

Summer 1

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY
FIRE PROTECTION PUBLICATIONS
HEADQUARTERS FOR
IFSTA
INTERNATIONAL FIRE SERVICE TRAINING ASSOCIATION
A NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY
ORGANIZED TO DEVELOP TRAINING MATERIALS FOR THE FIRE SERVICE

Speak of fire

A Systematic Approach to Functional Fire Service Consolidation and Merger

By Floyd L. Pittard

An objective look at the fire service delivery system in many areas of the United States shows that duplicative waste exists — sometimes to an extreme. It is not hard to find situations where as many as 10, 20, or even 30 individual fire departments exist and compete for tax dollars in an area that serves less than 100 square miles. Situations exist where two or three fire service systems that are immediately adjacent to one another have complete and sometimes duplicated resources.

There are many reasons for the existence of what appears to be such a wasteful system. Citizens saw the need for protection, and many fire departments were established because of necessity and without any plans for future development. Small communities were separated by distances that precluded the establishment of an overall protection system. Once established, these mostly volunteer fire departments developed a strong sense of pride, competitiveness, and a "don't tread on me" attitude.

As the urban, suburban, and rural areas grow, fire departments responded to the needs of their constituents. Fire departments hired career personnel, perhaps a paid chief or a chief and a very small contingent of driver/engineers, which was augmented by an active group of volunteers. As growth continued, many of the departments became fully staffed with paid personnel or developed larger career-oriented systems that were augmented by volunteers. Mutual-aid and automatic-aid agreements assisted these departments in their efforts to respond to

ever-increasing numbers of emergencies. This reduced the need for some resources but did not address much of the duplication found within the total system.

History And Demographics

Several years ago it became apparent that three fire departments (in two fire districts) in the Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area were duplicating apparatus, manpower, and equipment. These departments were also working closely together through automatic-aid agreements at emergency scenes. Duplications were especially apparent at the mid-manager and support levels. EMS officers, finance officers, and other department positions were found in triplicate. Each department had good delivery systems and public relations, and each individual department also had a strong identity and sense of autonomy with strong political and administrative leadership.

A driving force for an alternative fire service delivery system was the property tax rate set by the three departments in the Portland metropolitan area. The tax rate for one agency was over \$3.00 on each thousand dollars of property worth, and the other agencies had a tax rate of approximately \$2.65 per thousand. This rate was seen by the cities as exorbitant. A quote from one city manager was, "You charge too much, and we want that money. If you can't do it cheaper, we will."

The service area of the proposed consolidated department was 175 square miles with a population of 240,000 and included eight cities, only one of which had its own fire department. (The

service area of the proposed consolidated department was part rural and was adjacent to the Portland metropolitan area in the southern part of the district.) It was necessary to keep the cities informed of the study and the city councils' and mayors' participation in the process.

The leadership for a merger needs to come from the top down. Fire districts in Oregon have five board members that are elected at large. City fire departments are governed by elected councils and mayors. The taxpayer provides the financial support, and this support is strengthened by the establishment and delivery of a more cost-efficient service.

Tentative overtures were made by staff and board members to arrange discussion regarding the possibility of functional consolidation. The results of the first meetings between the two fire districts were disheartening — to say the least. The initial meeting ended in the two respective board presidents arguing over what color the engines would be and who would be in charge.

Eventually, as a result of more meetings, the board members, city council, and mayor directed the staff to develop a plan for functional consolidation. This type of consolidation would leave each department whole; yet it would allow for use of equipment, facilities, and manpower interchangeably throughout all three departments.

Once the politicians decided to look into the matter, it was time for the three fire chiefs to prove that they were amenable to the project and to get things moving. The chiefs agreed that even though one of them might not favor a certain matter, the outcome would be based upon the considered opinion of what would be in the best interest of the public served. Each time the chiefs came to a point of dispute or indecision, they would ask what was best for the public and make their decision based on the answer.

The board of directors and city council were kept informed of progress. Reports were made to each other on a regular basis. It was also important to keep all employees informed of what was being done and why. Memos, personal appearances on closed-circuit TV by the three chiefs, and articles in newsletters were provided throughout the process on a scheduled basis. Without this, the rumor mills work overtime!

Radio, television, and newspapers were kept informed of the progress on an almost daily basis. The media became quite interested when it was explained that the fire service was embarking upon a plan that would ultimately reduce costs, improve service, and reduce duplications. There was a good story to tell — it was good press if the plan was accomplished and good press if it failed.

The real nuts and bolts of the plan began with the chiefs' establishment of the Task Force. The Task Force would

develop master plans for each division and subdivision within the proposed consolidated agency. Nineteen such areas of study were identified, and plans were required to be submitted by certain dates. Task Force reports were presented to the chiefs, reviewed, returned for modification as necessary, and presented to governing bodies.

About this time, the inconvenience and delay in communications between boards, city council, and administration became excessive. Headquarters for two of the districts were located 22 miles apart with access over two of the busiest highways in Oregon. To overcome this barrier, an Intergovernmental Council was established. It consisted of two representatives from the governing bodies of each department. A representative from each of the cities was solicited and sat on the Intergovernmental Council (IGC) in an advisory capacity. This committee's responsibility was to facilitate the flow of information and direction between staff, the boards, and the city councils. A meeting of the IGC meant that at least two elected officials from each of the three agencies were up to speed on developments, and they could pass on the information to their colleagues at regularly scheduled meetings. The other seven cities were also kept abreast of developments through their representation to the IGC. The members of the IGC met and discussed the progress of the study. These members would evaluate the progress, report to the boards and city councils, and make recommendations. They had no decision-making authority for their respective agencies.

The unique part of the organization was that it was being administered by not one — but three fire chiefs! The joint chiefs had manifold responsibilities. Not only did they have to keep their own departments functioning but they also had to integrate their department into the new organization and be responsible to the governing bodies of all three agencies. They also had to keep budget, personnel, and other functions separate as required by state law and bargaining unit contracts. Quite a juggling act!

As the Intergovernmental Agreements were developed, adopted, and implemented, they were closely monitored to ensure that the desired results were achieved. As the consolidation unfolded, the efficiency and cost-savings predicted by the Task Force reports were confirmed. By November 1988, the joint chiefs were able to advise the boards that the system did work as projected, and the time was right to consider full merger. In January 1989, the districts jumped through all the legal hoops, changed the department names, got new stationery, and became a fully merged district. A new logo was developed for the department, and Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue replaced individual department names.

Plans are to reduce redundant positions over the next five years (approximately 25 positions) at a savings of 1.2 million dollars per year. State law does not allow for a reduction in force in the merger, but through attrition a reduction in force will occur through retirements and job changes. Two of the

SF-Consolidation-Regional

For Reference

Not to be taken from this room

MARY M SPILA NETC LIBRARY
FEDERAL EMER MANGT AGEN
NATIONAL EMER TRNG CNTR
EMMITSBURG MD 21727-
W - 00033749

FEMA - 11/95

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 191
SILWATER, OKLAHOMA

IF YOU RECEIVE THIS PUBLICATION WITH DIFFERENCES IN ADDRESS OR NAME, PLEASE CONTACT THE PUBLISHER AT THE ADDRESS LISTED BELOW, INDICATING WHICH ONE IS CORRECT. THANK YOU!

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
Fire Protection Publications
SILWATER, OK 74078-0118

continued from page 1

original three chiefs have retired; the remaining chief is in charge now.

The work force has been fully integrated. One-third of all paid personnel were transferred throughout the new organization. Also, two volunteer systems and two explorer posts have been fully integrated.

Department resources include the following:

- 342 paid personnel
- 110 volunteers
- 25 explorers
- 17 stations
- 25 engines
- 5 trucks
- 8 rescues
- 3 brush rigs
- 3 tankers
- 1 haz mat squad
- 1 heavy rescue

The merger has eliminated the need for two aerial apparatus and allowed the department to construct an eighteenth station and to staff it without hiring additional personnel. At any time, 80 firefighters (including volunteers) and their apparatus can be assigned to the scene of a major incident. The tax rate for the district is lower than when separate, and that rate will remain constant for the next five years. The joint resources provide a level of service that has been recognized as one of the best in existence.

The Process

Merger or consolidation will proceed only if the need has been made apparent, and need begins with the governing bodies' willingness to direct its staff to begin the documentation necessary. District board and city councils of two or more entities considering functional consolidation, consolidation, or merger need to be aware of and agree that the end result may well affect them personally, even to the extent that as many as half of them might find their positions eliminated! The political bodies need to perform the following:

- Agree to a study and support it wholeheartedly in dollars and effort.
- Establish target dates for beginning and ending the study.
- Agree that an unbiased study could show the need for merger or consolidation, or the opposite.
- Agree that future actions should be taken based upon the results of the study — not on the desires of a particular department.
- Address the fire chiefs' needs.

When the governing bodies agree to a study, their next step should be to direct the staffs of the departments involved to identify the areas of duplication, which may include the following:

- Redundant positions
- Purchasing
- Supply stocks
- Training facilities
- Communications facilities
- Operational overlap
- Number of stations and locations
- Number and types of apparatus

Depending on the size and sophistication of the departments involved, this list may be expanded considerably.

The elected officials and chiefs should give the staff firm direction. It is important that the staff members understand that it is their responsibility to enter into the process with open minds and a commitment to accomplish the mission. Staff will be able to develop a list of pros and cons based upon their experience and knowledge of the departments involved.

The Fire Chiefs' Role


The fire chiefs have the means to make or break the process. Without their full cooperation, the program is scheduled for failure before the start. Their cooperation cannot be given grudgingly or halfheartedly. The commitment must be a genuine 100 percent. The vision for the future needs to be clear, and a chief's moral obligation to the fire service and the people served must come first.

In this instance, three fire chiefs were operating a merged and functionally consolidated organization. Why was this successful? The fire chiefs agreed in the very beginning that they would set their own egos and self-interests aside in favor of acting in the best interest of the people they served. If the chiefs involved will publicly agree to this philosophy, such a program will be successful.

Hard to do? Not at all. The most crusty, hard-nosed fire chief in the world would not have attained his position had he or she not believed what all the fire service believes — that we are here to protect the public. This philosophy can also be of immeasurable value to the rest of the employees in a department.

About the author:

Floyd L. Pittard is retired from the Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue Department where he served as Assistant Chief. Chief Pittard's involvement in the fire service covers a period of 28 years during which he has been noted as a leader in the field of public fire prevention education. He currently works as a consultant in fire department mergers and consolidations.



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

We are looking for articles to publish in *Speaking of Fire*. We welcome articles on training, new or procedures implemented in your departments, or stories of interest to the fire service. We are also interested in training tips the department uses. *Fire Protection Publications* pay a gratuity for articles and training tips to be printed in *Speaking of Fire*. However, we do not use articles that have been published in other publications. We will notify you if your training tip has been selected.

Articles should include a short biography of the author and the author's address, telephone number. We also request that the articles not be referenced document articles if computer generated, we ask that you send a copy in its native format and in a generic format (ASCII). Also include a double-spaced printed copy of the article.

Send articles to:

Cynthia Brodhage
Editor, *Speaking of Fire*
Fire Protection Publications, Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078-0118



Notes From IFSTA'S Executive Board Chairman Dennis Compton

The National Fire Service Incident Management System (NFSIMS) Consortium met in Houston, Texas, on February 26 and 27, 1993. The meeting was generously hosted by Ed Hawthorne of Shell Oil. The agenda for the meeting focused on the following three areas:

- Finalizing the document that merges the Fireground Command (FGC) System and Incident Command Systems (ICS) into a single Incident Management System (IMS)
- Finishing the development of the constitution and bylaws and any other administrative guidelines governing the Consortium
- Determining the focus of the Consortium for the next several years

The session began on the morning of February 26 with an open forum attended by the Houston Fire Department and other fire departments in the metropolitan area. The activities of the Consortium were discussed, and the IMS was explained. In addition, the meeting included a briefing on the 1993 IMS seminar to be held in Phoenix, Arizona, September 13 through 16, 1993.

There was also a presentation that described the Fire Department Analysis Program (FIREMAP), which is being developed in the Phoenix Fire Department. FIREMAP uses the techniques of task analysis, job analysis, and video to identify "benchmark" service delivery elements and evolutions. FIREMAP will help to determine and evaluate staffing and other resource requirements and their impact on service delivery. There are many other potential applications for FIREMAP. The methodology should provide a tangible process through which fire departments could better measure the effectiveness of their resources in delivering fire and emergency medical services.

At the completion of the meeting, FGC and ICS had been successfully merged into a single baseline Incident Management System (IMS). This was a tremendous accomplishment that many had said could not be done because of the politics involved. Members of the Consortium, through several years of hard work, proved that good sense and a focus on what is in the best interest of the fire service can conquer political and territorial obstacles. These members have something of which to be proud.

distribution system for document. Efforts also include information to build an app would provide more specific some of the following areas:

- EMS
- Haz mat
- High rise
- Urban search and rescue
- Wildland/urban interface
- Staging
- Personnel accountability
- Responder rehab

The last part of business included election of officers. The following were elected to three 3-year terms:

- President
Gary Morris
Phoenix Fire Department
- Vice President
Alice Forbes
*U.S. Forest Service
Region 5, North Zone*
- Secretary
Mike Wieder
IFSTA
- Treasurer
Ed Hawthorne
Shell Oil and Chemical Co.

It has been a pleasure to be NFSIMS Consortium since it and to observe the progress it made to date. The members, talented, dedicated group that through demonstrated effort can (over time) do what many as highly improbable, if not it is going to be fun to process continue.

There will be information soon telling how to obtain a Consortium's work. I would that you attend the IMS Phoenix in September. You my office at (602) 495-584 registration materials. See you

About the author:

Dennis Compton has been the Phoenix Fire Department He currently serves as Assistant

Speaking of Fire, Summer 1993

IFSTA Notes From the Fire Department Instructor's Conference (FDIC):

✓

Winners from the IFSTA drawing were:

Mark Freer
St. Mary's, Ohio

John R. Unger
Frankfort, Kentucky

Bryan Stiles
Owensboro, Kentucky

Each winner received a set of 10 IFSTA manuals.

✓

The IFSTA Executive Board chose not to award the Hudiburg Award this year.