

Message to CFOs

Contracts signed on the Integrated Clothing Project (ICP)

On 19 May 2008, Firebuy signed contracts with the preferred bidder to the ICP, Bristol Uniforms Ltd, to cover the Purchase Managed Service (PMS) and Fully Managed Service (FMS). These new service contracts, in addition to the Purchase Only Agreement signed last year, will offer Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) the flexibility to choose the procurement option that best suits their requirements and budget.

The letting of these final parts of the contracts means FRAs can now avoid lengthy and expensive procurement and testing regimes. Instead, they can take the opportunity to purchase, at very competitive prices, a full range of clothing designed specifically for the Fire & Rescue Service and selected after a very comprehensive testing process.

Fundamental to the range is, of course, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The PPE available under the ICP is designed to offer protection for firefighters against specified risks, whilst maximizing comfort and fit for both male *and* female operational staff.

The widely acclaimed ICP garment trials found that the structural firefighting PPE supplied by Bristol Uniforms Ltd performed particularly well in the 'Functional Task Performance' tests, which replicated the wide range of movements carried out by firefighters in PPE at operational incidents. The Bristol Uniforms 'Wildland' and 'Technical Rescue' PPE ensembles also performed very well.

Importantly, the PPE ensemble evaluation included the clothing worn beneath. Here, the Bristol Uniforms stationwear also performed well, being very compatible and comfortable to wear under the PPE. These garments are constructed from high-performance moisture control fabrics designed to improve comfort and also limit any contribution to physiological loading.

Clearly, the firefighter's stationwear is seen by the general public and as such should be recognizable to them. The red/grey colour scheme of the Bristol Uniforms option is designed to capture a unique identity for the fire and rescue service, which arguably could not be achieved with other common colours such as blue or black. This colour scheme has been endorsed by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) as the one most likely to achieve a national identity for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Sportswear, undress uniform, corporate wear and non-operational PPE make up the remaining clothing options. After a comprehensive evaluation, including wearer trials and a thorough consultation process focusing on equality and diversity issues, the full catalogue is now available.

Here are a couple of quotes from female FRS employees who have worn the clothing:

"I loved it, it was very comfortable and practical, and it was in women's sizes!!"

"I'm very disappointed to be returning the (waterproof) jacket, as I've been using it as my brigade don't issue jackets to all staff. It's been very comfortable, warm and useful - and waterproof too! A great bonus!"

Full details of the contract options and the clothing catalogue, complete with technical specifications and price list, will shortly be available on the members area of the Firebuy website at www.firebuy.gov.uk

Nomex

You will note that the PPE section of the catalogue features a PBI fabric outer shell.

Although Firebuy had given consideration to offering Nomex as an alternative option to PBI, Firebuy has now concluded that it would not be appropriate for it to do so. The Bristol PBI ensemble was chosen after the detailed and comprehensive testing process referred to above, and therefore is the ensemble which is available under the ICP.

Firebuy anticipates that those FRAs with a historical preference for Nomex will be disappointed by this decision. However, Firebuy will continue to work collaboratively with FRAs to discuss their individual needs and illustrate the substantial benefits of the ICP [product/offering].