



Analysis of Suggestions for Improvement as part of the FY 2010 County's Line of Business & Schools Program Review Processes Fall 2008

Request By: Public

- Suggestion:**
1. Restore the volunteer firefighter and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) departments to viable, "first-due" entities.
 2. Cut the average \$54,000/day Fire and Rescue Department overtime to save over \$19 million per year by improving volunteer recruiting.
 3. Make training more possible for volunteers (i.e. separate out Firefighter I and II training).
 4. Have more than one volunteer Firefighter Academy session per year.
 5. Do not require every operational volunteer to play the role of both Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT).

Response

Provided By: Fire and Rescue Department

Background: Volunteer Fire and Rescue Departments in Fairfax County serve the citizens by providing operational and financial support to the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department and by providing direct service to the other organizations that support the needs of the community. The volunteer companies raise funds as tax-exempt organizations to procure fire apparatus, ambulances, and other essential equipment and serve a vital role in the combined career/volunteer system.

There are 12 active volunteer departments in Fairfax County with nearly 250 trained operational volunteers to provide supplemental staffing for fire and rescue services as follows:

- Back fill for units out of service
- Provide coverage for scheduled public events
- Augment front-line units during inclement weather or other peak activity periods
- Provide enhancements to other front-line units based on expected call volume

Recommendation:

Each suggestion is addressed separately below:

1. Based on current policies and regulations, the volunteer departments are equal partners in the combined Fire and Rescue Department. Whether a unit is "first-due" or not is based on the type of call, the qualifications or level of training of the crew

and the actual location of the unit. These factors are taken into account when the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system dispatches the appropriate apparatus in the optimal sequence.

2. The Fire and Rescue Department continually explores opportunities to streamline operations in order to reduce overtime without compromising resident or firefighter safety; this includes maximizing volunteer utilization. In fact, operational overtime decreased 4 percent from \$15.6 million in FY 2007 to \$14.9 million in FY 2008. The challenge with volunteer utilization is the limitations on availability during the weekdays because many operational volunteers have daytime jobs and are unable to commit to 24-hour shifts. On weekends and when available, the department takes full advantage of volunteer availability and uses them to up-staff units, place additional units in service, fill in while career members are attending training or provide staffing to maintain a front-line unit in service.
3. The separation of the Fire Fighter (FF) I and FF II training is not recommended. While the separation of FF I and FF II will cut down on the length of a single class, the total amount of training required will not change and the separation of the classes actually increases the cost. When asked, most volunteer recruits commented that they would rather get the training completed all at once. In addition, the department has found that after a lengthy break, a large percentage of the students do not return for the FF II portion of the class, but take the Fairfax County training and volunteer in another county with fewer qualification requirements. Finally, as a combination system, the volunteer fire fighters who staff the engines need to have the same qualifications as their career counterparts, who graduate from recruit school with FFII and EMT certification. Any change to these requirements would be in direct conflict with the FRD mission statement that clearly states the department will “provide the highest quality services to protect the lives, property, and environment of our community”.
4. The administering of one volunteer Fire Fighter school per year is purely a function of demand; to run a fiscally responsible and safe fire fighter school requires a minimum of eighteen applicants (over 18 years old, EMT certified and meets physical requirements/CPAT). At this time, the department only has enough qualified volunteer applicants to fill one class per year.
5. Current department and County standards require the following to ride a suppression unit: EMT, FF I, FF II, Haz Mat First Responder - Operations and Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVOC). However, volunteers have the option of being EMS-only to staff a Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance. To staff an ambulance, department and County standards require the following at a minimum: EMT-B, Haz Mat First Responder – Awareness and EVOC.

Based on the information provided, there would be no significant savings to the County if any of the above suggestions were implemented.

Furthermore, the department sees no other viable alternatives at this time for the use of volunteers. As stated above, operational volunteers are used when possible to offset overtime. However, the alternative of having volunteers offset overtime on a continual basis is not feasible.

Historically, the department was founded and staffed by volunteers, but with an increase in call volume and competing career obligations, volunteers were no longer able to provide the level of emergency response needed. The County eventually staffed all stations with career personnel with volunteers acting in a supplemental role. At this time, the department is fully leveraging volunteer personnel resources. Volunteer members are utilized whenever possible to meet safe staffing levels per NFPA 1710, to provide surge capacity during peak activity periods by placing ready reserve units in service, and to use volunteer units to provide special event coverage.

These suggestions relate to two of the department's proposed reductions, including the elimination of the \$10,000 contribution to volunteer fire stations (Reduction Priority #12) and the elimination of the Management Analyst II in the Volunteer Liaison Office (Reduction Priority #19). While these suggestions are encouraging increased participation by the volunteers in the Fire and Rescue Department, the reduction of the \$10,000 volunteer contribution and the elimination of the position will affect the volunteer's ability to support the Fire and Rescue Department and will diminish coordination and communication, possibly leading to reduced participation.