

FIRE CREWS WELCOME MANSLAUGHTER CONVICTIONS

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Our thoughts are with the crews of East Sussex and families of Brian and Geoff, no criminal conviction can outweigh what has happened and the losses that have been suffered.

The Fire Brigades Union which represents the majority of fire crews in East Sussex, has welcomed the manslaughter convictions of the owner of Festival Fireworks and his son. Firefighter Geoff Wicker and video technician and former firefighter Brian Wembridge died in a fireworks explosion at the Marlie Farm site in December 2006.

The Fire Brigades Union said both Martin Winter and his son Nathan Winter had shown total contempt for firefighter and public safety.

But the union warned that lessons had not been properly learned by either Government or the fire service. Government is still encouraging fire services to concentrate on prevention and are reducing resources used for emergencies such as Marlie Farm. This is having a detrimental impact on the way firefighters plan, train and deal with emergencies.

The union said the regulations covering the storage and transport of fireworks were not properly monitored or enforced. It said fire services out side of East Sussex had not learned the lessons of the tragedy in terms of their knowledge of what fireworks are stored on which sites and in what way.

There were also major gaps in the way fire services train crews to deal with the risks of fireworks explosions while tackling fires.

Steve Huggins, FBU Brigade Secretary for East Sussex said: "These two men showed utter contempt for firefighter and public safety. We welcome their conviction.

"This tragedy happened in East Sussex, but it could happen again in this County or elsewhere tomorrow. Lessons have not been learned by either Government or the fire service, despite their claims to the contrary.

"What happened at Marlie Farm and what came out in witness evidence have implications for all fire services. This tragedy could have happened anywhere and may happen again with even worse consequences.

"Nationally the monitoring and enforcement of fireworks regulations is patchy at best and non-existent at worse. There is very little co-ordination between the agencies which are meant to be responsible for the regulations.

“We have major concerns with the use of shipping containers for the storage of fireworks as the CHAF project has shown. Containers are used across the country by people in the firework industry and any supermarket selling fireworks around 5th November.

“There are major concerns at the lack of training and preparation for firefighters. The training gaps identified at the trial are not only in East Sussex but remain across the fire service three years after this tragedy.

“These two men should pay heavily for what they did. But it is important to ensure that all the lessons are properly learned, so no one else is killed in similar circumstances.”