

Fire Department Accreditation

Dear Reader:

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We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Fire Department Accreditation

Reference Number:
MTAS-294

Fire department leaders across the nation are recognizing the importance of leading their departments through Fire Department Accreditation. Across the United States, there are 259 (Year 2018) accredited fire departments; this represents an increase of 42 departments since August 2015. There are a total of five Tennessee municipal fire departments included in this prestigious number: Alcoa, Brentwood, Bristol, Kingsport, and Maryville. This is also an increase of one department since August 2015.

Accreditation is a way to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of a fire department by determining community risks and fire safety needs, accurately evaluating the organization's performance against a consensus standard of excellence, and providing a method for continuous improvement. Measuring professionalism and service delivery of fire and emergency services is a new concept for most cities.

Every day, fire chiefs, city managers and local elected officials make critical decisions about fire protection and emergency medical services for their communities. Now more than ever, there is constant pressure to do more with the same resources and in some cases less resources. Most city managers are hard-pressed to justify increasing expenditures unless they can be attributed directly to improved or expanded service delivery. There are a number of methods and a variety of techniques to measure fire service performance. Everyone agrees that the process should allow citizens, elected and appointed officials, and fire service personnel to see the success.

Commission on Fire Accreditation International

Reference Number:
MTAS-356

The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) provides an assessment tool to determine when a fire department has achieved an appropriate level of professional performance and efficiency. The CFAI has been providing this service since 1988 when it was created by the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the International City/County Managers Association (ICMA). In 1996, the CFAI became a trust organization in cooperation with the IAFC and ICMA, and in 2001, the CFAI incorporated to create a unique standalone organization. The cooperation among all three organizations remains excellent. Members of the IAFC and ICMA serve on the board of directors of the Center for Public Safety Excellence, Inc., the CFAI and the Commission on Professional Credentialing Excellence (CPCE). The CFAI is the result of a decade of hard work by many fire service leaders and local government officials. The success of this program depends upon the support of the two founding organizations as well as a strong board of directors.

The center's board of directors is composed of the following representatives:

- Two IAFC representatives
- Two ICMA representatives
- One IAFF representative
- Four-at-large representatives from fire service and stakeholders

The commission is composed of the following representatives:

- Agency head representing a fire department serving a population of greater than 250,000;
- Agency head representing a fire department serving a population of 100,000 to 249,999;
- Agency head representing a fire department serving a population of 25,000 to 99,999;
- Agency head representing a fire department serving a population of up to 24,999;
- International Fire Service representative;
- Consensus standards representative;
- City manager representative;
- Labor representative;
- Insurance industry representative;
- Federal fire service representative;
- Industry representative.

These board members provide a broad spectrum of representation that allows for continuous improvement and increased professionalism within the CFAI itself. The most recent change for the CFAI came in March 2006 with the unveiling of a new corporate name and logo. The new name, Center for Public Safety Excellence, Inc., was intended to better describe

what the organization does in relation to fire department accreditation and fire chief credentialing as well as new programs in virtual reality training. As for the fire department accreditation section of the corporation, the name remained Commission on Fire Accreditation International.

The mission of the CFAI is to “assist the fire and emergency service agencies throughout the world in achieving excellence through self-assessment and accreditation in order to provide continuous quality improvement and the enhancement of service delivery to their communities.” [1] The accreditation program provides an in-depth process of self-assessment for fire departments, granting accreditation to organizations that successfully complete the assessment process and an on-site evaluation by their peers.

[1] Commission on Fire Accreditation International, “An Improvement Model Through Self-Assessment” 2006

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Accreditation Benefits

Reference Number:
 MTAS-357

Benefits of Fire Department Accreditation

So why would a fire department want to conduct an evaluation of its fire service program? According to the CFAI, there are so major reasons to earn accreditation:

- Raise the profile of your agency with your community
- Emphasize your agency’s dedication to excellence to your stakeholders
- Establish an agency-wide culture of continuous improvement
- Assist with communicating your leadership’s philosophies
- Build positive relationships with your labor groups
- Offer independent verification and validation of your agency’s operations
- Provide tangible data and information for your elected officials

These are all proactive reasons with a purpose to improve, but the primary goal of a self-assessment process is to answer three basic questions:

- Is the organization effective?
- Are the goals, objectives, and mission of the organization being achieved?
- What are the reasons for the success of the organization?

CFAI further describes the benefits of an accreditation program as: The promotion of excellence within the fire and emergency services:

- Assure colleagues and the public that they have definite missions and objectives that are appropriate for the jurisdictions they serve
- Provide a detailed evaluation of the services they provide to the community
- Identify areas of strength and weakness within the department
- Create methods or systems for addressing deficiencies while building organizational success
- Encourage professional growth for both the department and its personnel
- Provide a forum for the communication of organizational priorities
- Foster national recognition by colleagues and the public
- Create a mechanism for developing strategic and program action plans
- Fostering pride in the organization from department members, community leaders and citizens

These benefits range from abstract concepts to practical, day-to-day improvements. However, improvement will not occur unless the organization applies the findings from the self-assessment to local planning and implementation activities. The willingness to allow for improvement and accept change is another challenge the department must accept.

Self-assessment focuses on whether the organization is meeting goals that are commensurate with its responsibility. In today's world of government where the focus is on reinventing, re-engineering, rethinking and quality management, a department must continue to ask itself if there is value added by the actions it is taking within the organization. This process assists the fire service by asking questions to determine if the fire department is effective in meeting the needs of its community.

Accreditation Model

Reference Number:
MTAS-358

A task force consisting of a group of highly qualified and dedicated professionals developed the accreditation model. These chief fire officers, trainers, city and county administrators, and academic professionals worked together to develop the self-assessment model, the basis for accreditation. The model provides a proven methodology to continually evaluate and improve services. The process helps organizations stay in touch with the communities they serve and meet the needs of their citizens.

Included in the accreditation model are the following 10 categories that fire departments use to evaluate their performance:

1. Governance and Administration
2. Assessment and Planning
3. Goals and Objectives
4. Financial Resources
5. Programs
 - Community Risk Reduction
 - Public Education
 - Fire Investigations
 - Domestic Preparedness
 - Fire Suppression
 - EMS
 - Technical Rescue
 - HazMat
 - Aviation Rescue and Firefighting
 - Marine and Shipboard Rescue and Firefighting
 - Wildland Firefighting
6. Physical Resources
7. Human Resources
8. Training and Competency
9. Essential Resources
10. External Systems Relationship

Within each category are criteria that measure or index a service or practice so that a judgment can be made. Within each criterion are performance indicators that define the desired level of ability to demonstrate a particular task as specified in the accreditation model. A total of 244 performance indicators are evaluated in preparation for the accreditation with 77 of these being core competencies that cannot be failed.

The Accreditation model includes a comprehensive research and information collection guide with checklists, exhibits, benchmarks, references, and activities broken down by category. Several appendices address additional topics including defining the elements of response time, creating standards of response coverage, and developing master or strategic plans.

Accreditation Process

Reference Number:
MTAS-359

The accreditation process includes four major levels: Becoming a Registered Agency, Becoming an Applicant Agency, Becoming an Accreditation Candidate, and Becoming an Accredited Department. These levels allow a department to move through the CFAI process and achieve accreditation. The CFAI encourages departments to join the CFAI network as registered agencies even if they do not intend to pursue accreditation in the short term.

The process begins by applying for "Registered Agency" status and paying an application fee of \$570.00. Registered

agency status is valid for up to three years and includes manuals, information and access to the CFAI accreditation program. During this stage, the fire department must also assign an accreditation manager who is the fire department's point of contact and who must attend the complete CFAI workshop series for the department to progress to the next step.

Once the accreditation manager and others are trained and oriented to the process, the department may proceed to "Applicant Agency" status. This requires an applicant agency fee that is based on the population served by the department. If the department transitions to applicant agency within one-year of becoming a registered agency, the \$570.00 applicant agency fee will be applied to the registered agency fee. This one-time fee, unless there is a lapse in status, fee ranging from \$4,900 to \$13,600 based on entity's population. Applicant agency status is valid for up to 18 months for career departments and up to 24 months for fire departments that are 90 percent or more volunteer.

The entire self-assessment process can take from one to three years of dedicated work. After a long self-assessment and planning process, the department will enter "Candidate Agency" status, and the commission will send a peer assessment team of three to five assessment team members from outside the state to conduct an on-site assessment. This on-site assessment includes a review of water supply systems, fire safety inspections, firefighter training records, dispatching procedures, financial planning, apparatus maintenance and many other operational topics. There are no fees associated with this part of the process although the requesting fire department is responsible for the travel expenses of the peer assessment team. The budget associated with this travel is approximately \$6,000 for the team to travel to your department as well as approximately \$1,500 for the team leader to travel to the commission's accreditation hearing. The department should also budget dollars so that the fire chief, accreditation manager, and other members of the accreditation team can attend the accreditation hearing.

After almost a week of peer review, the peer assessment team will compile a report to CFAI either recommending accreditation or recommending that additional work be conducted before accreditation. If accredited, the fire department will be presented with the certification by the commission at a semi-annual CFAI meeting and will join the elite group of accredited fire departments.

Fire department accreditation is valid for five years. Within 45 days of the anniversary date of accreditation, the department must submit an annual compliance report with its yearly maintenance fee (1/5th the current application fee). On the fifth anniversary of the award of accreditation, the department submits the application for re-accreditation. The department will begin the process beginning at the submit a revised copy of the self-assessment to the CFAI and go through another on-site peer assessment process. The agency is then brought to the commission for reaffirmation of accreditation.

This might seem like a lot of work and a significant financial obligation; although, after completing the accreditation process, securing a comprehensive self-assessment management document, and making improvements within the department, most will agree the time and money are well spent, and the fire department is more efficient and effective in its operations.

Accreditation and ISO Rating

Reference Number:
MTAS-360

Inevitably, the question will arise about whether accreditation will help lower the community's ISO rating. Data collected by Dennis Gage of ISO seems to indicate that it will. CFAI provides the following information:

The Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO) is the agency that collects data and analyzes the capability of community fire suppression services. This evaluation is based on criteria such as fire alarms (how well the department receives alarms and dispatches its resources), the number of engine companies (their distribution, etc.), and water supply (whether the community has a sufficient water supply, etc.). Essentially, ISO is classifying a community's ability to fight fire.

The CFAI, on the other hand, provides a comprehensive system of fire and emergency service evaluation that can help local governments determine their risks and fire safety needs, evaluate the performance of the organizations involved, and provide a method for continuous improvement.

This presents a correlation between the ISO community assessment and the CFAI self-assessment. According to CPSE, in 2020 there were 280 accredited agencies although ISO has established a classification on only 92 of these agencies. The remaining are military installations or are found in a state where there is an independent rating bureau. Of the 211 accredited agencies with an ISO classification, the following is a breakdown by classification:

Classification	Number in Class	Percent of Total
1	98	35.4%
2	86	31.0%
3	21	7.6%
4	4	1.4%

5	1	0.4%
Department of Defense	66	23.8%
Total	277	100%

Note that if you want to improve your ISO classification to a class five or better, accreditation is a good opportunity to do so. Conversations with ISO representatives indicate that it is possible that future versions of the ISO Fire Suppression Rating Schedule will provide some level of credit for accreditation.

Accreditation in Tennessee

Reference Number:
MTAS-361

As previously stated, the Alcoa, Brentwood, Bristol, Kingsport, and Maryville Fire Departments are currently accredited. In addition to these municipal agencies, Naval Support Activity Mid-South (a DoD fire department) in Millington is an accredited agency. Germantown is a registered agency. Johnson City and Murfreesboro are both candidate agencies. These fire departments have established the path for other fire departments to follow.

In May 2006, the Maryville Fire Department hosted the first CFAI training for fire accreditation class conducted in Tennessee. In the past, anyone from Tennessee who wanted to take the courses had to travel outside the state. Each of the three courses are one day each and were offered for three consecutive days. Martel Thompson, a retired fire chief from Henderson, Nev., led the Maryville course. Students in the class came from as far away as Alaska, Illinois, Ohio and Georgia.

The first course is a one-day session about the self-assessment process and serves as an introduction to the accreditation program and its benefits. The focus is on determining how good your fire department is, how you measure it for credibility, and how you prove it. This class and process focus on measuring success rather than failure. One example is about how a fire service measured itself by determining the amount of fire loss in a given community. A better measurement in this case would be the amount of property saved rather than the amount lost.

Day two of the series is on the standards of coverage and covers the primary functions of eight strategic planning components: deployment, risk identification, service levels, distribution, concentration, reliability, performance, and overall evaluation. The assessment process requires the fire department to develop a standard of coverage document that analyzes response factors and to set a standard for the local community. This process alone provides a tremendous amount of valuable information to be used in the future growth of the city and fire department.

Day three of the series includes training on becoming a peer assessor. Peer assessors are a key element of accreditation and are the foundation for improvement. Anyone with experience can become a peer assessor after training. Peer assessors are not paid and actually perform an incredible amount of work during the peer assessment process. Peer assessors are not allowed to review fire departments within their own state, but they do assess fire departments of similar size and makeup to their own.

The Maryville classes had 35 attendees with most of them representing Tennessee fire departments. This was a great opportunity, and we hope to see future courses sponsored in Tennessee.

In summary, successful completion of the evaluation process will enhance training, quality of service, and information available to fire and emergency service agencies and personnel.

Self-assessment has many benefits. It allows agencies to accurately evaluate their departments and identify strengths and weaknesses. It provides them with a method to address deficiencies and encourages quality improvement through continuous self-assessment. There are many examples in which agencies were able to justify the need for additional equipment, work force, or services using the self-assessment process. Ultimately, self-assessment ensures that agencies are meeting the needs of their communities.

Many city managers have already heard about this process through ICMA, and with additional information and courses being held in Tennessee, it is expected that there will be more Tennessee fire departments achieving registered agency status. The cost of the registration and courses may seem expensive, but the return on the investment will be incredible.

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