

November 2, 2000

Dear Chief Atkins:

Thank you for your question regarding the organizational structure of a fire department. If I understand your question, you want to know, "What is the best organizational structure for a fire department in a city our size and what is the most efficient use of management staffing."

Your question could not come at a better time since I have just researched this question for a recent class that I taught. First, and foremost, let me say that there should always be one person held accountable for the success or failure of the fire department and that person should be the Fire Chief. Accountability in city government is extremely important. If the duties of the Fire Chief are spread to more than one person, the finger pointing and "blame game" will begin. This type of management structure should be avoided at all costs. The City of Paris does not want to roll back the calendar to 50 years ago.

The Fire Chief needs to work a traditional 40 hour business work week and be available to attend other functions related to the success of the fire department. These functions would be things like City Council meetings, planning and zoning meetings and seminars and meetings related to the fire department that are held during business hours. The Fire Chief should be a resident of your city and be in town most of the time. If you plan to hire a person from outside the community, you should have two major restrictions on them. (1) They must live in Paris and (2) They should **not** be allowed to have other employment except the job of Fire Chief. A Fire Chief with work and financial ties to another employer will not make the kind of leader in the fire department that you need. Even if you allowed a limited amount of outside employment, you must make sure that there are no apparent or actual conflicts of interest or ethical violations that would expose the Fire Chief and the City of Paris to lawsuits.

Even in the smallest communities, the Fire Chief works a 40 hour work week, sometimes, even when he is the only employee of the fire department. Those cities that have, for one reason or another, allowed their Fire Chief to work shift work have seen failure and have regretted their action. No city in Tennessee or the USA to my knowledge, of your size allows the Fire Chief to work shift work. This would be absurd. The whole idea of having a fire chief is to be the manager of the fire department.

The Fire Chief needs to work regular business days for several reasons:

1. The Fire Chief needs to work so that he overlaps all shifts to insure uniformity in the manner in which the fire department operates.
2. The Fire Chiefs needs to be available during all regular city business hours to handle the business and administrative functions of the fire department.
3. If the Fire Chief works on only one shift, he becomes to familiar with the firefighters on that shift and can be unfair by favoring or overly criticizing these firefighters in both promotions and discipline. As you know, promotions and discipline are critical and contain legal liabilities.
4. The Fire Chief needs to be present when representatives of agencies such as the State Fire Marshals Office, TEMA, or other state officials visit the fire department during business hours.
5. The Fire Chiefs needs to be present to talk to sales representatives of various vendors who call on the fire department during regular business hours.
6. The Fire Chief needs to work with the training officer of the fire department to insure that all shifts have access to, and complete necessary and mandatory training.

I hope this answers your question, and I'm sorry that it took two weeks to reply.

Sincerely Yours,

Ray Crouch, Sr.
Fire Management Consultant

Copy: City Manager – Carl Holder, Jr.
Commission Members