



Paul Lewis is Secretary of the Health and Safety Committee

## Recovery Position

Figures showing the rise in violent assaults on police officers makes for depressing reading. There are of course many reasons why they have increased, not least the move towards 24 hour licensing. Some factors the police service has no control over, but there are other areas where we in the police service need to do all we can to lessen the risks that officers face.

Two years ago, the federation ran a survey on officer safety which revealed a worrying disparity between forces in terms of the level of safety training officers were receiving.

Since then we have worked with ACPO and other stakeholders to improve things. Two years on, we've made progress, but not as much as we would have liked. For want of a better expression, ACPO have been dragging their feet on this one and still don't see this as a priority. They are still not delivering adequately on officer safety training.

We have made some headway in that revised guidance on officer safety has recently been published and we wait to see how many forces implement this.

The falling numbers of police officers could also impact on assault figures as more and more officers find themselves going out alone. The area of risk assessment still has some way to go. Some forces are carrying out risk assessments, but if they are not taking into account the falling numbers of officers, they are really not worth the paper they are writing on.

Body armour is a vital part of an officer's equipment and is often all that stands between an officer and fatal injury. At the end of last year, the Home Office Scientific Development Branch issued new guidelines on standards which we welcome. However, it has come to our attention that forces are keeping body armour beyond its shelf life. We understand that body armour is an expensive part of kit, but this is a worrying development that could put officers at risk. We would urge forces to comply with the new guidelines.

More recently we believe that ACPO are pushing for the

police service to be exempt from section three of the Health and Safety Act following the de Menezes case when the Metropolitan Police Service was found guilty of failing to protect members of the public under section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act.

However, the point of health and safety legislation is to learn from incidents and put measures in place to prevent them happening again, not to remove it because of one case. To make the police service exempt would remove chief officers' duty of care to officers leaving them with no protection in the work place.

The rising number of assaults on police officers makes for difficult reading, but forces are exposing officers to greater risks by allowing them to patrol alone, not ensuring their equipment is up to scratch and continuing to be inconsistent in the level of training given.

That is unforgivable.