

# Ann Arbor Fire Department

## Quarterly Newsletter

www.a2gov.org/fire

April - June 2008

### Message from the Chief

When the City of Ann Arbor began a program of combined fleet management for all service areas in 2003, numerous fleet vehicles were capitalized and depreciated according to their projected lifespan. Fire administration was asked to project its short and long term fleet needs; however, some critical areas were not considered in the projection. In its efforts to meet fiscal targets, Fire Administration extended the estimated life for usable service of the entire front line fire fleet. Additionally, none of the reserve fleet was included in the replacement schedule, and therefore, no funding was provided for their replacement. Reserve apparatus are often used as much or even more than front-line apparatus because they serve as replacements for those vehicles when they are out for service. Even if no major mechanical issues arise, the front-line apparatus are frequently taken out of service for scheduled maintenance. Therefore, it was a critical error to eliminate the reserve trucks from the replacement schedule.

The ability of our small fleet to handle the steadily rising rate of fire and EMS calls, equates to a higher rate of wear and tear. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) guidelines suggest a general total life span of 15 years per apparatus; this includes five years at reserve status. The NFPA recommended standard is to change the current usable life from 20 years to 15 years.

With Ann Arbor leaders having approved numerous multi-story high density living projects throughout the city, in addition to numerous properties via annexation, the city continues to anticipate, plan, and invest in the future growth of Ann Arbor. This plan will be problematic if the fire department needs are not considered to be part of these plans. Citizens will see their insurance rates rise based on the Insurance Service Office, Inc. (ISO) ratings, which are based on the fire services' ability to manage these large structures in the event of a fire or other emergency.

A 2005 field review by the ISO, recommended a larger front line fleet with accordingly higher staffing levels than the current amount employed by this department. Fiscally, this is not recommended nor a responsible track to take given the current economic outlook of the region and state. A better approach would be to keep the current numbers, but adapt the recommended replacement schedule that keeps the fleet prepared and allows the department to have reserve apparatus mechanically fit to perform as good as, or better than, the front line. Comparable cities to Ann Arbor were reviewed including Lansing, Grand Rapids, Sterling Heights and Madison. It became evident that the sheer numbers of front line fire apparatus in front-line deployment are almost double the size or larger than those operated in the Ann Arbor Fire Department. A fleet double the size of Ann Arbor allows comparable cities to exchange vehicles that are experiencing high usage with district vehicles with low run volumes allowing it to extend the lifecycle of those vehicles.

Fire command staff recommends that council adopt a plan utilizing general fund balance to correct the depreciation imbalance. A committee has been established to determine the type and manufacturer of replacement apparatus (see related article on page 2). Contact Master Mechanic Mike Masten, Assistant Chief Greg Hollingsworth or Assistant Chief Ed Dziubinski if you'd like to provide input to this committee. Your input is important and encouraged.

- Fire Chief Sam Hopkins



### Summer Fire Safety

The forest waves a hand  
From far across the land  
The deer frolic by  
The wind whispers "hi"

With the sun in the morning  
The moon late at night  
With the snow, with the rain,  
Oh what a sight!

**GONE!**

With one flash of a light  
A campfire spark  
The firemen must fight  
A blaze of bark

The poor little oak tree standing alone  
Oh how it wishes it could go home  
With an old rock for companion  
And it's leaves for friends  
It stands all alone  
Until the day ends



- Written by Stephanie McMahan,  
age 13 from Millington, Mich. in  
reference to wild fire prevention.



# Apparatus committee

The apparatus committee has been formed to develop a strategy for the department to meet its long-range apparatus goals. The committee will not only recommend specific truck specifications for a new ladder truck, it will also put together an action plan for what the ideal future fleet would look like.

When purchasing an apparatus, whether it's an engine, ladder truck or rescue vehicle, that apparatus shapes the future staffing models as well as determining the type of fire attack that occurs on a fire scene. The life of a vehicle is 15 years so the committee is tasked to look at the growth of the city and what changes will be occurring during that timeframe. The committee needs to consider a purchase into it's overall long-range planning of all apparatus to ensure that services can continue in the most effective and efficient manner for all types of calls.

The committee must think about how to attack fires in light of the many new high rise structures that are being built creating a higher density format in the City of Ann Arbor downtown area. Not only do they need to think about the equipment that will be necessary to attack fire today, but also tomorrow and throughout the lifetime of the purchase. Although this is a tough task, volunteers have stepped up to join the committee which is being led by Master Mechanic Mike Masten and Assistant Chief Greg Hollingsworth, in the hopes of establishing a plan that will meet the needs of the department, the city and most importantly, the citizens of Ann Arbor.

# Team training

On June 6, the Ann Arbor Hazardous Materials Team (HAZMAT) traveled to Dexter to participate in a joint exercise with the Washtenaw County Hazmat Team, the 51<sup>st</sup> Civil Support Team (CST), and Huron Valley Ambulance (HVA). The exercise was based on a clandestine lab. A clandestine laboratory is simply defined as a place where preparation of illegal substances takes place. These 'labs' are used to manufacture drugs, explosives and even biological or chemical weapons. Most often, the labs are used to manufacture methamphetamine, a potent illegal stimulant drug. The exercise was part of a week-long training that the 51<sup>st</sup> CST goes through annually as a recertification.

The 51<sup>st</sup> CVT is located in Battle Creek. They are a HAZMAT team attached to the National Guard. The Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) civil support teams are able to deploy rapidly, assist local first-responders in determining the nature of an attack, provide medical and technical advice, and pave the way for the identification and arrival of state and federal military response assets.

The training scenario included a security guard patrolling at the recently closed Pfizer campus where he came upon a lab that was not there two weeks prior. The guard called the police department who called for the Hazmat Team to investigate. Upon arrival, the HAZMAT Team elected to activate the county HAZMAT team and HVA. After making entry and identifying more expertise was necessary, a call was made for the 51<sup>st</sup> CST to respond.

The 51<sup>st</sup> CST, using the initial entry findings from Ann Arbor Hazmat Team, mapped out a plan for samples to be made to reduce the exposure time in the clandestine lab. Then, with the assistance of Ann Arbor HAZMAT, the 51<sup>st</sup> CST made entry to document and take samples to identify the process that was taking place in the lab.



A mockup of what could be found in a clandestine lab to produce a biological type of warfare agent

This was the first of many joint trainings that will take place with Ann Arbor HAZMAT, Washtenaw County HAZMAT, the 51<sup>st</sup> CVT and HVA.

## Statistics (April 1 – June 24, 2008)

Call Type	Rescue/ Medical	False Alarm	Hazardous Conditions	Fire	Other
Number of calls	852	168	61	81	188
% of call total	63%	12%	5%	6%	14%

**Total Calls: 1,350**



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### Firefighter accountability

Not knowing where a crew is located when you're told a floor or roof truss is about to collapse, is one of the most frightening moments of a fire commander's career. Over the years, there have been many methods used to account for firefighters at large fire scenes, from magnets on a metal box, Velcro tags, engraved metal and plastic tags, to laminated and bar coded plastic tags. The common theme with all these systems is that a person is required at the scene to pay very close attention to all the radio traffic and track personnel movements. There is always the possibility of overcrowded radio traffic resulting in missed communication. This can result in the possibility of not knowing where a crew is during a collapse - are they inside or outside, and if inside, what was their last known location.

Two years ago, a startup tech company, OnSite ERT, headquartered in Ann Arbor, approached the training division and command staff regarding their product. Their approach to firefighter accountability was to utilize off-the-shelf technology to lighten the workload of the fire ground commander. OnSite ERT, utilizes a hybrid radio frequency identification tag (RFID) attached to the firefighters coat. The system also includes wireless readers/locaters and a program that runs on the battalion chiefs' in-vehicle computer. When activated, each reader/locater creates a zone or cloud and will assign the fire fighter to the closest reader/locater. The commander just needs to know the placement of the readers, notes it on the readers identification label in the program, and the system will do the rest. The RFID tags only respond when polled or questioned by the reader/locater which, in turn, reports to the program running on the battalion chief's computer.

The department plans to undergo training this summer, and once fully trained, the program will be operational and the current tag system will be used as a back up. As soon as the battalion chiefs and safety officers become comfortable with the Onsite ERT program, other departments in Washtenaw County will be informed of the system to be used in conjunction with mutual aid calls and with the possibility of submitting this as a county-wide fire service UASI (Urban Area Security Initiative) project upon the area fire chief's approval.

### Training

Training Chief Steve Lowe has returned to suppression as shift 1 captain. He filled the role of training chief for six months. He enjoyed his time in the temporary role and has shared his vision for the training department with the rest of administration. He hopes that the position he left vacant will be filled with someone that shares his vision and can help move it forward.

The current fire department training classroom is approximately 500 square feet and holds only about half of a shift at a time. It was originally a furnace/storage room that has been converted into a classroom for training, and an EMS office, though not an ideal arrangement and much of the equipment is outdated. Lowe would like to acquire a site centrally located within the city that is at least 1200 square feet with more modernized equipment. Ideally, if police/fire dispatch is taken over by HVA, the current dispatch center could become a training classroom; as it is the perfect size, location, and has modern equipment.

Lowe would also like to see the division acquire a site for hands-on/practical training, something similar to City Yards on South Industrial, away from residential areas. A department/city owned property would be ideal because of the availability to have access anytime of the day, any day of the week. The department is required by law to have specific hands-on training on an annual basis. Having a site available to conduct this type of training at any time throughout the year would be very beneficial to help the division build an annual training calendar. Some examples of the hands-on training courses that would be held at the site are: hose evolutions, ground ladder, pump hydraulics, vehicle extrication, special teams training including confined space, trench, HAZMAT, and EMS training courses.

The City of Ypsilanti Fire Department currently has a confined space training unit that needs a storage/training location. Since the Ann Arbor Fire Department is in the process of building a functional consolidation relationship with surrounding fire departments, acquiring training sites would also be beneficial for cross-departmental training as well.

### Employee updates

Driver/Operator Matthew Hughes and his wife Carolyn welcomed Julia Denise Hughes on May 31.



## Positive Feedback

- Firefighter Dave Dangler, Driver/Operator Michael Roberts, and Firefighter Jeremy Torres had a patient go into cardiac arrest on the way to the hospital. The ambulance pulled over until they were able to regain a pulse. The patient is recovering nicely and is expected to have a full recovery. The family of the patient could not say enough nice things about the crew. GREAT JOB!!!
- Lieutenant Robert Ruppel and Firefighter Stephen Potbury were fishing off-duty when they heard someone yelling for help. They quickly drove their boat to the man who was yelling and found him holding another man up from the water, unable to lift him into the boat on his own, Ruppel and Potbury assisted and called 911 on their cell phone. They drove the boat to shore, and an ambulance met them there. The man in the water had been fishing alone and had accidentally fallen into the water and could not get back out; the water was only 46 degrees!

## Who's who in the Ann Arbor Fire Department?

Matthew Francis was a police officer in Chelsea, Mich. for seven years before joining the Ann Arbor Fire Department in December 2005, less than one week after Chief Hopkins joined the department. Though he was most recently a police officer, Matt already had firefighting experience. In fact, Matt joined the Explorer Scout Post at the Chelsea Fire Department when he was 13 years old. He has remained a part of the fire service industry ever since.

Matt graduated from Chelsea High School and went on to study criminal justice and then elementary education at Michigan State University. He transferred to the University of Michigan to finish up his degree while at the same time completing his state-required firefighter training in Chelsea. Matt has been an on-call fireman since 1993.

Upon completion of his degree at the University of Michigan, Matt attended police academy at Schoolcraft College and went on to substitute teach in Chelsea and Dexter schools before getting hired as security guard and firefighter with Daimler Chrysler. He later became an endurance driver for Chelsea Proving Grounds and completed his reserve officer training, working as a part-time dispatcher for Chelsea police before joining as a full-time police officer in 1999. Matt continued to be a volunteer firefighter through all of his jobs and education in both Dexter and Stockbridge.

As you can tell, Matt has always been extremely interested in working for the public. He idolized his father who was an Ann Arbor police officer and was also very interested in firefighting. When a full-time job was offered to him in Ann Arbor, he was thrilled and he left behind his police officer days to become a full time firefighter. Matt knew as soon as he joined the department that he had made the right decision.

For anyone that does not know Matt, he is very tall, 6'6" to be exact. He has a pet turtle that he's had since he was 10 years old, and he enjoys riding his wave runner and going fishing. Matt aspires to continue his career in Ann Arbor.

