



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

Guidance Notes

Fire and Rescue Incident Statistics

2022-23

An Official Statistics
publication for Scotland

31 October 2023

Working together for a safer Scotland

Notes on statistics used in this publication

Introduction

This publication presents fire and rescue incident statistics for Scotland and includes information on fires, non-fire incidents, casualties and false alarms. We publish commentary in the [main bulletin](#) as well as statistical tables in the [downloadable workbook](#).

This statistical series was formerly produced by the Scottish Government and they continue to host historic publications on their [website](#).

Downloadable workbook

We now maintain a single workbook which contains all statistics from this series along with the most up to date charts. Historic workbooks and infographics can be found in our publications web page.

Due to the changes in content over the years, and to facilitate the addition of statistics in future, we have removed historic table numbers and instead introduced unique table reference codes. We now reference tables in the contents page using the topic of the table.

We revise all statistics based on our live administrative data system in order to keep the public record as accurate as possible. The Home Office Fire Statistics publications for England operate a similar policy.

Official Statistics

The statistics in this series are classified as 'Official Statistics'. SFRS were named as Producers of Official Statistics in 2019 and so are now able to assign this designation to our statistical series.

Prior to October 2015, these statistics were produced by the Scottish Government and accredited by the United Kingdom Statistics Authority as National Statistics (signifying full

compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics). Subsequently they have been produced by SFRS in voluntary compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. SFRS are working towards regaining accreditation as National Statistics for this series.

Consultation and engagement

We are committed to providing relevant, useful and timely statistics and appreciate your feedback on what we publish.

Currently we send out notifications to those who may use our statistics through the Scottish Governments [ScotStat](#) service. We are looking at other methods of user engagement, including the use of our website to provide news and notifications for our statistics.

We are committed to improving access to our statistics and aim to provide further means to keep up to date.

Data Source

Each time the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) attends an incident in Scotland, details of that incident are uploaded to the Incident Recording System (IRS) run by the Home Office. The IRS is a continually updated database with incidents added on a daily basis.

Figures based on the live IRS have been used by the Service throughout the year and reported to the SFRS Board on a quarterly basis. It is possible therefore that some of these statistics will match management information which is in the public domain.

The IRS was introduced across Great Britain in April 2009 and extended statistical reporting to cover all incidents attended by Fire and Rescue Services.

This increased the amount of information available about incidents attended and ensured that all incidents have a distinct record. More information on the IRS can be found [here](#).

A number of different software packages are in use across Great Britain to capture this information before sharing it with the Home Office IRS, while these systems can look different they capture the same essential information meeting standardised definitions. There have been two such systems in use in Scotland since the IRS launched in 2009-10.

Prior to 1st April 2009, the 'fire damage report' form - FDR1 (94) was the main source providing information on all fires involving casualties and all fires in buildings, vehicles and outdoor structures. The FDR3 form collected aggregated data on 'secondary' and 'chimney' fires, consequently analysis of these types of fire prior to 2009 is limited.

Comparability

Buildings by Fire Spread

Previous publications have described fires that have spread to a whole building as 'Fire beyond building'. In 2020-21, this category was changed to 'Whole building'. The previous category title was believed to be misleading as it suggested that the fire had spread further than the original building. The category describes when a fire has spread to a whole building but has not spread further than the original building where the fire started. The definitions and ways of recording are the same and so, figures are comparable between years.

Incident Recording System

The change of data collection with the introduction of the IRS in 2009-10 caused discontinuities in some of the longer-term time series. These include: non-fatal casualties and smoke alarms:

Non-Fatal casualties

There is a significant discontinuity in the number of non-fatal casualties between 2008-09 and 2009-10. Non-fatal casualty data from after 2009-10 should not be compared with figures from before the discontinuity in 2009-10. The change in recording of precautionary checks significantly contributed to this discontinuity, under the FDR system officers could select this outright whereas under the IRS system officers must first select a nature of injury before precautionary checks can be selected.

Consequently the change in inclusion criteria impacts the total count causing a notable decrease. Removing precautionary checks does not fully resolve the issue and comparisons without this category should not be drawn from before and after the introduction of IRS. A new category, 'First aid given at scene', impacted recording practice which caused an increase in the total even when excluding precautionary checks.

Smoke alarms

The IRS introduced 'don't know' in addition to the existing 'yes' and 'no' in gathering data on the presence of smoke alarms. This has affected the trend data and as such we recommend that smoke alarm data after 2009-10 is not compared with data prior to 2009-10.

Over Border Incidents

A small number of incidents that SFRS have attended since 2009-10 have occurred across the border in England. Tables in the Tables and Charts Workbook that breakdown to local authority level include a 'Not Known' category for these types of incidents as they cannot be assigned to a Scottish local authority. It is likely that SFRS have not captured every incident that they attend over the border, as the appropriate English fire service will have recorded it when they were deemed to be operationally responsible for an incident. These figures should therefore not be used to conclude overall cross border activity that SFRS attend.

Quality Assurance

Policy

We have implemented a single quality assurance process for IRS records in Scotland which replaces the remaining legacy assurance processes.

Between 2013-14 and 2018-19 quality assurance for the North and West Service Delivery Areas had been undertaken by the Business Intelligence Team in SFRS, while East SDA records were assured by the East Operational Control.

For the years 2009-10 to 2013-14 IRS records were assured by staff in the 8 legacy Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland. All records are now maintained by the Business Intelligence Team in SFRS.

Process

The SFRS Operational Control Systems submit basic data about each new incident to the IRS. This creates a new record with data such as times and which appliances were in attendance already populated. The officer in charge of an incident then enters data to the IRS using software forms with inbuilt validation rules.

After the most severe fire incidents the SFRS fire investigation team compile a fire investigation report that details the findings of the investigation and the most likely origin and cause. Once completed, they review and where necessary update, the IRS record to reflect the findings of the investigation. SFRS Business Intelligence Team also use these reports to crosscheck the IRS records.

All dwelling fire records are manually quality assured for inconsistencies and errors, and control room logs are used to support this work.

Potential errors are identified by running a series of exception checking scripts on the IRS database which look for occurrences of common recording errors, which are then manually checked.

These scripts are adapted and expanded as new recording errors come to light. This is prioritised proportionate to the value of the data. Further random record checks are conducted when there is capacity to do so.

Potential Errors

As quality assurance is an ongoing process and we currently have no automated means to cross check the IRS logs with control room logs, it is difficult to accurately estimate the 'true' error margin, either at the time of publication or following revision, of the subcategories of incidents or casualties. There may be some miscategorisation which has yet to be addressed, or is not possible to address without access to another data source.

We believe that the high level totals for primary fires, secondary fires, chimney fires and false alarms have a very low margin of error (below 1%) as categorisation issues would largely effect subcategories.

The total and category breakdowns of fatal casualties are cross checked against records kept by the fire investigation team and are believed to be as complete and accurate as possible.

Should a revision take place as a result of new information coming to light it could make a relatively large proportional difference due to the number of fatal casualties recorded.

It is possible that a casualty currently recorded as a non-fatal casualty may later die from injuries sustained in the fire and would then be recorded as a fatal casualty; in such a case a revision to the statistics would occur at the next opportunity.

Non-fatal casualty figures for those who received first aid at the scene or attended hospital following the incidents are believed to have a low error margin as when crosschecking has been possible, we have found that it is rare for such a casualty to be missed from the IRS record.

Non-fatal casualty figures for those who were encouraged to have a precautionary check with a doctor are believed to have a larger error margin as there is some underreporting that is difficult to consistently crosscheck.

There may also be variance in the judgement of officers at a scene in whether to recommend a precautionary check. Consequently the total for non-fatal casualties with precautionary checks included is believed to have a larger error margin.

In 2020-21, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing restrictions meant that SFRS crews had to reduce their involvement in cases that required multiple agencies to attend. Social distancing measures meant that crew had less active involvement assisting with casualties at incidents. The IRS recording guidance asks crews to record casualties if they had an active involvement. Consequently, non-fatal casualties are believed to have a larger error margin in 2020-21 and 2021-22 than in previous years as there is some underreporting that is difficult to consistently check. There are variations in recording practices regarding casualties across the country. It has been agreed that mandatory training materials will streamline this process and that data quality will be enhanced in the future.

Definitions

Providing general definitions to the main terms used in the bulletin and workbook, for further guidance please refer to the Incident Recording System – [Questions and Lists document](#).

Fire Categories

Primary fire: A fire which involved a casualty or rescue, or which was attended by five or more fire appliances simultaneously, or which took place at designated locations (non-derelict buildings, vehicles and most outdoor structures).

Secondary fire: A fire which is not a Primary fire or a Chimney fire. They take place either outdoors or in derelict buildings and include grassland fires and refuse fires.

Chimney fire: A fire where the flame was contained within the structure of a chimney and did not result in any casualties or rescues, or require attendance by five or more appliances, or take place in an industrial chimney.

Late fire calls: Fires which were known to be extinguished at the time the fire service became aware of them (by call or other means) and which were subsequently attended.

Property types

Dwellings: Buildings that are a place of residence, typically occupied by households, excluding hotels, hostels and residential institutions. Mobile homes are specifically included in the dwelling count.

In 2000, the definition of a dwelling (for the purpose of reporting fires) was widened to include any non-permanent structure used solely as a dwelling, such as a caravan, houseboat etc.

Other Buildings: All buildings, including those under construction, but excluding those meeting the definition of dwelling, and excluding derelict buildings or those under demolition.

Road Vehicle fires: All fires which take place in cars, vans and other road vehicles including abandoned vehicles but excluding derelict vehicles.

Refuse fires: Secondary fires which take place in a rubbish container (such as a wheelie bin or skip) or where the burning material is loose rubbish (including bonfires).

Motive

Accidental: Fires where the fire was ignited by accident, or where the cause was not known or unspecified.

Deliberate: Fires where the motive was thought or suspected to be deliberate regardless of ownership of the materials and regardless of whether the intent was malicious. Deliberate fires includes fires caused by the crime of wilful fire-raising but is not exclusive to this.

Fire Casualties

Fatal casualty: A person who has died as the direct or indirect result of injuries caused by a fire incident. Even if the fatal casualty dies subsequently, any fatality whose cause is attributed to a fire is included.

Non-fatal casualty: A person who was referred to hospital for injuries, or who received first aid at the scene of an incident, or who was advised to see a doctor for a precautionary check regardless of whether they did so.

Physical injuries: This is an aggregate category under 'nature of injuries' and includes the following IRS injury categories: fractures, cuts and lacerations, back and neck injuries, head injuries, chest and abdominal injuries and other physical injuries.

Other specified: This is an aggregate category under 'nature of injuries' and includes the following IRS injury categories: choking, collapse, chest pain

or heart condition or cardiac arrest, impalement, drowning, hypothermia, heat exhaustion, concussion, bruising, unconscious or fitting or unresponsive (no other evident significant injury), other medical conditions, and other breathing difficulties.

False Alarms

Fire false alarms: An event in which SFRS believe they have been called to a reportable fire and there is no such incident.

Non-fire incident false alarms: An event in which the SFRS believe they have been called to a reportable non-fire incident and there is no such incident

Malicious: The call was made with the intention of causing SFRS to attend a non-existent incident.

Good intent: The call was made in good faith in the belief that there was an incident for SFRS to attend.

Due to apparatus: The call was initiated by a fire alarm or the operation of other alerting equipment such as break glass call points.

Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals: The call is received from an automatic fire alarm or a person in the workplace which has not been caused by a fire, to which SFRS responds. These are avoidable false alarm signals, and are made up of a selection of all false alarm types.

Non-fire incidents

Non-fire incident: Formerly called special services, these cover incidents requiring the attendance of an appliance or officer and where there was no fire. The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 placed a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service to make provision for firefighting and road traffic accidents.

It also included an additional function order that covers non-fire incidents such as rescues from collapsed buildings and serious flooding.

Other

Smoke alarms: This is a catch-all term used in these statistics for smoke alarms and heat detectors.

Ignition source: The source material giving rise to the fire. The subcategories used in the bulletin are aggregate categories defined under Question 8.4 in the above noted IRS – Questions and Lists document.

Time of call: For the purpose of these statistics, this refers to the hour in which SFRS were first alerted to the incident determined by truncation i.e. a call received at 1:53am would be reported as 1am. In practice SFRS log timestamps for all calls to the nearest second.

Rescue: Where a person has received physical assistance to get clear of the area involved in the incident.

Related Statistics

The Home Office publish a range of fire statistics for England:
www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-statistics

The Welsh Government publish fire statistics for Wales:
gov.wales/fire-and-rescue-incident-statistics

We do not present a link for Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service statistics as they do not use the IRS system and do not publish comparable statistics.

Transport Scotland publish statistics on road traffic collisions in Scotland. Since SFRS attend incidents where they are required, the Transport for Scotland statistics provide a more complete picture of road traffic collisions and casualties: www.transport.gov.scot/publications/

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