




Development and Implementation of a Management Reform Plan for the District of Columbia

FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Task 1 Problem Identification

 *TriData Corporation*

and

Arthur Andersen LLP

October 7, 1997



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Management Reform Plan
for the
District of Columbia**

**FIRE AND EMERGENCY
MEDICAL SERVICES
DEPARTMENT**

**Task 1
Problem Identification**

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Though we were given much assistance, the evaluation here is the responsibility of the authors.

TriData and Arthur Andersen used extensive teams of consultants to address the many services of the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. Key members of the teams were as follows:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TriData Corporation and its subcontractor, Arthur Andersen, have undertaken a rapid but comprehensive review of the D.C. Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (DCFEMS). This report describes the findings of Task 1 – identifying the problems requiring management reforms. We have identified a rather long list of areas requiring management reform. Task 2 – identifying the reforms needed, and Task 3 – developing an implementation plan, will be undertaken in October and November 1997.

Because of the limited time, we have tried to be selective and focus most on issues we consider of greater importance rather than the myriad problems one can find in a large, complex organization. This Executive Summary lists the highest priority problems. A few areas require further analysis before one can say whether they require reform – those that could not be reviewed in the three weeks available for the initial review.

Methodology

Study team personnel met with the head of every major functional area of the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. We also met with employee organizations and with many of the rank and file members of the department. Team members rode with or observed operations of some units. We requested and reviewed much data. There was, of course, no time in this period to develop or run any computer models of the department's deployment or do any in-depth analysis. But we believe most of the major problem areas were identified.

Overview

The D.C. Fire and Emergency Services Department has the awesome responsibility of protecting not only the citizens of the District of Columbia, but also the government of the United States and millions of visitors. Although this type of study, by its very nature, tends to focus on negatives, the many fine achievements of the men and

women of the Fire and Emergency Services Department and the progress being made under its current leadership should not be overlooked. Much progress started prior to this study.

Overall, the DCFEMS delivers a range of emergency services similar to comparable cities and entirely appropriate for its community. Service levels for firefighting services appear to be nominally in line with national practice, while emergency medical service response times are much longer than national standards.

There are serious shortcomings in the prevention and planning functions, which have aggravated the fire and EMS problems over the long term. There is little targeted activity to reduce the fire problem and little or no capacity or analysis undertaken for understanding its unique problems and their causes. The Department finds itself in a reactive mode, moving from crisis to crisis, with major opportunities for improvement and correction missed due to a mixture of the lack of a planning staff (until recently), political micromanagement, and barriers posed by the DC procurement and personnel rules.

The appointment of a new Chief and the initiation of this study offer an historic opportunity to direct the organization towards a future of enhanced service and responsiveness to community needs. There are many areas for improvement and many problems, which if taken in isolation, would constitute crises in and of themselves.

Fire Department morale is generally poor due to continued reduction in resources over the years, negative media reports, perceptions of undercompensation, and some incredibly bureaucratic procurement policies and constraints that have affected the ability to maintain the emergency forces, and hamstrung the leadership's ability to manage.

Fire Department Organization and Management

- The D.C. Fire Chief is hamstrung from making normal management decisions by the current constraints on his authority, from procurement, to budget, to

deployment of resources. For example, any change to the Fire Department *Rules and Regulations* manual must be approved by the D.C. Council.

- Firefighters have access to computers for filing fire incident reports, but not for many other functions. A more completely integrated computer network is needed within the fire department.
- There is confusion about the development of budgets and the allocation and management of appropriated funds, including budgeting for overtime and budgeting for adequate staffing for each position. Managers are not given complete budgets for their areas of responsibility. Widespread use of firefighters to fill-in for positions outside firefighting distort the budget picture.
- Strengthening and clarification of mutual aid agreements with neighboring jurisdictions are needed.

Fire Prevention

- The District of Columbia has a fire death rate averaging about 60 percent higher than the national fire death rate per capita in the last four years (30 deaths per million versus 19 nationally). It has one of the higher per capita fire death rates among American cities.
- The Fire Prevention Bureau reports to the Assistant Chief for Operations, an unusual organizational placement as compared to other cities. Many departments have elevated prevention to the level of suppression and support services.
- The unit is significantly understaffed, and has been trending downward on services provided, with no one raising alarm signals about this impact.
- There is no systematic program to reach the school children and the elderly of D.C. with fire safety information. The current program only reacts to requests from the schools or community groups. Though the department does not know what percent of children and elderly are reached annually, it is clear that

the majority of children and elderly do not get regular, let alone annual, messages. There is only one public fire educator for a city of over 500,000 population (Atlanta has five).

- There is no juvenile fire-setter counseling program in place, though juveniles setting fires has been known to be a key fire problem of long standing.
- The recommendations from a previous U.S. Fire Administration study of arson unit management in D.C. were not implemented. There is inadequate support by the police in arson investigation, and arson investigators do not have peace officer powers to provide an alternative. The result is an extremely low clearance rate for arson.
- The courts have given the fire department the job of inspecting repairs to schools, though the department personnel have no training to do this, and have a major shortfall in fire inspection.
- Unqualified personnel are reviewing plans for complex fire protection systems in new buildings. There are no fire protection engineers. (Prince George's County has nine.)
- There are delays in turning around building reviews, which result in complaints from the construction community.

Emergency Medical Services

- Over three-quarters of the responses of the Fire Department are for emergency medical service calls. Average response times for Advanced Life Support (paramedics) are highly unsatisfactory. EMS medical care varies in quality.
- Unit Hour Utilization factors (the percent of time units are busy) are far above national norms, a factor in the high response times and in paramedic burnout.
- The first responder program gets engine companies to medical calls much faster than possible with EMS ambulances alone. However, further improvement is needed: fire company response times for EMS calls are 1-2 minutes higher than for fire calls, even after the longer time to triage and

dispatch EMS calls is taken into account. There was no ready physical or operational explanation for the difference.

- EMS personnel and cross-trained firefighters are two cultures at odds with each other. Although they share facilities and work side by side, they have different work schedules, accountability practices, overtime arrangements, performance standards, and dual chains of command, which leads to friction.
- Quality assurance needs to be improved.
- Key supplies – e.g., fuel, oxygen – are poorly distributed, leading to unnecessary time out of service for ambulances.

Firefighting Operations

- There are no reserve ladder trucks – zero. There are very few reserve pumpers, and in such bad condition that they are not to be counted upon. National standards call for a reserve fleet of at least one to two vehicles for every eight in the primary fleet. Whenever a ladder truck is taken out of service for repairs, there is a hole in the City's protection.
- There is a major problem with inefficiently repairing fire apparatus. The procurement bureaucracy and multiple approvals required to get even small repairs to brakes or springs puts vehicles out of service for weeks, a month, or even a year. There are many repair horror stories. Emergency purchasing authority went into effect only in June 1997. The lack of reserve vehicles and the procurement delay for emergency repairs are two red flag situations. (Legislation passing Congressional committee this past month may provide a partial solution, but the impacts of the past will be felt for a while.)
- Several internal fire department studies that considered re-deploying resources to fill holes and smooth out response times have been stymied, in part because of mistrust of the data. Some of the moves appear to make good sense. A further examination of deployment is needed beyond this three-month study. It is a complex analytical issue.

- The response time data critical for assessing service effectiveness, determining inequities between particular neighborhoods and for overall deployment appears to be inaccurate. It suffers from a common problem found nationwide – the lack of consistent reporting by radio of when a unit arrives on the scene. This is compounded by frequent delays in the posting of the on-scene information by the dispatchers. The fire apparatus does not have the (long existing) technology that permits pushing a button on the dashboard upon arrival at the scene to automatically register the arrival time in the computer.

Communication Technology

There are major holes (areas) in the city where the communication system does not work well.

- The computerized dispatch system is out-of-date and inadequate for the current expanded mission of the department.
- There are major “inter-operability” problems – the ability to communicate with the adjacent departments, which already are on modern 800 MHz systems for a decade. The District has been planning a modern 800 MHz system, since the early 1980s, but has been thwarted by its own procurement delays. This has had a ripple effect, requiring renewal by the FCC of frequencies that had been approved for use.
- There are major problems with firefighting forces being able to communicate from the Metro system station tunnels and from deep within federal buildings.
- Training and management of police 9-1-1 communication personnel are deficient in many ways for their support of fire and EMS operation. Even the way they answer the phone – “Police Emergency” – promotes confusion and delay for citizens reporting fires and EMS needs.
- The prevention and suppression units need in-vehicle data communications technology.

Personnel Issues

- **Accountability** – All ranks complained about a lack of adequate accountability of personnel. Officers and chiefs as well as firefighters need to be held accountable. There is a lack of adequate accountability for attendance, meeting the dress code, and even for acute safety problems such as dangerous driving.
- **Disability Retirements** – Due to restrictive language in the (Congressional) budget authorization for D.C., the police and fire departments together effectively have been restricted to retiring on disability a total of only nine people hired before 1970 each year, regardless of the numbers injured. This results in the Fire Department having to carry about 36 people on permanent, full-time injury status, and to replace them with overtime. This in turn is a major contributor to the high overtime usage, and unfairly reflects on the department. (The problem may have been solved by a rule change by Congress within the last few weeks.)
- **Personal Safety** – There is no comprehensive risk management program for hazards to personnel, and many dangers from lack of equipment and poorly maintained equipment. There is much liability exposure. One example: The compressed air tanks used in SCBAs are not regularly tested, in violation of OSHA regulations and DOT Standards. About 75 percent of the tanks are not up to date in testing.
- **Position Descriptions** – Position descriptions are out of date: CPO will not update them. The lack of adequate requirements in position descriptions, and other hiring practices has led to hiring mechanics who cannot maintain modern fire apparatus satisfactorily, a critical problem.
- **EEO** – Overall, the department is quite representative of the resident population it protects, much closer than most big city fire departments (65 percent minority versus 67.5 percent minority in the population). However there needs to be further attention to conflict resolution and diversity training, and further attention to reducing perceptions of unfairness. Also, about 85 percent of those passing the

last promotion exam for officers (Sergeant through Captain) were not minority, foreshadowing potential imbalances in representativeness in the future.

Special Operations

The Fire Department has recently (in August) consolidated many key specialized services under a Special Operations Battalion Chief, who reports to the Assistant Chief for Operations. This excellent move will enhance the ability to deal with rescues, hazardous materials incidents, and terrorism. However, some major problems exist:

- Poor conditions and no backup units for rescue units and special vehicles.
- Much vehicle extrication equipment and other specialized equipment is in poor repair or at the end of its useful life.
- Unit personnel have been paying for repairs out of their own pocket.
- No budget for the unit: it survives on grants.
- Key personnel are on temporary detail to special operations; to help coordinate the functions, permanent staff is needed.
- There is a lack of large transport vehicles needed to bring heavy equipment such as lumber and shoring materials to a cave-in, and to bring supplies to rescues, affecting the ability to respond and maintain heavy rescue operations.
- There are too few specialized HazMat protective suits (only 6; at least 12 are needed).

Property and Supply

- The procurement, storage and distribution of supplies is deplorable. Lack of key supplies hampers delivery of services and affects the morale and dignity of the personnel.
 - Medic units run out of oxygen and fuel

- Toilet paper and vehicle cleaning supplies often have to be purchased by firefighters out of their own pockets
- There is no dedicated property officer, no property management program, no supply chief, poor storage facilities for supplies, no central inventory system and no accountability for property.
- There is little to no security in supply storage facilities. Theft is a concern. Since there is no formal inventory system, no one knows the extent of the theft.

Station Maintenance

- Many stations are in disrepair. Examples: Portable heaters used all winter. Leaking roofs. Lack of adequate provisions for female firefighters.

Training

- The Training Academy is in deplorable condition – literally a junkyard. The Department needs a new facility with live burn simulation capabilities.
- EMS and fire training have recently been combined under the Training Division. The training culture needs to change with it.
- There is inadequate equipment and apparatus for training recruits. The stations “borrow” training equipment to fill their needs.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

TriData and its subcontractor, Arthur Andersen LLP, were selected by the DC Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority to undertake a three-task study of the DC Fire and Emergency Services Department. This report summarizes the result of Task 1 - Problem Identification.

Before this study started, the D.C. Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department was already in the process of undergoing change. The new Chief, promoted from within, has been moving the department in the right direction on many fronts. There are many new people in senior positions and they generally seem to be well aware of the problems in their units. These problems were caused by a variety of factors over the years, not the least of which was a lack of funds to purchase the technology needed for a modern department. In addition, severe procurement barriers and rules constrictions inhibited the sound and efficient use of the funds that were available.

Despite the many good intentions and plans to correct problems, our focus has been on what the state of the department currently is, not what it is projected to be. We will take the plans into account in formulating management reforms and implementation plans in Tasks 2 and 3.

Scope

This study included all services and functions of the Department, including firefighting, emergency medical services, and special operations (rescue and hazardous materials, counter terrorism and fireboat). It includes communications, training, maintenance and various support and administrative services. It excludes a complete deployment analysis, which is not clearly necessary nor possible within the time constraints of this study.

Methodology

Task 1 of this study was allocated approximately three weeks of calendar time in which to be completed. TriData used a broad team of specialists in different aspects of fire and emergency medical services, so that the different aspects of the Department could be reviewed in parallel. To avoid individual bias, most areas of the Department were reviewed by at least two members of the project team.

The Fire and EMS Department was extremely responsive in providing a large amount of data in a short time. The Department provided complete access to its personnel at all levels and greatly facilitated the effort.

In the course of this task, the team met with virtually all of the division chiefs and higher ranks, as well as the Authority. Many rank and file members of the Department were visited in the stations and contacted through various employee groups, including the unions representing firefighters, medics, and communications workers and the local chapter of the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters. TriData staff also observed the communications center, and rode with various operations units, especially EMS units. There were no large fires that we know of during this period, although the staff was able to attend one fire and observe operations on several other emergency incidents.

Ideas for addressing many of the problems raised here have begun to be formulated but only the problems are described in this initial Task 1 report.

Inter-Departmental Connections

The Fire Department is heavily dependent upon the cooperation and the effectiveness of many other departments. Unfortunately, we were not able to spend time with the other departments exploring these interconnecting links, but feel they are important to flag.

Here are several examples:

Police – The police support the Fire Department in arson investigation, but not nearly to the extent needed. Their Public Information Officer needs to coordinate more effectively with the Fire Department's PIO when both departments are on the scene. Both departments rescue boats often respond to the same minor calls for assistance, redundantly.

Schools – Schools need to incorporate fire safety education into the curriculum and/or facilitate Fire Department presentations. They need to actively refer juvenile fire-setters to the Fire Department. The use of fire department inspectors for leaky school roof inspections drains time from an inspection unit that already cannot handle its prime inspection workload.

Public Works – There are many problems related to DPW providing unsatisfactory or overpriced station maintenance at the Fire Department. Also, lack of street maintenance causes undue wear and tear on fire vehicles, significantly increasing their maintenance and out-of-service time.

Procurement – The centralized procurement function has severely slowed repairs to emergency vehicles, stations, and purchase of new vehicles. It also hinders purchasing of everything from new vehicles to everyday supplies to the point that firefighters routinely purchase their own.

Health Services – There is a need for increased contact with the D.C.'s elderly citizens regarding fire safety. Juvenile fire-setters need to be referred more often to psychological counseling. Health Services and the Fire and EMS Department needs to coordinate policy and programs regarding emergency and non-emergency treatment of citizens by the EMS. In particular, to what extent should EMS be the non-emergency care provider to low-income citizens.

Prosecutors, Courts – Prosecution of arsonists and violators of fire and building codes need to be more effectively coordinated.

Consumer and Regulatory Affairs – Need to better coordinate technical fire protection aspects of building plans reviews and inspection of schools.

Organization of the Report

Chapters are devoted to the major services and major support functions of the Fire and EMS Department. In general, the chapters correspond to major divisions or groups of units on the organizational chart of the Department.

CHAPTER 2 – OFFICE OF THE FIRE CHIEF

This chapter addresses a variety of functions that report directly to the fire chief, and also some of the cross-cutting administrative and personnel issues in the department. The functions include the Chief Financial Officer (procurement, budget, payroll); equal employment opportunity (EEO), Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, judicial affairs, and the public information office. While several financial functions such as procurement are being viewed across all departments in parallel studies, the Fire and EMS Department's needs and barriers in this area are addressed here (and elsewhere in the report), too.

The new fire chief has set in motion many changes for improving the department, and virtually all seem to be in a commendable direction. He is well aware of the many problems in the department, and he and his chief officers made no attempt to sugar coat them. They are frustrated by a long history of reducing resources while the job increases in complexity and demand. They are frustrated by many rules of procurement, restrictions on changing Fire and EMS Department rules and regulations, and generally being hampered from allowing the chief to make decisions that he should be able to make with regard to expenditures, re-deployment and many other aspects of running the fire department.

One of the most important reforms that needs to be considered is freeing the fire chief to do his job, or retiring the chief if he is not up to the job. We have undertaken studies in a variety of fire departments across the United States and Canada and know of virtually no other situation where a chief's hands are as tied as they are in D.C.

Overall Organization

The D.C. Fire and EMS Department's grouping of services is somewhat unusual relative to other fire departments. However, there is no one proven organizational structure that works in fire departments.

One of the anomalies that seems to cause a problem is the placement of the fire prevention function under the operations division. This is discussed further in the Prevention Chapter, but we note here that it seems to cause reduced attention and visibility for prevention.

The Organization Chart (Figure 2-1) shows that the Chief's office has many stalks on the chart reporting directly to him – miscellaneous administrative services, the Chief Financial Officer, plus the three assistant chiefs. The Chief has done nothing short of a remarkable job in making a number of key personnel changes that generally seem good, and starting many improvements moving in parallel. The many support services that report directly to the Chief and to the Assistant Chief for services do not appear logically grouped and workloads for the Division Chiefs seem uneven. However, the overall structure of the organization does not appear to be a major impediment or root cause of the many problems the organization has. We will reserve judgment on the need to change the structure.

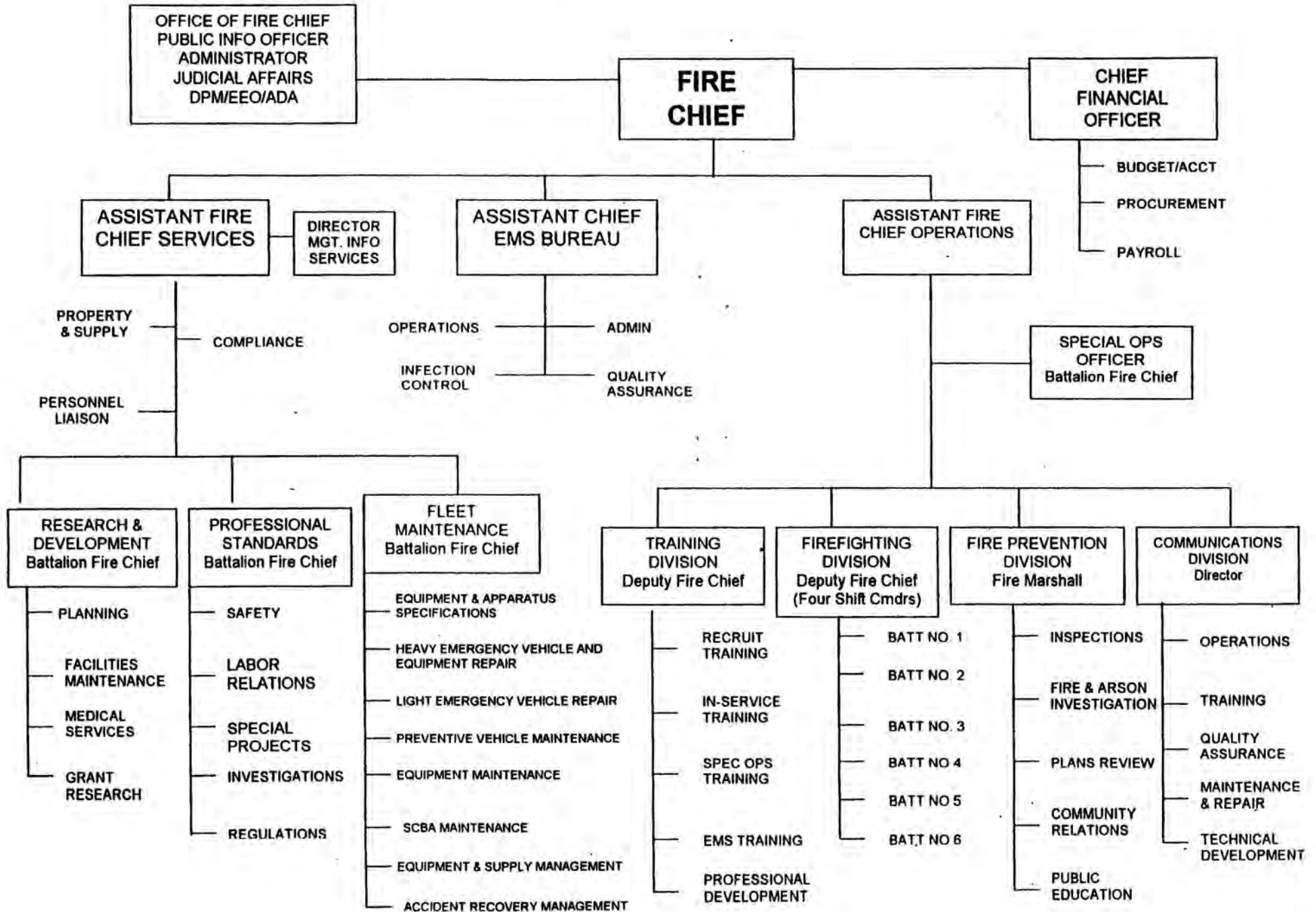
Rules and Regulations Book

The Department's book of Rules and Regulations dictates much that is done or not done in the Department. The City Council has oversight relative to its content. While oversight for major changes to the department is of course appropriate and desirable, the Fire Chief cannot properly manage when every individual change in rules or regulations has to be approved by the Council. This publication is hopelessly outdated and restricts or limits management innovations or change. A good portion of the document no longer applies and many obvious revisions are long overdue. As it carries so much weight, seeking a way to bring it up to date and keep it flexible is critical.

Accountability

There are many examples of the fact that members of the department often are not held accountable for even serious errors or misbehaviors. It was simultaneously heartening and discouraging to hear a demand for higher levels of accountability from chief officers, the IAFF local, the Progressive Firefighters and many individuals. While

D.C. FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION CHART



everyone has a different perception of who should be accountable for what, there is a common desire for increased accountability in many areas. For example, firefighters who have endangered others through careless driving or misuse of equipment are not always penalized adequately, if at all; personnel are not always held accountable for equipment they have lost or damaged, or facilities damaged (e.g., by hitting the apparatus doors on stations).

There seems to be a cycle of low morale and sloppiness in stations. The training facility includes a fire vehicle junkyard. Many personnel have untidy personal appearance. A wide range of dress codes was observed among people of similar functions.

Accountability must apply to officers, as well as the rank and file. One of the problem areas found in many departments is the difficulty that Battalion Chiefs have in holding their station officers accountable for standards. The Battalion Chiefs are busy and often concerned about damaging morale further through disciplinary actions. Nevertheless, there were widespread perceptions that discipline for everything ranging from lateness to negligence was not treated uniformly. While there is a need to follow-up with a more detailed review of the reasonableness of the complaints and extent of the problem, it is clear even at this point in time that there needs to be a major improvement in accountability – people being held to a standard – and in the equity of applying the rules. Mid-level managers need to be held to task if they do not hold those below them to task.

DPM/EEO/ADA/OPM Functions

This office manages the diversity program, EEO cases, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, sexual harassment complaints and Training Academy orientation. The office works closely with Corporation Counsel, the Office of Human Rights and the Federal agencies at EEOC and the Department of Justice.

The D.C. Fire and EMS Department, more than most, has come close to representing the ethnic make-up of its community, which is becoming ever more diverse.

The uniformed work force is 61 percent minority and the total department workforce is 65 percent minority versus 67.5 percent minority in the population.¹ The leadership of the department – the heads of all the important functions – is about 75 percent minority.

Nevertheless, there remains a legacy of racial tension that has not gone away. There are perceptions and charges of continued discrimination on exams, in disciplinary procedures and in everyday living. These charges may or may not be true, but the perceptions are upsetting to almost all, those who believe them true and those who believe they are unfairly raised. Most acknowledge that much progress has been made, but there is much room for further improvement.

Concerns raised from the workforce include the need to inform in advance all people potentially eligible for a new type of training, a promotional exam, or the opportunity to travel, so they can prepare, and so there is no perception of favoritism in the selection. Some felt this was not always done.

The past three promotional testing examinations for the classified ranks of sergeant, lieutenant and captain resulted in about 85 percent of the promoted employees in these ranks being non-minority. This will affect the future composition of the upper ranks.

There was a desire by some that further efforts be made to recruit more firefighters from within the district. District residents do receive an extra five points on their applications, so all other things being equal, they have an advantage. Some lament the demise of the cadet program, which had worked with high school students and groomed them for positions in the department. The Department's current philosophy is to focus on having a competent work force and a workforce that reflects the diversity of the population. Residency is a secondary consideration.

The loss of funding for the Department's cadet program resulted in its reduction from 75 to 25 cadets and then to its discontinuation. Some firefighters felt that adversely

¹ Data from DC Fire and EMS Department, "Agency Breakdown by pay plan and sex", 8-30-97 In D.C., 36 percent of the population is non-African American and in the uniformed force, 39 percent.

impacted the ability to hire minority DC residents into the department, though, as noted above, D.C. residents still get 5 points extra on hiring evaluations. The cadet program virtually guaranteed employment as firefighters. The program focused on D.C. high school students as a recruitment target group. However, because hiring has continued to be made from the 1989 test list, the lack of a cadet program has been moot. The end of that hiring list now is being reached, and a new test is needed.

Some members of the department were concerned about the equity of disciplinary actions, pointing out that the percent of disciplinary actions given to minorities was higher than their percentage in the force. This appears to be true though not dramatically so. There is a perception by some of the minority members of the department that discipline is likely to be harsher for a minority firefighter than for a white firefighter doing the same thing. The call was not for fewer penalties but for equity of treatment. The data we have does not raise a large red flag, but merits some further attention.

Diversity/Sensitivity Training – Diversity/sensitivity training, while needed and mandated by the Mayor's Office as part of a law suit settlement, is not adequately funded. At least four hours per year are required. There are providers under contract, but no funding. Some departments (e.g., Sacramento) have been using training in conflict resolution to prevent and resolve problems of interpersonal dealings in a diverse society, with excellent success.

Employees sometimes avoid going through the D.C. EEO office in favor of the federal EEOC. Employees cite lack of trust in the District's involvement for taking this action.

Though the department is almost representative of the resident population it protects, much closer than most big city fire departments, there needs to be further attention to conflict resolution and diversity training, and further attention to reducing perceptions of unfairness.

ADA – The Department has conducted an internal study to measure compliance with ADA. Funds have been proposed in the budget for construction of concrete

improvements and ramps to ensure access to Headquarters and firehouse community rooms.

Public Information Office

The department needs to improve its capability to deal with the media. There have been a number of situations over the past year where there was needless embarrassment to the Department for not getting the total story correct (e.g., the B'nai Brith anthrax scare and the furor over the sensitivity of the Department in connection with the investigation of the death of a workman killed when a steel beam fell from a bridge, necessitating an OSHA investigation). The media does not do a very good job of reporting on positive changes in the Department nor in assisting with public education, another major area requiring public information officer expertise and familiarity with the press. The D.C. Fire and EMS Department has had a relatively negative press compared to other fire departments. There is rarely a positive story, and many negative ones. While some of it is deserved criticism, the PIO needs to take a more proactive role. The surrounding counties, notably Prince George's County, have strong public information functions that are worthy of emulation.

Office of Judicial Affairs

This office is vacant – the position has been funded but it has not been filled. This office will serve as a liaison to the Courts System and Corporation Counsel. The purpose of this function is unclear.

Office of the Chief Financial Officer

All FEMS financial functions are managed in this office. The CFO has oversight over accounting, budget, payroll, EMS Billing administration, and (most recently) procurement. The accounting functions are staffed with nine FTEs, and there are three FTEs for procurement. There is currently one key vacancy – the accounting officer. The

CFO needs another budget analyst to better divide the responsibilities of budget execution and position control.

There is a lack of understanding at various levels of the department as to what the CFO can and cannot do legally within the city-wide budgeting and procurement constraints that the CFO does not control. There seemed to be confusion in the Department about the entire budget process, about budgeting for overtime, about whether money in the budget is clearly earmarked for each division, etc. There is a perception among many rank and file members that the CFO represents the central city purchasing bureaucracy more than the needs of the Fire Department. Better officer education, better internal communication about budget issues, and better effort by the CFO to explain the budgeting issues are all needed. The role and authority of the CFO needs to be better explained to the department.

Operating Budget – A better budgeting system is needed. Each area in the department needs to have a budget for its personnel, equipment, maintenance, and overtime. The budget for an area can be an earmarked part of another unit's budget, but one way or another one needs to give managers an idea of their total budget and develop understanding of what different functions cost. One small example: when firefighting personnel fill in for communications or EMS personnel, their salaries are still charged to fire operations, decreasing the perceived cost of some functions and raising others. A lack of confidence was expressed in many parts of the Department with respect to the quality of the budgeting process.

Capital Budget – Many problems in the department stem from lack of adequate capital investment in major equipment and facilities. Among the major capital projects pending include roof replacements, underground storage tank removal, and the purchase of the 800 MHz communications system. Needed facilities and capital expenditures are discussed throughout this report. Planned acquisitions include an Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) system and a live fire facility for the training academy.

Procurement Staffing – Contracting authority was recently turned over from DAS to FEMS although the staff at FEMS only has experience with small purchases.

The CPO staff members are lobbying for an experienced procurement manager to join the team and provide direction for their new responsibilities.

The office is understaffed. There is a need for both an experienced lead procurement officer and at least one more contract specialist. Presently, non-procurement (field) personnel are doing the "leg work" (i.e., finding vendors, securing quotes, submitting them to procurement) to help move items through the procurement process. The acting lead procurement officer also has property officer responsibilities. The staff lacks time to monitor spending and enforce the limits of the blanket purchase order agreements.

Although FEMS was given contracts authority, the agency's procurements are still being held up at DAS by the "mid-activation process." Mid-activation is a process where agencies begin the procurement process and then are required to send the procurement over to DAS for approval or release of authority to procure goods and services. After approval the procurement action is returned to the agency to complete the procurement process. Mid-activation in effect nullifies the contracting authority the agency was given.

The District government's highly publicized finance troubles have made procurement all the more difficult. Some vendors will not give quotes to the FEMS at all. Other vendors require up front payments or 50 percent payment on delivery of goods or services. Agencies with good relationships with vendors suffer from other agencies' problems. For example, a FEMS vehicle that was repaired was not released to the agency although payment was received for the services rendered, because of another agency's unpaid debit.

There are concerns that central procurement has created some problems. For instance, the vendor notification process for solicitations was recently changed to a postcard system. Since the change, FEMS has had a solicitation pending twice with absolutely no responses. The FEMS procurement personnel know that although the District has had its problems there are still plenty of vendors who will do business with the District. FEMS procurement personnel suspect that the change to use of a postcard

notification of solicitations has contributed to the lack of response. There is concern that the change was not adequately communicated to vendors, who may consider the postcards junk mail. FEMS procurement is putting the solicitation out for a third time and requesting a pre-bid solicitation conference.

Before contracting authority was given to FEMS from DAS, a Councilmember convened a hearing to investigate the lack of life-saving equipment (defibrillators) for EMS, which was held up for 10 months at DAS. After 10 months of review, the solicitation was returned to FEMS procurement without approval. FEMS procurement armed with new contracting authority completed the process.

The Fire Chief has cited fixing procurement as a priority. Procurement has had a negative impact on operations, creating problems with the fleet in vehicle downtime and inadequate supplies for facilities maintenance. Blanket purchase order agreements have been issued to combat this problem. FEMS has many of these agreements for all sorts of purchases ranging from auto parts to light bulbs.

In the past, FEMS worked closely with DPW to provide repair services. This has changed and FEMS has terminated almost all work (a few exceptions include Underground Storage Tank removal effort) citing DPW's "overcharging" for the services provided. An instance was cited where FEMS was charged \$10,000 for work on heater/boiler system. FEMS management contends DPW staff did no repair work – only a cursory inspection of the system. FEMS has issued a contract to General Services Administration for air conditioning services.

The procurement function is currently under review District-wide. There is ongoing discussion about the potential use of procurement cards. The status of this initiative is unclear, but concern was expressed in FEMS about the plan for the District to submit one payment for all agencies, instead of agencies having ability to pay their own bills. There is a concern about whether the District's "lump-sum" payment approach will be held up by agencies that have not paid their share.

Procurement has a major impact on delivery of services – especially in terms of providing supplies, contracting out for repair services, and purchasing equipment. The office needs additional experienced staff to more effectively manage the workload and take on value-added activities including monitoring spending.

Salary, Pension and Retirements – Pensions for non-firefighting personnel are being addressed in another consultant study, but several issues particular to the Fire Department must be addressed here.

A major problem affecting the Fire Department's budget has been the need to carry approximately 36 people on permanent sick leave, because Congress only allowed the Fire and Police Department together to retire 9 personnel on disability each year from among those hired before 1980. This starts the year with 36 person years of overtime required to fill these position functions – a very wasteful practice. (There may be relief of this problem, via a higher ceiling for disability retirement, in the D.C. budget authorization bill currently before Congress.)

The disparity among pension plans for Fire vs. EMS personnel negatively affects EMS morale, as discussed further in the EMS chapter.

The issue of salary comparisons was raised at a project status late in this Task 1 period. Fair salary comparisons with other cities are difficult to make because of different work schedules, services delivered, and treatment of benefits. We are gathering data but this was not completed in time for a fair, accurate presentation during this task.

Procurement Process – Emergency contracts (which can be very costly) are very rarely used by FEMS. Two examples where emergency contracts were appropriately used:

- A fire truck hit a curb and ruptured its gas tank. The spill flowed over an electrical transformer directly in front of the Environmental Protection Agency. A clean-up contract was issued immediately.

- An engine was repaired in another jurisdiction. On the way back to the District the vehicle broke down. An emergency contract was issued to tow the vehicle from a rush hour lane in the neighboring community.

Office of the Administrator

The Administrator function is like that of a Chief of Staff. This office serves as a coordination point for civilian and uniform operations. As an example, this office was very helpful in coordinating activities for this study.

Overall, the lack of adequate funding and investment in capital equipment and new technology makes it increasingly difficult for the Department to carry out its legally mandated functions and also maintain the growing list of other services provided to support the citizenry. (Specific needs are detailed in subsequent chapters. Some global departmental issues are addressed here.)

Budget – Overtime pay is being used to supplement workforce for staff out on extended sick leave. The administrator is working with Corporation Counsel to review the possibility of increasing the number of retirements allowed for the FEMS and the Metropolitan Police Department.

There is a need for an improved budget process in which managers of divisions and bureaus provide justifications of budgets to develop accurate budget plans. There is discussion about the need to move to zero-based budgeting, and move managers away from the practice of basing current year budget requests on what was budgeted last year.

An initiative to update the department's technology infrastructure has had significant reductions in its planned budgets, hampering the agency's ability to improve internal communication and customer service (e.g., the budget for computer technology).

Personnel – There is a lack of management training for managers and the need for performance standards and performance-based evaluations for personnel, including managers. The general sentiment in the department is that evaluations are too often based

on personality, and not actual performance. There is a need to identify career paths and role models for all employees to improve morale and develop the experience necessary for upward mobility.

Uniformed personnel manage administrative functions including facilities and fleet management. Consideration needs to be given to replacing the uniformed personnel with civilian administrators in some positions, to provide stability and more expertise specific to those functions, and free the uniformed personnel for other functions.

There is a shortage and overuse of overtime for virtually all ranks below Assistant Chief, stemming in large part from a lack of adequate numbers of FTEs, and continued reassignments of people to fill gaps, requiring backfills.

Community Relations

There is no office of community relations per se. Part of this function is performed by the public education section in the Fire Prevention Division. But the overall issue is department-level policy.

Some firefighters suggested that the Department could do more in the way of good community relations at the neighborhood level. They felt that the stations should have more of an open door policy, and encourage neighborhood contacts. We did not see anything from the citizens, nor had time to conduct a citizen survey to validate this concern, but it is noted here for possible future consideration. Going the other way, some stations expressed concern about their security (especially petty theft and vandalism.)

It also was noted that sometimes by chance, all-white companies are assigned to African-American neighborhoods, and that mixed crews would be better for community relations in those areas – a small point of sensitivity that battalion chiefs might keep in mind.

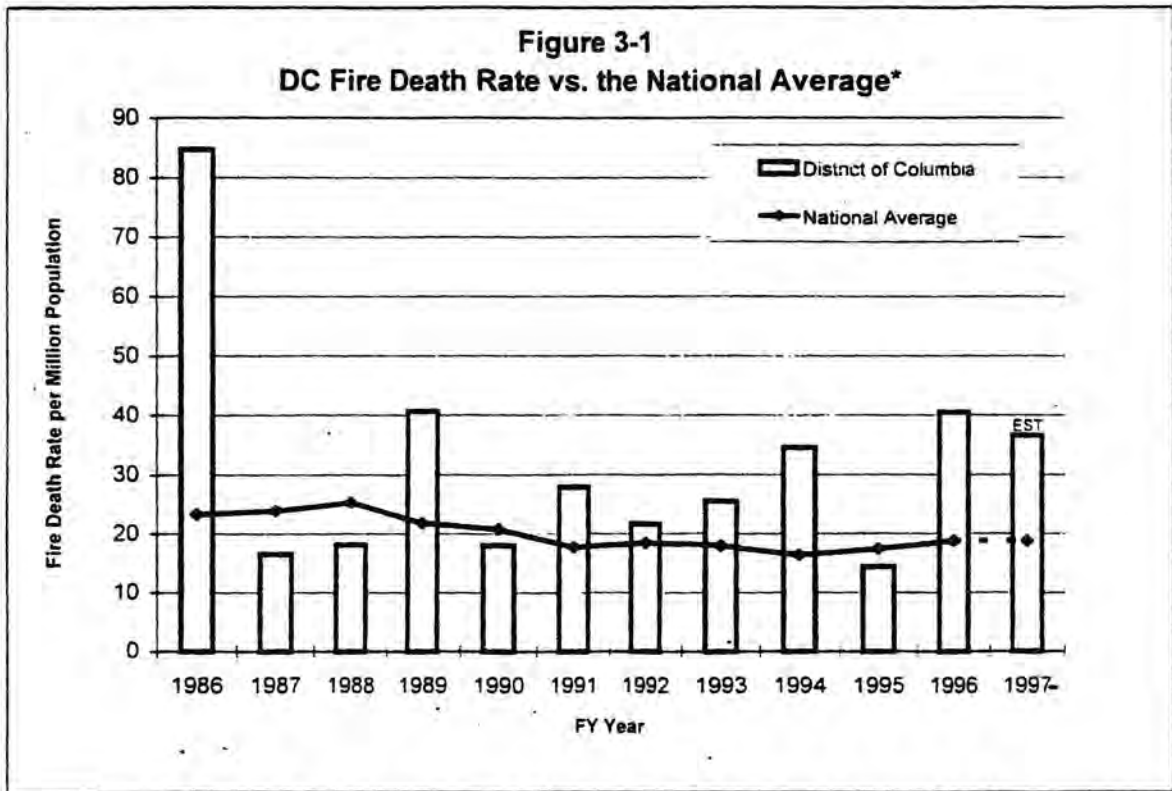
Heavier use of companies in prevention programs (public education in schools, inspection of local businesses) would help community relations – and is needed by prevention, as discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3. PREVENTION

This chapter addresses all of the functions of fire and injury prevention including Public Fire Education, Code Enforcement, Plans Review, and Fire and Arson Investigation.

The mission statement of the D.C. Fire Department and EMS is "To improve the quality of life for those who choose to live, work, visit, and do business in the District by preventing fires before they occur; and by providing emergency medical and ambulance service." That mission is not being upheld with respect to prevention, nor is its spirit met in the budget allocation. Only three percent of the budget goes to prevention, about par with many other U.S. fire departments, but much lower than is typical in other nations that pay less for their fire protection and have lower life and property losses per capita.

The District of Columbia has a fire death rate averaging more than 60 percent above the national average. Over the past four years the D.C. fire death rate averaged 32 deaths per million versus less than 19 nationally. (In cities over 500,000 population the average death rate nationally was about 20 per million, so the comparison is similar.) Relative to states, D.C. had the third highest death rate after Alaska and Mississippi. Figure 3-1 shows the D.C. fire death rate per capita relative to the national average for a twelve-year period, 1986-1997.



* Source: *Fire in the United States, 1985-1994*, with additional and revised data for 1991-1997 from the D.C. Fire Department. Population estimates used in calculating per capita rates were taken from the police department report by Booz Allen Hamilton. The 1997 estimates were extrapolated from ten months data.

The number of structure fires reported in the District has remained fairly level over the past four years (see Table 3-1).

FY 94	1023
FY 95	1031
FY 96	853
FY 97	1060 (prorated from 10 months)

The lack of a complete annual budget for the Fire Prevention Division that includes expenditures for materials, training, and overtime hinders management of the Division's resources. It is essential that the Fire Marshal have complete and detailed

information on the prevention budget available, including training, prevention materials, and office supplies and equipment. He also needs the authority to have the present equipment repaired.

Public Fire Education

The fire department has one person assigned to provide all fire safety education for over 500,000 people. This is far fewer than other cities of D.C.'s size. While some school visits are made with the aid of line company firefighters, the effort is far too small to fulfill the mission. A comparison with the public education effort in other cities is shown in Table 3-2. Relative to the size of the fire problem and high fire death rate in residences, this is too small an effort.

City	Population	Public Fire Education Staff	Comments
Charlotte	600,000	2	In addition, each fire station has its own public education program
Pittsburgh	369,000	2	
Baltimore	726,000	4	
Atlanta	395,000	5	Includes PIO function
Philadelphia	1,553,000	8	
St. Petersburg	260,000	3	Includes PIO function
District of Columbia	585,000	1	Supplemented by some PIO and Fire Inspection Time

There was no data available on the outreach of the public education program in terms of the percent of school children or elderly reached. There is no organized plan for providing fire safety education. The program is largely reactive.

The department's Public Information Officer assists in providing information about the fire program to the media, but not nearly to the extent needed. Given the high fire death rate and high fire incidence in residences, the public education program should be much stronger. There is adequate information from the D.C. Fire Incident Reporting

fire safety provision and not on non-fire items (e.g., roof repair) unless more funding and personnel are provided, or the city management agrees to retreat from its fire safety goals.

While some may consider any inspector qualified to do any inspection, inspectors need to be trained on the hazards for which they inspect, or at least have some feel for the subject. D.C. firefighters are not qualified to make inspections of schools other than for fire safety.

Some cities (e.g., Miami) have placed the building department under the fire department, and cross-trained inspectors. Getting the schools open was a critical function of the government and the firefighters are willing to help in any emergency. They have a tradition of assistance to the community. If the school inspection function is to be a regular duty rather than a one-time stopgap, then the fire department needs training and additional inspectors or overtime money from the school system to make up for their regular inspection work displaced by that assignment.

Private School Inspections – Not all private and parochial schools are being inspected annually as prescribed by general order of the fire department, partly because of the priority given to the court-ordered public school maintenance inspection program. Private schools usually are inspected by request only, though some others are inspected as time permits.

Computers and Office Equipment – The Prevention Division depends on its record keeping. A lack of computerized data submission and retrieval capability is adversely affecting the Prevention Division's efficiency and morale. Lack of computer technology is causing a loss of valuable field inspection hours and reducing the time that supervisors have to adequately perform first level supervision of division personnel. They are spending many hours on manual filing and handwriting reports. This work is labor intensive and results in files that are not current. During the first six months of FY97, some 8,000 personnel hours were spent in the office on paperwork. This accounts for almost four staff years in the office during the first six months of FY97, rather than out performing inspections.

Training – There is no formal Prevention Division training program, and no one assigned as divisional training coordinator. Training is provided on a sporadic, non-scheduled basis. The lack of an annual planned training curriculum does not ensure that all divisional personnel receive a minimum level of continuing education. Training is not mandatory.

Vehicles – Division personnel routinely are forced to use privately-owned vehicles to perform their jobs. There are only 15 fire department vehicles assigned to a division with 590 personnel, most of whom are in the field daily. This creates a liability problem for both the personnel and the department. The divisional vehicles that are available are generally in bad shape, and not all are equipped with fire department radios and other emergency equipment. This prevents the full use of these vehicles for emergency response in times of natural disasters and/or criminal or terrorist incidents. In addition, fire inspection personnel routinely go into high crime, drug-infested areas with no immediate means to request police assistance. There are documented cases where fire personnel in the District of Columbia have been attacked with firearms.

Clerical Support – At the present, only two clerical positions are authorized: one clerk typist and one receptionist. The receptionist spends the vast majority of her time answering telephone calls from the public, leaving only one person for support duties. It is not efficient or effective to have a clerical support ratio of 2 to 59. Operational personnel, including the Chief Fire Marshal, spend large numbers of hours on clerical work: filing, typing, etc.

Code Revision – The District of Columbia Fire Prevention Code Supplemental of 1992 does not have a provision that automatically adopts the latest edition of a nationally recognized building code and NFPA code. At present, builders and developers are quite often confused over which version of the building and fire protection codes are currently in effect in D.C.

Night-time Inspections – Because the inspectors spend most of their time on day shifts, there is not an adequate fire inspection program for places of public assembly and alcoholic beverage establishments that operate primarily at night (e.g., night clubs,

theaters, bars, convention centers, etc.). On-duty fire investigators provide coverage at night as time and workload permits, but not enough.

Underground Storage Tanks (UST) – The EPA requirement to upgrade underground storage tanks will impact the divisional inspection workload over the next fiscal year and must be addressed. By December 22, 1998, all tanks must be upgraded. There are an estimated 30,000 tanks in the District of Columbia, of which 212 belong to the fire department. The two people assigned to inspect USTs cannot possibly handle the workload projected and there did not seem to be a plan to cope.

Plans Review

Built-in fire protection is one of the keys to fire safety, and to holding down public fire protection costs. D.C. is operating under a strong building code, but lacks the capacity to adequately enforce it.

The department does not have the in-house capability to undertake the review of complex built-in fire protection systems. There are no fire protection engineers in the Department. They have not been using any engineers from the private sector or from other city departments. By comparison, Prince George's County, Maryland has nine fire protection engineers participating in plans review. Most of the plans review work is left to firefighters in the inspection section, who do the best that they can. Without advanced technical training, they frankly are not qualified to cope with the complexity of modern fire protection systems. All other major Washington area jurisdictions utilize fire protection engineers.

Unlike mechanical and electrical plans, private builders are not required to hire engineers to certify fire protection plans prior to submission, which increases the importance of a competent review by the fire department.

Fire protection requirements often have to be reviewed several times before the builders make the requested corrections satisfactorily. Plan approval can take eight