



Chief: Who's Training Your Firefighters and What Are They Learning?

May 15, 2011

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As we continue to see the LODD numbers dropping, it's no secret that training is a main ingredient to minimizing firefighter injury and death. While we won't be able to totally eliminate firefighter death and injury—because there will be times where we must place our personnel in extreme but necessary risk to attempt to save a life—those incidents are not frequent.

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Even though they're not frequent, we must respond to every reported structural fire with the well-trained resources, staffing and command/control leadership to match the reported situation, with the ability to make the rescue—if the conditions indicate the need.

These days, "the new public" aggressively wants to know what they get for their tax dollars—the 2011s taxpayers' mindsets are a lot different than they were 10 years ago. Chiefs also have responsibility to honestly and without fluff make sure "the new public," including city hall officials, fully understands what we generally can do—and what we can't do, based on available funding.

A simple example is that if you had 30 firefighters on your first alarm in the past, all arriving within seven minutes, but due to city hall cuts, you now have 15 firefighters in 10 minutes, it's impossible for you and your members to provide service as expected previously. Simple math. No emotion. Just the way it is.

Progressive and forward-thinking fire chiefs understand that fire service collaboratives, sharing resources, automatic mutual aid, mergers when applicable, tougher building and sprinkler codes and other creative thinking can sometimes help minimize the challenges.

The most basic ingredients of fire service delivery—but the most important—are the ones who get the job done: our firefighters and our company officers. You can have a great chief (your definition), but without great company officers who carry out the mission with discipline and firefighters getting the job done with equal respect and discipline, you're like a great football coach without a winning team.

With it being [Fire/EMS Safety, Health and Survival Week](#), training is a major focus of any fire chief wanting their members to succeed at structural fires. Structural fire survival is the focus for 2011. The IAFC has again partnered with many national fire service organizations, and, of course, the [IAFF](#).

The IAFF (working with representatives from the IAFC, USFA and NIOSH) took the lead in developing a program focused on this year's theme: [Fire Ground Survival](#). The program is available to all firefighters, volunteer or career. This new program is the most comprehensive survival-skills and mayday-prevention program currently available in the fire service.

Incorporating federal regulations, proven incident-management best practices and survival techniques from field veterans, and real case studies from experienced firefighters, the FGS program aims to educate all firefighters to be prepared if the unfortunate happens. IAFF Fire Ground Survival instructors will provide participating fire departments with the skills they need to improve situational awareness and prevent a mayday.

The IAFF began developing the program in December 2007 to ensure that training for mayday prevention and mayday operations are consistent across all firefighters, company officers and chiefs. This comprehensive training program applies lessons learned from firefighter fatality investigations conducted by NIOSH; it was developed by a committee of subject matter experts from the IAFF, the IAFC and NIOSH.

To be clear: fire chiefs must find out who is training their firefighters. In the program, years of researching using subject matter experts provide a diverse range of ideas and input from seasoned veteran fire officers, resulting in a qualified program a chief can be confident in. But what about other training opportunities that are out there and being marketed?

In the last several years, many firefighters and fire officers have offered hands-on training at your location. Make no mistake about it: some of the programs are excellent and among the best you can get. They're taught by veteran fire officers with decades of fireground and command experience who fully understand the big picture when training firefighters.

Unfortunately, there are programs where those who are instructing have yet to ride the front seat of the rig, not to mention command a working incident. Is that important? That's up to you, Chief, to figure out.

Here are a few thoughts and questions you may want to apply when providing direction on who you want training your firefighters—and on what:

- What are the focus, goals and objectives of the training program?
- Are they teaching your firefighters operations based on recognized national standards?
- Do they test and certify the attendees at the conclusion of the training?
- Are they teaching what you want taught and performed on your fireground, or are they teaching what they do at their own fireground? Make sure what they teach matches what your FD does, or what you want done.
- Are they asking you—well before they arrive to do your training—for copies of your SOPs so they can teach based on your operational guidelines? Are they following that up with discussions with you to ensure they're delivering what you expect?
- Are the instructors certified or qualified to teach what they're teaching? Are they instructors at their own FDs?
- Who owns any problems that may occur during the training, be it firefighter injury, death, personnel matters or related issues?
- Are all of the instructors clean and adhering to your department's standard of substance-free operations?
- Ensure your contact confirms that all of the hands-on instructors successfully meet your department's standards related to criminal background checks.

Some of these questions may seem like a stretch—and may be easy to ignore—until something goes wrong. There are some phenomenal programs out there that provide hands-on training that matches the needs of your department.

However, there are also programs that teach firefighters techniques and tactics that may work well where they operate, but would not work well in your community. How do you know which programs to pick? That's up to you, Chief, as you'll be ultimately responsible.

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