

Poles apart

A fire station without a pole is a sorry place. These gleaming shafts of brass may hark back to the days when fire engines were horse-drawn and firefighters lived above the stables, but they have never been supplanted. With pole, time from crew quarters to fire engine is about 1.5 seconds, depending on the drop. Without pole, anything up to 20 seconds down the stairs. For the firefighters at Plymouth's new Greenbank fire station, it's the stairs or nothing. The health and safety police have decreed that the threat of turned ankles and wrenched knees cannot be ignored. So Greenbank is *sans* pole. The Fire Brigade Union, no slouch when it comes to protecting its members' interests (or lives), is peeved, arguing that running down the stairs is more fraught with risk than sliding down a pole.

May we make a suggestion? A Stannah stairlift would do the job nicely and in complete safety. And while we're about it, do firefighters seriously suppose they can continue using ladders? Such wanton recklessness. Properly secured scaffolding with a safety rail should be *de rigueur*. And what about all these high-pressure hosepipes? Quite lethal, in the wrong hands. No. The FBU really must shape up and become more safety-conscious. Doesn't it realise it is playing with fire?