

ALL- PARTY PARLIAMENTARY FIRE SAFETY & RESCUE GROUP



APPG Fire Safety & Rescue Meeting with Dept. for Business and Trade Minister Kevin Hollinrake MP Held at Dept. for Business and Trade, Old Admiralty Building, Admiralty Place, London SW1A 2 DY

2:30pm – 3pm

19th September 2023

Attendees:

- Minister Kevin Hollinrake MP, Department for Business and Trade
- Arme Ergonul, Private Secretary to Minister Hollinrake
- René McTaggart, Head of Policy Coordination, Briefing and Correspondence - OPSS
- Nicole Owen, Senior Policy Adviser – OPSS
- Baroness Brinton, Co Vice Chair APPG Fire Safety & Rescue
- Peter Aldous MP, Treasurer APPG Fire Safety & Rescue
- Hattie Shoosmith, Parliamentary Secretary to Bob Blackman MP
- Ronnie King, Adviser/Hon. Sec. APPG Fire Safety & Rescue
- Dominic Ellis, Deputy Fire Commissioner London
- Oliver Stallworthy, Staff Officer to Deputy Commissioner

Topic: Lithium Ion Batteries and E-Bikes

Peter Aldous MP:

- Fires caused by lithium batteries has spiked hugely in recent times.
- APPG pleased with the Ministers co-operation thus far.

Baroness Brinton:

- Some batteries are good and reliable, others not.
- Consumers and retailers need clarification on what EU rules and regulations surrounding lithium batteries have been carried forward.

René McTaggart:

- The General Product Safety Regulations are designed to be a 'catch all' on areas which are not covered by sector specific regulations.

- The regulations recognise the importance that every item on the market needs to be safe for consumers.
- Safety regulations must take into account foreseeable use. E.g. consumers buying a charger from a separate retailer which may pose a threat due to incompatibility. Business must be aware of this risk and take appropriate action and the Dept. is currently looking at how to make this responsibility clearer for business and consumers.
- Dept. keen to widen awareness of this issue and educate consumers further to prevent future risk.

Ronnie King APPG ADVISER/HO.SEC.:

- Electrical Safety needs to be a priority. Some of the battery fires can have the same power as the equivalent of 6 hand grenades.
- APPG is asking for a 3rd Party Safety Certification on these items.
- The fires caused present great danger to firefighters and are almost impossible to extinguish, especially for larger batteries- buses, cars etc.
- Seeking advice on fire matters has previously been difficult as it is encompassed by so many departments- Home Office, Education, Business, Transport, Energy, DLUHC etc.
- A recent meeting was coordinated by the Scottish Office.

Dominic Ellis Deputy Fire Commissioner London:

- Although e-bikes most common, other battery items pose significant dangers. Recently an electric whisk caused a serious fire.
- Lithium battery fires have doubled for battery items, but for e-bikes this has absolutely flown up with significantly more. [showed graphs]
- E-bikes produce 3m, 2000c degree flames. Often at night and in flat stairwells.
- Cambridge example, killing an entire household.
- Most fires are caused by batteries (conversions, separate chargers purchased etc.)
- To put out the fires, generally water is used but requires a lot.
- Flames from these batteries ruin the firefighters' protective fire gear.
- Anticipating the Fire Safety Review.
- Requests that the Dept look into the lifecycle of such batteries further.
- When fires occur, there is often too much fire damage to determine the cause of the fire.
- People often put old/damaged batteries into waste cycles, presenting potential of public danger.
- A bad fire in Merseyside destroyed a re-enforced car park. If this had been caused by an electric battery (for reference one Q7 battery is equivalent of a 1 bed flat) in a multi storey car park, the potential damage and fatalities is extraordinary.

Ronnie King - APPG ADVISER/HO.SEC.:

- APPG is host to much expertise. It is designed to advise and assist the Dept as much as possible.

Minister Hollinrake:

- Dept is keen not to look at this issue politically. Public safety is the priority.
- Need to take an evidence based approach to this.

René McTaggart:

- They are engaging with Warwick university who are undertaking a safety study into the root causes of these fires which is due to report in the new year.
- Understand we cannot wait for results and need to be ensuring maximum safety now.

Baroness Brinton:

- Consumers need advice on how to look after lithium batteries and specifically how to travel with them- pilots often very cautious to take them on flight.

René McTaggart:

- They are working with DfT on travel concerns.
- It should be the responsibility of the retailer to provide safety advice.

Ronnie King - APPG ADVISER/HO.SEC.:

- Fire is fragmented throughout Govt departments. Who holds final responsibility?

Minister Hollinrake:

- Happy to take final responsibility. If something falls under another department, we will be responsible for co-ordinating with them.
- Generally high street retailers are more responsible and accountable than online markets.
- Online sellers often push back, claiming they are a marketplace, not a retailer. The dept is pushing back and clamping down on this. They are committed to business that it is a fair and level playing field, thus need to ensure that online sellers are just as responsible through an upcoming Bill (digital markets bill).

Baroness Brinton:

- Advertising campaigns on batteries would be useful.

Oliver Stallworthy (Staff Officer to Deputy Commissioner):

- They are rolling this out, with a campaign being sent to local brigades last week.

Baroness Brinton:

- Is any advice being issued to uber, just eat etc?

Minister Hollinrake:

- The advice is openly available to them. The Minister was interested in the letter that had been sent to companies such as Uber Eats and wanted to review this so he could consider whether there is any further action he wishes to take.

Deputy Fire Commissioner Dominic Ellis:

- London Fire have also previously written and will share the letter with the dept as a template (*Letter from LFB to Uber attached to the minutes*)

Minister Hollinrake:

- Recommended applying for a debate in the House on this matter.

The meeting closed at 3pm.