



EMERGENCY SERVICES TAKE ALCOHOL HIT - UK EXPERT ENDORSES TRADING HOUR REFORMS

26 February 2016: Alcohol experts say sending late night revellers home earlier is a common sense solution to a problem that is severely impacting United Kingdom (UK) and Australian emergency service workers and threatening community safety.

A recent survey of emergency workers in the UK found that alcohol is placing a significant and unnecessary strain on essential services, with up to half of police, paramedic, emergency department and fire services time spent dealing with alcohol-related incidents.

The report, *Alcohol's impact on emergency services*, produced by the London-based Institute of Alcohol Studies surveyed approximately 5,000 blue light service staff about their experiences with alcohol on the job and how this impacted on their home life.

The study found that police spent 53 per cent of their time dealing with alcohol-related incidents, ambulance staff 37 per cent and emergency department personnel 25 per cent.

The responses revealed a culture of fear and systematic abuse, with three quarters of police respondents and one in two ambulance crews injured in alcohol-related incidents.

Between a third and half of all emergency service personnel reported they had suffered sexual harassment or abuse at the hands of intoxicated members of the public.

Katherine Brown, Director of the Institute of Alcohol Studies, says it's clear that public drunkenness is making the lives and jobs of emergency services personnel much harder.

"It is wholly unacceptable that our frontline emergency workers who go to work each day to protect our communities should be subject to such treatment," Ms Brown said.

Ms Brown argues that it is crucial that alcohol is not allowed to continue diverting public resources and to threaten community safety.

"Every ambulance taken out of commission for two hours for cleaning because a drunk threw up in it is one less ambulance on the road and available to respond to a life threatening incident. The more policing resources committed to policing the early morning hours, the greater the likelihood that resources are two thin on the ground to respond to emergencies at other times of the day," Ms Brown said.

Police Federation of Australia Chief Executive Mark Burgess says that when police resources are diverted to policing a range of licensed venues, it's the greater public that suffer.

“There’s a very real and serious impact on police and emergency workers personally as a result of alcohol-fuelled violence, but there’s also a secondary impact on the community at large as more and more of our resources are diverted away from community policing to address incidents caused by alcohol. It is for that reason that the Police Association of NSW and the Queensland Police Union are so supportive of the successful trading hour reductions introduced in New South Wales and soon to be rolled out in Queensland,” Mr Burgess said.

Ms Brown, who is currently visiting Australia, was impressed by the current legislative environment and says these state governments should be commended for showing leadership and the willingness to tackle an unacceptable level of alcohol harm.

“Sending late-night revellers home earlier is a common sense and modest solution to a problem that is costing our emergency services and ultimately our communities dearly, and the New South Wales and Queensland governments should be congratulated for the introduction of measures that prioritise the safety of both your emergency services personnel and in turn, the community at large,” said Ms Brown.

Katherine Brown is available for interview.

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Alcohol’s impact on emergency services (UK)

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. For more information visit www.fare.org.au

The core aim of the **Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS)** is to serve the public interest on public policy issues linked to alcohol, by advocating for the use of scientific evidence in policy-making to reduce alcohol-related harm. The IAS is a company limited by guarantee, No 05661538 and registered charity, No 1112671. For more information visit www.ias.org.uk