

# **Opposition to Consolidation of Fire and Police Departments**

## ***A Position Statement of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)***

Current economic conditions have led to pressure for municipal governments to reduce costs. Among the national trends being promoted by some public administration and management consultants is the consolidation of critical public-safety functions.

The IAFF opposes the consolidation of fire and emergency services departments with local law enforcement agencies, including the transition to public safety officers who are cross-trained to perform both fire/emergency medical services and law-enforcement functions.

The IAFF opposes consolidation of fire and police departments for the following reasons.

- ❖ The basic mission of fire/EMS and police departments is vastly different. Despite a shared goal of public safety, the mission, objectives, tactics and threats remain separate and distinct at both an operational and public-expectation level.
- ❖ Activities of police vs. firefighters/paramedics require different protective equipment and vastly different training.
- ❖ The consolidation concept breaks up the 'company unit' which is the basic functional unit of a fire department. The Company unit conducts time-critical first-intervention in all hazards. In comparison, police officers often respond as individuals or in teams of no more than two in a single vehicle. These small numbers are unacceptable for fire ground first response.
- ❖ Consolidation exchanges the team concept for individual action. Individual action on a fire or EMS scene is not tolerated and too often met with fatal consequences. Individual action in the fire service arena leads to inefficiency and chaos.
- ❖ On scene operations become confused. For example, a PSO on the scene of an alcohol induced motor vehicle crash with multiple injuries will have to decide whether to control traffic and begin a potential criminal investigation or whether extricate a patient and provide medical care.
- ❖ Attempts to consolidate fire and police have traditionally been associated with attempts to cut costs of public service in a community. In reality, the volume of police responses, as well as fire/EMS responses are high. Any jurisdiction with anticipated population growth or land expansion would

find that the volume of responses alone will require additional resources regardless of the umbrella under which they are deployed. Therefore, the greater issue is 'service quality'. To date, reports from communities using the PSO concept of public service deployment reveal poor morale, low efficiency and lack of quality.

- ❖ In stead of moving toward consolidation without appropriate insight form making such a decision, local decision makers should consider the fire department accreditation process. The accreditation process was developed by the IAFC and the International City Managers Association (ICMA) in the early 1990's and continues to be the premier process for assessing fire department resources and performance. The accreditation process includes a community risk assessment which is essential prior to any emergency response system resource change. The overall goal of the accreditation process is to develop a long term quality improvement plan for fire departments including cost considerations.

### **Conclusion:**

Fire, EMS and law-enforcement staffing models are diverse and complex and cannot be based on attempts to establish a cheaper method of service delivery without regard to overall system impacts. The IAFF is opposed to consolidation, which offers a false short-term hope and real long-term problems. Quality of service should never be sacrificed and preventable loss of life should not be dismissed to balance a bottom line. Economic changes in the local economy are just one of many challenges faced by the fire and emergency service. It is the position of the Association that any consolidation of Fire and Police organizations would further harm resource deprived communities.

Alternatively, management and labor should work collaboratively to seek real solutions to building strong and efficient departments, based on data-driven models, which can leverage the highs and weather the lows of these natural and ever-present economic challenges. Community leaders are encouraged to require their local fire departments to engage in the accreditation process offered through the Center for Public Safety Excellence. More information on accreditation may be viewed at <http://publicsafetyexcellence.org/>.