4-24-2012

Let Me Tell You a Story: How an Annual Report Will Benefit Your Fire Department

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TECHNICAL
bulletin

April 24, 2012
LET ME TELL YOU A STORY –
HOW AN ANNUAL REPORT WILL BENEFIT YOUR FIRE DEPARTMENT
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As the chief or member of your fire department, you know what you do day in and day out, but who else knows that?

A fire department is a valuable community asset providing emergency and essential services to residents, businesses and visitors. Regardless of the size of the community, many people will never need the emergency services the fire department provides. This is especially true in a large city, where the percent of people using the emergency services is very small. As an example, consider a city with a population of about 40,000 people where the fire department provides fire, EMS, rescue and technical rescue emergency services. The fire department made about 3,000 calls in 2011. Some of those calls were to non-residents, and some were to the same resident on multiple occasions, but for this example, assume that all calls were to residents and all responses were unique. In this scenario, the fire department touched 7.5 percent of the population. Those 7.5 percent are aware of what you do, but what does the other 92.5 percent of the population know, and how do you tell them what you do? You tell them with your annual report.

Technically, an annual report is a comprehensive report on the fire department's activities from the preceding year. The annual report provides information to elected officials, residents, businesses and other interested people about the fire department's activities and accomplishments. The annual report is a way to market your department and to share the department's capabilities without being boastful.

A fire department annual report can be as simple or as detailed as the department's leadership desires. Small departments may decide to include a list of responses and significant accomplishments, while larger departments may include many more details about the fire department and its performance from the previous year. Items that may be part of a fire department annual report include:

- Introductory letter from the fire chief
- Mission statement
- Goals and objectives
- Performance measures
- Organizational chart
- Community demographics
- ISO Rating and what the rating means to the community
- Budget
    o Current fiscal year breakdown
    o Previous fiscal year actual
    o Grants applied for and grants received
    o Cost-per-call or other cost-per-unit measure
    o Revenue sources and percent of revenue from each source

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- List of accomplishments
- Incident responses from the preceding year
  - Summary of all responses
  - Fires by type, fires by fixed property use, etc.
  - Incidents by time of day, day of week, district, etc.
  - Dollar loss by type of fire, day of week, property type, etc.
  - Value of all property at risk and amount of property saved
  - False alarm analysis
  - Historical trends
  - Rolling five-year analysis of all types of responses
  - Number of personnel responding by type of fire, hours worked, etc.
  - Response time – average and by percentile
  - Response time breakdown by component (ring time, call processing time, turnout time, travel time)
  - List of high dollar loss fires with a synopsis of the incident
  - Other data reports as determined by local needs
- Fire prevention and public education activities
  - List of public education programs
  - Code enforcement activities
  - Pre-fire planning activities, number of pre-plans, hours invested
  - Fire inspections by inspectors and company personnel
  - Number of fire code violations found and corrected
  - Average number of days to achieve compliance
  - Fire department attendance at public events
  - Fire department fire protection and EMS standbys at special events
  - Citizen's fire academy program activities
  - CPR, CERT and other community preparedness programs
- Fire investigation activities
  - Number of incendiary and suspicious fires
  - Number of arson cases prosecuted
  - Fires by cause
  - Fires by location of origin
  - Number of fires where the cause was determined
- Training activities
  - Number of training hours for the department and for each firefighter
  - Number of drills
  - Subjects covered and hours of training by subject
  - New recruit training program
  - Certifications achieved
  - Technical courses completed
- Personnel roster (do not include personal contact information)
  - Rank
  - Position
  - Level of firefighter certification
  - Level of EMS certification
  - Years of service
  - Awards and recognitions
  - Promotions
  - Retirements
- Apparatus roster
  - List by type and age
  - List new acquisitions
  - List annual cost for fuel, maintenance, and repairs
  - Cost per mile or hour to operate

- Facilities (fire stations) roster
  o Address of each station
  o Description of primary response (first-due) area – a map is best
  o List of apparatus assigned to each station
  o List of maintenance and repairs
  o Annual cost to operate the station(s)
- History of the fire department

Use tables, charts and graphs to present numbers and data so it is easy to understand. Compare statistics with different years, for example the number of structure fires, to show trends, especially if the trend shows improvement and is the result of an effort by the fire department to reduce the incidence of fire or for some other improvement.

The department should organize the report in a format that best presents and promotes the department's contributions to the community. One example of a format is to organize the report by major headings.

- **Fire Suppression** – response to all types of fires
- **Emergency Medical Services** – responses providing basic and advanced life support to the ill and injured
- **Special Operations and Rescue Techniques (SORT)** – unique and extraordinary rescue operations, such as confined space rescue, swift water rescue and high angle rescue
- **Hazardous Materials Response (Hazmat)** – control and mitigation of spills of dangerous and hazardous materials, including home or business pesticide spills and spills arising from transportation accidents

- **Public Fire Safety Education** – tours, talks, press releases and other activities to promote public awareness of fire safety, including visits to schools, Fire Prevention Week activities, smoke detector programs and fire department displays and promotions at public events
- **Fire Inspections** – commercial fire code compliance inspections, pre-fire planning inspections and activities, sprinkler system installation inspections, plan reviews, fire hydrant flow tests and residential inspections
- **Fire Investigations** – cause and origin investigations of every fire, participation in a county or combined jurisdiction arson task force
- **Other Services** – fire hydrant maintenance, assistance to other city departments, community services (blood pressure checks, health fairs, CPR training, CERT classes, etc.), mutual aid and automatic aid to other fire departments, work with community groups, service on local committees and civic organizations
- **Fire Department Infrastructure** – maintenance and repairs on tools and equipment, technical services such as annual fit testing, refilling of compressed air cylinders and maintain the fire department's inventory

Use pictures throughout the report to highlight fire department personnel at work on fire or emergency scenes and involved in community activities. Be careful when using photos of fire scenes and especially EMS calls to protect the privacy of patients and victims. Screen the photos carefully as the department should not use photos that show improper fire ground procedures, techniques or safety violations.

GETTING STARTED

You have decided to create your first annual report, so how do you begin. First, review the data that you have available and then decide what you want in the annual report. Some departments may use database programs such as Firehouse, Emergency Reporting, or New World, and those programs can produce "camera ready" graphs and charts for inclusion in the report. Smaller departments may not have such a computer database program, but if they report to TFIRS, they can use a free web resource called the Summary Output Reports Tool to produce graphs for inclusion in the report (see the resources section for more information).

Next, decide on the layout. MTAS has examples of several Tennessee fire department annual reports on Knowledgebase (see the resources section for more information), or search the Internet for fire department annual report to find examples. The report's design should include ample use of white space (i.e., do not crowd a page with too much information) and be organized in a logical manner. Include a cover page with the fire department logo or a photo showing the fire department in action. For larger reports, include page numbers and a table of contents. Have several people in the department proof the report, and then send the report to someone outside of the fire department. Ask that person to review the report from an outsider's perspective and make changes accordingly. As a final review, have someone with a good command of grammar and punctuation review the report for spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.

Produce enough hard copies of the report to distribute within the fire department and to elected officials and community leaders. Place a copy in the local library. For the widest distribution, produce an Adobe pdf format copy, and place that on your fire department or city website for download.

SUMMARY

A fire department annual report is an excellent tool for a fire department to use to tell its story to the community and to build community support for its efforts and needs. The report should inform and educate the community about the role the fire department plays in community safety. Department members will take pride in the annual report, knowing that they contributed to the accomplishments of the department and that they helped make a difference in the community.

RESOURCES

Sample fire department annual reports are available via Knowledgebase on the MTAS website at http://www.mtas.tennessee.edu. Click the Access Knowledgebase link on the left side of the page and enter *Fire Department Annual Report* in the search box.

Information on performance measures is available via Knowledgebase on the MTAS website at http://www.mtas.tennessee.edu. Click the Access Knowledgebase link on the left side of the page and enter *Tennessee Municipal Benchmarking Project* in the search box.

Departments reporting to TFIRS can use the free web-based tools available from the United States Fire Administration. Go to http://nfirs.fema.gov/ and click on the link titled *Web-based tools*, then click

the link titled *Summary Output Reports Tool* to access
your department's data. Registration is required to
access the data. For information on this resource,
and to get a registration and login, contact Dennis
Mulder, TFIRS coordinator, at (615) 532-5753,
Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. CST,
or Dennis.Mulder@tn.gov.

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MTAS1681 • E14-1050-000-046-12