

GO TO BLAZES!

Fire Brigades Union's fury over plans to slash number of appliances just as dissidents step up their arson campaign

PROPOSALS to slash the number of fire engines in towns and villages across Northern Ireland are potentially deadly, it has been claimed.

The shock proposals — contained in an integrated risk management plan — represent sweeping cutbacks at a time of a renewed dissident fire-bombing campaign.

Twelve stations could lose their second (or back-up) appliance — a 50pc reduction in capacity — according to the consultative document.

Last night local Fire Brigades Union chief Jim Barbour branded the proposals "sheer folly".

The key areas earmarked for the cutbacks are: Ballycastle; Ballyclare; Ballymoney; Castlederg; Clogher; Holywood; Kilkeel; Lisnakee; Maghera; Newtownhamilton; Portstewart and Rathfriland.

BY JOE OLIVER

public outcry, told Sunday Life: "Some of these areas are remote and some distance from other towns in terms of support.

"If you have two appliances and one is attending an emergency then back-up cover is only a matter of minutes away.

"That's why there has always been two appliances in these stations.

"But now, if they do away with the second appliance, the back-up has to come from the nearest town and that could take up to 20 minutes.

"It's sheer folly and can have only one outcome — the potential loss of life."

The four-year risk management document, which has just gone out to public consultation until January 31 next year, also proposes a review of fire station locations in Belfast.

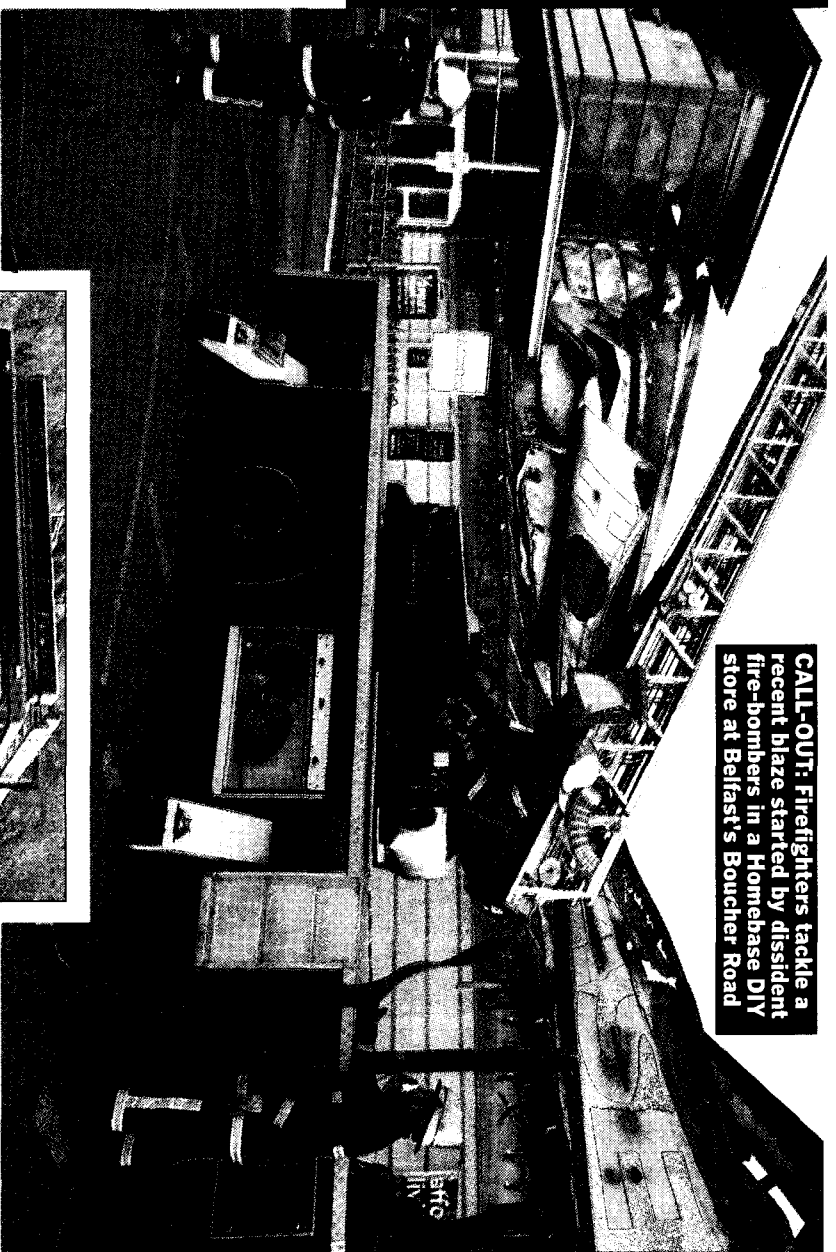
According to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS), a review of activity levels had indicated that second fire appliance usage at some stations was low.

William Gillespie, chairman of the NIFRS Board, has described the proposals as a "far-lor-made" solution for the changing needs of emergency cover.

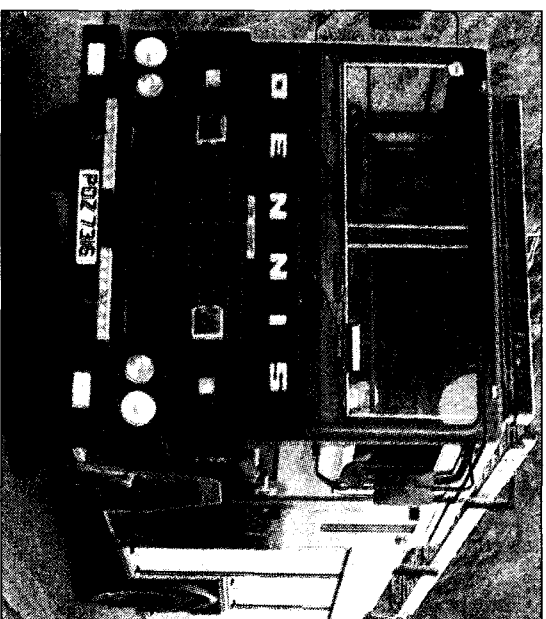
But Mr Barbour warned: "Clearly the Fire Brigades Union will be totally opposed to such a drastic reduction in service capability.

"We have seen recently the continuing threat posed by dissident republicans and the fire service has been stretched to the limit. We must have a fire and rescue service that has sufficient capacity and resilience."

The union is planning to lobby politicians over this "key issue of public safety".



CALL-OUT: Firefighters tackle a recent blaze started by dissident fire-bombers in a Homebase DIY store at Belfast's Boucher Road



Where alarm bells are sounding...

- BALLYCASTLE**
- BALLYCLARE**
- BALLYMONEY**
- CASTLEDERG**
- CLOGHER**
- HOLYWOOD**
- KILKEEL**
- LISNASKEA**
- MAGHERA**
- N'HAMILTON**
- PORTSTEWART**
- RATHFRILAND**

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