at work in incidents reported during the Bonfire period (24 Oct – 7 Nov) for the previous 5 years.



## **Bonfire Strategy 2024 evaluation and learning**

20. Evaluation is a fundamental component of any learning organisation, as it allows for reflection, assessment, and growth. By regularly analysing outcomes, processes, and feedback, CDDFRS can identify areas for improvement and implement changes to drive effectiveness.
21. To promote continuous improvement, a meeting was held with partners to discuss enhancements for the 2025 strategy. It was agreed that the Bonfire Strategy will be shared with partners at the earliest opportunity, ideally at the beginning of September 2025, to ensure sufficient preparation time.
22. To further support improvement, evaluation forms were completed by crews, and individual watch visits were conducted. These evaluations revealed that school presentations require refinement to better engage audiences and address technical challenges. IT issues, such as difficulties in sharing large PowerPoint presentations and playing videos, were barriers to effective delivery.
23. Feedback from schools, however, was overwhelmingly positive, with school teachers noting that the content was both age-appropriate and engaging. While schools found the material suitable, CDDFRS crews expressed the need to tailor presentations more specifically to different audiences and improve technical reliability to ensure seamless delivery. Addressing these issues will further enhance the educational impact and strengthen partnerships moving forward.
24. Having police 999 operators based in the CDDFRS Control Room to enhance coordination between Durham Constabulary and CDDFRS was described as highly effective and received very positive feedback from all involved.
25. By embracing evaluation and actively addressing this feedback for the Bonfire Strategy 2024, CDDFRS continues to demonstrate its commitment to learning, adapting, and improving for the benefit of its teams, partners, and communities.

## **Summary**

26. This report summarises the 2024 Bonfire Strategy, which aims to prepare for and reduce the number and impact of illegal bonfires, injuries, and fire-related incidents during the bonfire period.
27. To manage the anticipated increased demand, TRV were strategically deployed to tackle secondary fires, ensuring frontline fire appliances remained available for life-risk incidents.
28. Emergency Response crews carried out 151 EVAs to remove flammable materials, 215 Blue Route Patrols to deter nuisance fires, and 24 school sessions to educate young people on firework safety.

29. A proactive social media campaign reinforced safety messaging, with TikTok proving most effective. The Sparkler Safety Video reached 194,000 views and 572 saves, while Facebook and Instagram content also generated significant engagement, raising awareness around fire safety and firefighter protection.
30. Dry weather conditions contributed to an increase in deliberate secondary fires and deliberate primary fires when compared to previous years. While organised events proceeded without issue, feedback highlighted a lack of formal displays in East County Durham.
31. Additionally, 9 incidents of violence were reported against crews, primarily involving fireworks thrown at staff, causing significant vehicle damage but no injuries.
32. Evaluation is a key part of CDDFRS's commitment to continuous improvement. It has been identified that there is a need to share the 2025 Bonfire Strategy earlier, refine school presentations, resolve IT challenges and tailor presentations further.
33. By addressing these areas, CDDFRS aims to enhance educational impact, strengthen partnerships, and demonstrate its dedication to learning and improvement.

## **Recommendations**

Members are requested to:

- **Note** the contents of the report.

**Ben Cairns, Director of Community Risk Management**