



City of Ann Arbor Fire Department

Quarterly Newsletter
January – April 2009

www.a2gov.org/fire

A note from the National Fire Protection Association

The fire service has many unique management needs. It requires: A distinct team spirit; a need for strong disciplinary influence for concerted and instant reaction on the fireground; a high quality of leadership from its officers; continuous training; an extremely wide range of technical competence; a labor/employer relationship not comparable to that in other occupations; and an ability to deal with the public under both minor and major crisis situations. The fire service is not profit oriented, and it has an obscure productivity pattern. It is a major consumer of tax dollars, uses costly equipment, is heavily dependent upon manpower, and at present, has no satisfactory means of measuring effectiveness of its operation relative to cost. Despite the complexity of these needs, the fire service has generally performed well for many years.





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Message from the Chief



How do we survive the decrease in property tax revenue that is the department's only source of income? The fire department is a general fund agency that is subject to the upward trends of the City and, unfortunately, subject to the downward trends of the state and country. Recently, it was published that safety services was required to reduce its budget from one year ago by 10 – 15%. The budget approved for fiscal years (FY) 2010 and 2011 was reduced by \$1.3 million over the two-year period, from the original request. It presents a major problem to make reductions in the general fund when it is made up of 96 percent fixed costs. It is ultimately impossible to achieve the mission of the department without adequate staffing levels.

In FY 2000/2001, the department reportedly incurred \$1.2 million in overtime costs for its 126 full-time employees (FTE). If these costs were broken out into programs, it would show more clearly why those costs were incurred. Those programs supported public fire education, firefighter officer training, technical rescue team training, hazardous materials team training and specialized member training. Since FY 2000/2001, FTEs have fallen from 126 to 94 in the current fiscal year; a reduction of 25% including the closing of a fire station. In that time, the department has continued to protect life and property with unbelievable success. I continue to be impressed with the dedication and professionalism demonstrated by our members. However, I do not believe that we can continue to make staffing cuts and still provide the protection to life and property as we are committed to perform. I can tell you that at the first presentation of a proposed budget that suggests 14 FTEs be cut in FY 2011, the Council committee declared that submission to be unacceptable. I couldn't agree more, however, a \$1.3 million reduction is not an option without considering cutting FTEs. Therefore, we need to come up with some more creative ideas on how to reduce the budget without reducing FTEs.

Many of you are aware of the discussions that have taken place with surrounding communities. In brief, those discussions are regarding an agreement concerning fire protection, shared stations, combination of crews, and budget savings by private organizations for major purchases, and in some cases, merging with other departments. We are working very hard at making this work because we agree that 14 FTE's is not the responsible approach to the economic crisis.

I want you all to know that I am concerned about keeping our staffing levels where they are, and I am doing everything in my power to keep us at 94 FTEs. Some have asked if there are ways they can help, and the answer is yes! You can continue to come to work and perform the way you have over the last few years, as life-saving professionals. Trust that we are working very hard to make the necessary savings to ensure that there are no FTE reductions. We hope to create a new design for a municipal fire department that shares all the resources a community has to offer by reducing duplication of services and eliminating boundaries. These changes will not only save money, but also jobs, and create a better service for the communities we serve. -Fire Chief Sam Hopkins

"FIREFIGHTERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES. WE OWE IT TO THESE MEN AND WOMEN TO PROVIDE THEM WITH BETTER TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT SO THEY CAN DO THEIR JOBS MORE EFFECTIVELY AND SAFELY." -U.S. SENATOR CARL LEVIN



Citizen assistance

Did you know that, on average, the fire department responds to two calls a day that are considered “service” or “good intent” calls? In 2008, the department ran on approximately 708 calls categorized this way. You may wonder what type of incident would be considered a service call or good intent. Good intent calls are those where someone thinks there is an emergency, such as a fire, but it turns out to be a prescribed burn, or they think they see fire but it’s actually steam or smoke from a barbeque. Service calls are typically defined as someone needing assistance. This could be someone that has water leaking in their home and they don’t know what to do, a mother who has locked her keys in the car with a child also inside, someone stuck in an elevator, or even when someone has fallen out of bed or in the bathtub and needs assistance getting back up.

It is important for the citizens of Ann Arbor to know that the fire department does not “charge” for these types of calls. There seems to be a misconception that if it isn’t deemed an emergency in the caller’s eyes, i.e., needs help getting up, then it will not be an emergency for the department either and we would charge the citizen for the service. This is NOT true. The department considers those events to be emergencies, even if they are not life threatening. Many of those calls could become life threatening if the department does not assist, i.e. the child locked in a car on a hot summer day. That situation can become very serious very quickly. The fire department is available to serve the citizens of Ann Arbor 24 hours a day and does not charge for any type of emergency services.

The department does, however, recover costs for some of the special services it provides, such as plan reviews, inspections, and special permits for bonfires, prescription burns, fireworks, etc. The department also recovers costs for repeated false alarms which occur when a fire alarm is signaling a fire, but there is no fire or emergency. The alarm is typically malfunctioning. On average, it costs approximately \$250 for a fire truck to leave its station. There were 694 false alarms or false calls in 2008, so on average, the cost to the department was approximately \$173,500. The owners of the alarms are typically given a warning (i.e., no charge) for the first false alarm, and the amount goes up incrementally thereafter. This not only helps recover costs for the department, but also helps ensure responsibility on the owner’s part to have their fire alarm properly maintained, which promotes fire safety in the event of a real fire. Life safety, property protection and public education are top priorities for the fire prevention bureau.

Bright idea

For the past six years, the department has purchased bunker gear that included a removable knee pad option. This option is available through Morning Pride, which gives fire personnel the ability to change knee pads, if they become worn out or damaged, without having to purchase all new bunker gear which can be very expensive and, thus, provides a significant savings for the department.

After researching new industry trends, Lt. Craig Ferris read about a new use for removable knee pads. By separating the Velcro on the top of the knee, a 20-foot piece of webbing can be stacked flat inside the pocket. A carabiner is then clipped on the side of the pocket which gives the firefighter quick access to life safety egress equipment, extra space for carrying equipment, and extra padding for crawling.

This idea has been starting to gain momentum across the U.S. Fire Service and is an excellent example of how creative firefighters can be by using their gear for multiple purposes!



Photo depicts a carabiner and webbing within the knee pad of the turnout gear



Friday the 13th

The Ann Arbor Fire Department had five, first calls by 2 p.m. on Friday, March 13th. A first call is defined by a response of the battalion chief, Rescue 1, Tower 1 and 2 engines. Having this many first calls in one day is an unusual occurrence.

Call #1: Call came in around 7:50 a.m. with the caller stating her room was on fire. Fire crews arrived to find a small bedroom fire. The fire was extinguished, and three occupants were safely removed from the home. As soon as the firefighters were cleared from the scene, they were sent to another call.

Call #2: Crews were sent to the Maple Medical Clinic located at 501 N. Maple and arrived to find the building already evacuated and smoke throughout the building. Firefighters were able to locate an overheated furnace motor.

Call #3: Dispatch alerted fire units of a house filling with smoke at 2671 Kenilworth. Engine four and engine six arrived to find the home full of smoke. The home was searched, and a toaster was found to be smoking. The house was properly ventilated, and all units were cleared. Upon arrival back to the station, another call came in.

Call #4: Dispatch received many 911 calls for 100 S. 4th Ave. for reported smoke on the seventh floor. All city units were called to the scene to assist with occupant and smoke removal. The fire was found in one of the apartments. Fire was extinguished, the seventh floor was ventilated, and crews were released.

Call #5: After a much needed break, firefighters were sent to the University of Michigan for a reported fire. Crews arrived and were met by security and were told that a power strip and computer had smoked up the cardiac floor. They checked the area and, indeed, found smoke from a burned-up power strip.

Training update

"Live" fire training is the most realistic training opportunity a firefighter can experience. It exposes them to real heat, smoke, and fire behavior in a controlled environment. Firefighters have the opportunity to practice search-and-rescue simulations, ventilation, firefighting, and pump operations when participating in live fire training.

Although this is the best type of training a firefighter can receive, it is difficult to host a live training fire in the city. Close neighbors, road closures, noise, and the standard to conduct live fire training is extremely stringent and typically comes with a cost to the property owner. As required by National Fire Protection Standard 1403, the house must be abated of asbestos, all utilities shall be shut off at the street, permits need to be requested from the city, and there must be a clear title with no insurance on the structure. These are just a few of the items listed in the standard which is 32 pages long! Although many citizens offer their house or property to be used as a training site, they often change their mind once they realize there is a lot of paperwork involved and an associated cost.

Even though the process for live fire trainings can be tedious, the training division encourages citizens to contact the department if they own a vacant dwelling in the city that could possibly be suitable for department training. It's important to note that not all training sessions include fire. To reach the training division, call 734-794-6961, and ask for the training officer or training captain.

Statistics (Jan. 1 – April 30, 2009)

Call Type	Rescue/ Medical	False Alarm	Hazardous Conditions	Fire	Other
Number of calls	1,252	248	85	75	298
% of call total	64%	13%	4%	4%	15%

Total Calls: 1,958



Employee updates

- Firefighter Jim Tiernan and his wife welcomed a baby boy. James Jeffrey Tiernan was born on Jan. 12, weighing 8 lbs. 7 oz.
- Firefighter David Cue and his wife welcomed a baby boy and a baby girl on March 30. Peyton and Gavin are doing great!
- A group of active and retired firefighters have joined together to help a retired firefighter rebuild his barn, which burned down last fall. Ron Feeman retired as a master mechanic for the Ann Arbor Fire Department approximately six years ago. Thirty years worth of tools were ruined in the fire as well as kids toys, hay, and the horse stables. Firefighters are helping Ron rebuild the barn and are currently putting up the siding. They are hoping to move the horses back into the barn soon.
- As reported in the last newsletter, the department hosted a Bikes for Tykes event back in December in conjunction with Two Wheel Tango. Two Wheel Tango put together a video of the event which can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRxBPdxiezM>.

Grocery trip

Over the years, the department has received questions from citizens wondering why they see their local firefighters at the grocery store. It's important for everyone to remember that firefighters work 24 hour shifts, and their fire station is like their home for that period of time; they cook together and eat each meal together as a team. Each morning, one crew from each station does the grocery shopping for that day's meals. Proper nutrition and hydration is an essential part of firefighting, along with an appropriate exercise program.

The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) has a Wellness-Fitness initiative, which, in cooperation with the International Association of Fire Chiefs, has committed to an unprecedented endeavor. Their goal is to build a stronger fire service by strengthening their foundations; the firefighters. Firefighter Tilvis Bolen is responsible for maintaining the fitness equipment for the department. He recently organized the purchase of two new treadmills which are going to replace outdated treadmills at stations 3 and 4. There is fitness equipment at each station.

Who's who in the Ann Arbor Fire Department?

When she was 16 years old, Warreka Farrackand (Reka) witnessed her father having a heart attack at their family home. The fire department was first on the scene. Although her father had already passed away, the firefighters made her feel like everything was going to be alright. From that moment on, she knew she wanted to be "one of those guys."

Reka joined the Ann Arbor Fire Department in 1995. She has held the position of firefighter, driver/operator, and currently holds the position of fire inspector. The fire inspector position interests her because of the problem-solving necessary to make the community as safe as possible. She enjoys the researching the codes and standards. She believes the most important role of an inspector is to provide the safeguards necessary to prevent and reduce the loss of lives and property from fire through education and code enforcement.

If given the opportunity to change the department for the better, Reka would like to see the department work more effectively. She's a member of the Human Relations Committee and hopes to make positive changes in the department as a member of that committee.

She obtained her bachelor of science degree from Eastern Michigan University in public safety administration and is currently working on her master's degree also at EMU. She enjoys reading, gardening, and spending time with family and friends because they are truly what is most important in her life. She has one cat that she's had for 10 years.

