



Continuing Education Course



Developing a Fire Service Training Program

BY BRADLEY M. PINSKY

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Developing a Fire Service Training Program

Educational Objectives

On completion of this course, students will

1. Determine if your training programs reach their potential
2. How to consult your Organizational Statement when developing a training program
3. Learn how to prepare lesson plans
4. Discover legal requirements for training

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IF WE WERE TO BE HONEST, MANY OF US WOULD admit that our training programs do not reach their potential. Sadly, some training programs are simply ineffective. The existence of a substandard training program increases the likelihood of firefighter injuries and decreases the opportunities to perform skills properly, efficiently, and safely. Issues common to many of our training programs include the following:

- The training program, if one exists at all, fails to provide firefighters with the skills and knowledge to handle the department's operational functions.
- The required number of training hours for interior firefighters frequently is fewer than 30 hours per year.
- There is no training officer; or, if there is a training officer, the training officer is not qualified to develop, present, or teach the program.
- Department policies are insufficient to guide the development of training programs.
- The individual training programs do not follow a written lesson plan.
- The training program does not require basic skills to be practiced enough to ensure competence.
- Advanced skills are not developed.
- Minimum standards for the performance of skills have not been developed or implemented.
- The skills of each firefighter are not evaluated on a regular basis.
- As a result of the above, few persons attend or participate in the training.

Although many might think that these issues are limited to volunteer departments, this is not the case. Career departments face many of the same training challenges as volunteer departments.

Author's note: Do not become overwhelmed while reading this article and become dissuaded by the significant amount of work ahead of you. Developing a training program involves many steps, and it could take several years to build an adequate training program. Smaller departments may want to consider consolidating training functions with surrounding

jurisdictions to provide a broader support network for an efficient and comprehensive training program.

WHERE TO START

The first step in developing a training program is to gather the right team. At a minimum, the team should include the chief, the training officer (TO), and the health and safety officer (HSO). Other members of the training team could include municipal fire instructors, line officers, experienced firefighters, and retired chiefs.

Consult the Organizational Statement

The team should then look to the fire department's organizational statement. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations require¹ and National Fire Protection Association 1500, *Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program*, suggests that the fire department adopt an "organizational statement." Look at this statement as the strategic focus for your department. The statement guides the TO in how to develop the training program. Although there are several components to the organizational statement, the TO should focus on (1) the services the department will provide and (2) the types of training the department will offer and permit firefighters to take within and outside of the department training.

Do not confuse the organizational statement with the mission statement. The organizational statement is more specific and covers the services provided. An example follows:

"The services that the department will provide to the public are as follows, with levels stated as appropriate:

- interior firefighting
- scene support
- rehabilitation
- auto extrication
- wilderness firefighting
- ice rescue
- rope rescue to the technical level
- transporting emergency medical services to the advanced life support level
- fire police/traffic control
- wilderness search and rescue
- hazardous materials to the operations level
- confined space to the awareness level."

Table 1. Evaluation of Interior Firefighting Risks

Potential Injury/Illness.....	Risk (1-lowest, 5-highest)
Burns, smoke inhalation, suffocation	5
Illness from exposure to hazardous and toxic material.....	3
Electrocution and shock.....	3
Exhaustion, fainting, heart attacks, stroke	5
Injuries from tools, cuts, abrasions, crushing injuries.....	5
Falls from heights, including roofs, ladders, and other elevations	5
Injuries from falling objects.....	5
Falls through floors and other structures.....	4
Exposure to cold and heat and other environmental dangers	5
Violence from persons.....	3
Motor vehicle accidents from dangerous driving conditions and responses, and from being present on roadways.....	5
Communicable and infectious diseases	3
Drowning.....	2

This portion of the statement is important. It provides the TO with clear instructions on the general services firefighters must perform. The TO must ensure that personnel are capable of delivering these services in a safe and an efficient manner.

Thus, when developing the program, the TO should ensure the following:

- Each service offered by the department receives adequate attention in the training program.
- Each firefighter is expected to provide the services in which they participate in the training programs.
- Each firefighter is capable of performing the skills to a set standard.

Stated another way, if the fire department provides a service to the public, the TO must provide adequate training to the department members in that service.

The TO is not the only official guided by the organizational statement. This list arms the chief with solid reasoning and support for the department's budget. To perform the services listed in the statement, the department must be properly funded with a budget that provides the tools and equipment necessary to deliver each of these services. No services should be delivered to the public without adequate equipment or skills. Thus, chiefs who face budget cuts can explain to the municipality that insufficient funding will lead to the elimination of certain services because of a lack of funding for training or equipment. The municipality may then be asked which services should be eliminated to address such budget cuts. When the inevitable need for such service arises, the municipality will have placed the department in the unfortunate position of not being able to provide the service.

Consult the Risk Management Plan

The HSO must also reference the organizational statement as a first step in performing the job as it relates to the organizational statement and training program. NFPA 1500 refers to this as the "risk management plan," another document fire departments commonly overlook.

The HSO is tasked with developing the risk management plan. Development of the plan necessitates that the HSO evaluate and rate the risks to firefighters posed by the performance of each task necessary to provide each service the department offers. Once this evaluation has been completed, the HSO and the TO must ensure that adequate training is offered to educate firefighters about the risks of performing each task

and how to limit the risks. Table 1 illustrates how an evaluation of the risks of interior firefighting might look.

Once this plan is developed, the TO and HSO should ensure that adequate training is provided to each firefighter expected to deliver such services. Give the tasks with the highest risk rating the most attention, although no risk should ever be neglected during training.

Prepare Lesson Plans

It is not possible to create a short article on how to develop a lesson plan, which is a skill. Just the same, it is crucial that the TO be able to create an adequate lesson plan. This skill is covered in fire instructor training courses such as Fire Instructor I (which instructs students in how to modify a generic lesson plan so that it is applicable for teaching to the specific department or company) and Instructor II (which instructs students in how to create a lesson plan).

Lesson plans provide objectives for the skills. The objectives should address the risks associated with the service provided as well as the skills and knowledge needed to provide the service. Lesson plans should do the following:

- Indicate the target audience of the training (interior firefighters, operators, for example).
- Indicate the purpose of the lesson.
- State under what circumstances the training will occur.
- List what the participants will accomplish.
- Provide the standard used to evaluate participants' success.
- List the materials needed (tools, projectors, props, and so on).
- Cite a written procedure or policy of the department that underlies the training.
- Cite a policy or a chapter to be read by the firefighters prior to the training class or skills evaluation session.

Following are some samples of "simple" objectives:

- Given a two-story residence and a 24-foot ladder, firefighters shall be able to ladder a second-story window to permit firefighters to enter and exit; follow (*insert name of textbook, edition, and page*).
- Presented with photos of various types of buildings, firefighters will correctly identify the type of building as defined by the International Building Code, in less than 30 seconds.
- Presented with a motor vehicle with a crushed door, firefighters will be able to remove the door using extrication tools within 10 minutes in accordance with the depart-

● TRAINING PROGRAM

ment's Best Practice on Motor Vehicle Accidents (*insert page number*).

Another instructor, such as a company officer, should be able to teach a well-written lesson plan. It should include talking points, accurate descriptions of how to teach the program, and the contents of the skill or subject matter to be taught. TOs do not need to reinvent the wheel; they should consult other fire departments to obtain lesson plans that address relevant topics. Of course, the TO will likely need to adapt the lesson plan to the home department's practices and equipment.

Training Reflects the Policies

Ask any TO to list the challenges of the job. The lack of policies to guide the training will be near the top of the list. TOs should not have to create policies on how tasks should be accomplished, but they are often faced with no guidance on how to perform such tasks. Thus, when developing a program on rapid intervention, a TO must be able to create training that implements the department's rapid intervention policy and should not be expected to "make up" a lesson plan based on his expectations for a proper program.

TOs who frequently find themselves without the direction of a policy to guide the development of a lesson plan and are forced to develop lesson plans based on their own beliefs may be accused of implementing "their way" of performing a task. In their defense, what other choice do they have? The TO should advise the chief and the HSO that he needs policies to guide the training.

Should the TO be forced to develop a lesson plan without the benefit of a preexisting best practice or policy, the chief or his designee should review it before it is implemented.

TRAINING OFFERED VS. TRAINING RECEIVED

Merely offering a training program is not sufficient to prevent injuries and illness and to increase proficiency. You must monitor the programs to ensure that the firefighters are participating. Both career and volunteer staff face challenges in this area, as busy days both on and off the job reduce the time available to attend training. However, since the training program was created to reduce risks of injuries and illnesses and to increase proficiency, the TO must ensure that each firefighter is capable of performing the skills and has the knowledge associated with the performance of each service. A motto that could be employed is, "Do the skill or do the drill." Firefighters would be offered the opportunity to take a written and skill-based exam to evaluate competency in each area.

The evaluations are mini-exams based on the objectives stated in each lesson plan. Testing in itself is a problem, as some individuals face difficulties with written exams and other methods of testing. Make the TO aware of these difficulties. Assistance in developing mini-tests may be available from community educational centers.

Minimum Hours of Training

Most departments determine the minimum number of training hours before knowing how long it will take to provide and reinforce the minimum required skills and knowledge for the services they provide. Only after the lesson plans to teach the courses are in place can you determine the minimum number of training hours that will be required.

That being said, it is simply incredible how many departments require fewer than 50, 30, or even 10 hours of training per year for their interior firefighters. Many states require 100 hours of annual training for career firefighters. Volunteer departments should consider similar requirements.

Qualifications for the TO

NFPA 1041, *Standard for Fire Service Instructor Professional Qualifications*, suggests that TOs should have successfully completed Fire Service Instructor I and II. For volunteer departments, this may be a tough requirement, as it necessitates approximately 60 hours of education for each course. Still, the ability to modify an existing lesson plan or to create a new lesson plan is critical to the TO's success. All departments should provide their TO with this level of education.

OSHA regulations require that an instructor have specific training in the area he teaches or be experienced or knowledgeable in the topic. Thus, the TO should ensure that all course instructors are qualified. Not all instructors must be members of your fire department, however. If the TO gives some thought to the task, he can find persons inside and outside of the fire service to teach courses. Persons knowledgeable in construction, hazardous materials, rescue techniques, hybrid vehicle construction, and many other topics reside in and near your community.

Program and Skill Evaluation

NFPA 1500 suggests that the HSO continually evaluate the training program to determine if it is meeting the goals of reducing the risks of injury and illness. The TO should also evaluate the firefighters' skills to ensure that the training program is increasing their proficiency in each of the expected tasks. TOs must be open to criticism in this evaluation and must continually seek to improve the training experience and competencies.

When individuals who do not have the minimum acceptable skills and requisite knowledge are identified, the TO and the HSO must determine the reason for the training failure. Did the individual attend the training? Was a follow-up lesson offered to the individual? Was the training program inadequate or too complicated? Was there an opportunity for asking questions or enhancing the knowledge or skills if there was a failure in performing the skill set? It makes no sense to continue using an ineffective program or a poor lesson plan. All training programs can benefit from a critical examination and revision when necessary. It is well worth the time to continuously reevaluate the training program, especially if there are changing standards or new community hazards.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR TRAINING

OSHA regulations and NFPA 1500 contain standards for training in the fire service.² The OSHA regulations, often known as the "Fire Brigade Standard," provide general minimum requirements for training. These regulations also provide some general guidance as to the frequency of training and specific instruction on limited types of issues.

The regulations require that the fire department ensures that training and education are conducted frequently enough to ensure that each member of the department is able to perform his assigned duties and functions satisfactorily and in a safe

manner so as not to endanger other firefighters. At a minimum, all department members shall be provided with training at least annually, although firefighters who are expected to perform interior structural firefighting shall be provided with an education session or training at least quarterly. Certainly, this should not be an acceptable standard to fire departments. It may not satisfy the requirement that the training be provided frequently enough to ensure the safe performance of duties.

The regulations also require that leaders and training instructors have additional training and education to teach a particular skill set. The training is more comprehensive than that provided to members of a lower rank or those possessing fewer skills and less knowledge.

OSHA regulations³ also require that the department educate its firefighters about special hazards to which they may be exposed during fire and other emergencies, such as the storage and use of flammable liquids and gases, toxic chemicals, radioactive sources, and water-reactive substances.

The TO and the HSO should ensure that firefighters are provided with training on these special hazards at least once a year. The HSO will likely be required to conduct a survey of those hazards present in the department's response area.

Most fire departments are aware that federal regulations require that all persons who respond to releases or potential releases of hazardous substances as part of the initial response must receive training at the first responder operations level. The TO should ensure initial and annual training on these hazardous materials issues.

Evaluate responders to ensure that they understand basic hazard and risk assessment techniques and hazardous materials terms; know how to perform basic control, containment, and confinement operations within the capabilities of the fire department; know how to implement basic decontamination procedures; and understand relevant hazardous materials terminology.

All potential incident commanders (ICs) must complete "Hazardous Materials Incident Command" or a course that provides the same minimum hours of applicable course topics. The TO must provide annual refresher training and evaluations to the potential ICs to assess competency in this area. The department must maintain the record of the assessment and keep a record of the method used to demonstrate competency. Documentation of a lecture and short quiz in the training records will satisfy this requirement.

The fire department must maintain a respiratory protection program under both federal regulations and NFPA recommendations. Although there are a number of requirements for this program, the component related to the role of the TO is that the department must provide training in the hazards to which members are exposed that require use of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) and training in the proper donning and doffing of SCBA, the limitations of its use, its maintenance, and how to use all functions of SCBA.

This training must be given annually. The TO and the HSO should evaluate the training program as it relates to respiratory protection to ensure that each interior firefighter has the necessary skills and knowledge to operate in an immediately dangerous to life or health environment.

A brief example of such a training policy follows:

"Members must annually demonstrate knowledge of the following:

- Why SCBA is necessary and how improper fit, use and maintenance can compromise the protective effect of the respirator;
- The limitations and capabilities of the respirator (melting point, length of air, etc.);
- How to use it effectively and deal with malfunctions;
- How to inspect, don and doff, and check the seal of the mask and SCBA;
- Procedures for maintenance and storage;
- That they are able to recognize medical signs and symptoms that limit or prevent the effective use of SCBA."

Although there is no specific requirement to provide Mayday training, OSHA has cited fire departments for not providing it. This training should ensure that interior firefighters know how to call a Mayday and when it is appropriate to do so. ICs also should be trained in how to handle a Mayday situation.

Your department likely also should be trained in the following: bloodborne pathogen and exposure control (an OSHA requirement), workplace violence training (a Department of Labor requirement), sexual harassment (a best practice), and lockout/tagout (an OSHA requirement).

RECORDKEEPING

To prove compliance, record all training. Records serve many functions, including ensuring that all individuals have completed the required level of training. They can also protect the department from the adverse outcomes of litigation or government workplace safety inspections. Maintain training records and have them available for inspection for the duration of every firefighter's service—in no event for fewer than seven years.

TOs should strongly consider the use of checklists (whether on a records management system or handwritten) to ensure that every member has completed the required minimum training.

•••

Serving as the TO is a daunting task indeed. Not only is the training program difficult to develop, but it also must be continually evaluated to ensure that it is increasing proficiency and reducing chances of injuries. TOs must be qualified to perform these tasks and must have the time and skills to carry them out. It can take years to develop the training program; constantly evaluate it for effectiveness. One thing is certain: A solid training program will save life and property and prevent firefighter injuries. ●

ENDNOTES

1. 29 CFR 1910.156.
2. 29 CFR 1910.156.
3. 29 CFR 1910.120.

● **BRADLEY M. PINSKY** is an attorney representing hundreds of fire departments throughout New York State. He is also the municipal training officer and a captain for the Manlius (NY) Fire Department in Onondaga County. He is a nationally certified fire instructor II and state certified fire officer II. He is one of the four attorneys hosting Fire Engineering's "Fire Service Court Radio" and lectures annually at FDIC. He hosts a Web site at www.emsfirelaw.com.

Developing a Fire Service Training Program

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COURSE EXAMINATION

- 1) If firefighters were to be honest, many would admit that training programs do not reach their potential
 - a. True
 - b. False
- 2) Which of the following is a consequence of substandard training programs?
 - a. Decreased skills
 - b. Decreased proficiency
 - c. Decreased safety
 - d. All of the above
- 3) Which of the following is an issue common to many training programs?
 - a. Department policies are insufficient to guide the development of training programs
 - b. Advanced skills are not developed
 - c. Skills of each firefighter are not evaluated on a regular basis
 - d. All of the above
- 4) Many firefighters think that common issues in many training programs are limited to volunteer departments, but they are also found in career departments
 - a. True
 - b. False
- 5) The first step in developing a training program is to:
 - a. Learn the incident command system
 - b. Develop an Organizational Statement
 - c. Gather the right team
 - d. Solicit input from senior members
- 6) The team selected to develop a training program should consist of which of the following?
 - a. Chief
 - b. Training Officer
 - c. Health and Safety Officer
 - d. All of the above
- 7) After a training program development team has been selected, the team should look at the fire department's:
 - a. Mission Statement
 - b. Organizational Statement
 - c. Vision Statement
 - d. None of the above
- 8) The organizational statement is more specific than the mission statement
 - a. True
 - b. False
- 9) The organizational statement the _____ with clear instructions on the general services firefighters must perform
 - a. Chief
 - b. Mayor
 - c. Health and Safety Officer
 - d. Training Officer
- 10) When developing the training program, the Training Officer should ensure which of the following?
 - a. Each service offered receives adequate attention in the training program
 - b. Each firefighter is expected to provide the services in which they participate in the training programs
 - c. Each firefighter is capable of performing the skills to a set standard
 - d. All of the above
- 11) NFPA 1500 refers to the organizational statement and training program as the:
 - a. Risk Management Plan
 - b. Vision Statement
 - c. Contingency Plan
 - d. None of the above
- 12) The Health and Safety Officer is tasked with developing the risk management plan
 - a. True
 - b. False
- 13) No risk should ever be neglected during training
 - a. True
 - b. False
- 14) The objectives of a lesson plan should address the _____ associated with the service provided as well as the skills and knowledge need to provide the service
 - a. Financial impact
 - b. Risks
 - c. Didactics
 - d. None of the above

Developing a Fire Service Training Program

PROGRAM COMPLETION INFORMATION

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Please evaluate this course by responding to the following statements, using a scale of Excellent = 5 to Poor = 1.

- | | | | | | |
|--|-------|---|---|-----|----|
| 1. To what extent were the course objectives accomplished overall? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
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