



What's Happening

Navy Fire and Emergency Services Newsletter
Protecting Those Who Defend America



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Lightning Rods, Garden Rakes or Doormats

By Ronny J. Coleman

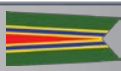
Since the dawn of time, or at least as soon as man was able to put words in use as symbols, he has been comparing himself against other objects and animals in his surroundings. For example, a man who is strong was referred to as “hard as a rock.” Someone who is sly was referred to as “cunning as a fox.” Sometimes that same “cunning” refers to someone being referred to as “sharp as a razor.” The list of analogies can go on and on and on.

Well, we might be able to use that same kind of an analogy when it comes to talking about our fire department organizations. For example, have you ever heard of an organization being referred to as “fat” or “lean”? We all do it and it is kind of fun. Analogies mean that something we are comparing is like something we like or dislike. What about your organization? What is it like? If you were going to compare your fire department to an animal or an inanimate object, what image would you select? Well, of course, most of us would like to select something positive, something that reflects both a good image of ourselves and one that other people would agree with.

Over a period of years, and after looking at large numbers of different firefighting organizations, I have developed three analogies that seem to be relative to the way a fire department is perceived by its community. The three objects that I have selected for symbols are: doormat, the garden rake and lightning rod.

What is a “doormat”? A doormat is an item that is quite necessary in most homes, if one wants to keep the home tidy. It is an object that is placed at the point of entry to the home and is used to make sure that no dirt and debris is inadvertently carried into the living areas. Those who want to protect the sanctity of the home place these doormats out into the weather.

As soon as the doormat has been scuffed, bumped, kicked, abused and otherwise shows signs of deterioration, then the doormat is unceremoniously dumped into the trash can and replaced by some other type of doormat.



Supporting the Fleet, Fighter, and Family



Clipboard (Cont.)

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While the mat is functional and serves a very utilitarian purpose in the home, it is not often shown any respect and generally comes into play only under circumstances where the environment is potentially threatening to the interior of the home. For example, we don't often worry about having doormats during spring and summer. They seem to come into play more often during rainstorms and turbulent times when snow is flying or when mud is being trucked from the garden into the house. It is the same for fire departments that are not treated with any respect, but are expected to react when danger threatens. When the crisis is over, the department fades into the background and receives little or no support.

What about a "garden rake"? Garden rakes are tools that we use to keep our lawns and gardens in repair. They are relatively inexpensive, and are used to cull and scrape around the landscape in order to keep it looking aesthetically pleasing and pleasant. There are a dozen varieties of rakes. Some are small, some are large, some are cheap and some are expensive. There is an interesting thing about a garden rake, however. If you inadvertently forget to put it back on the rack or you put it in a place where it is not properly maintained, it is not uncommon for someone walking into the garden to step upon the tines of the rake and have it come swishing up off the ground to crack them right along the side of the nose. When such an event occurs, the stepee forgets about the utilitarian use of his rake. Not infrequently, the rake is thrown vigorously out of sight or is broken across the owner's knee. No matter how beneficial that rake was in keeping the landscaping clean, when it struck out against its very owner because it reacted to physical leverage, it went from a tool to an enemy in a split second. The second it took that handle to travel from the ground to the bridge of the person's nose changes the whole relationship.

Sometimes our departments behave like garden rakes when disruptive and negative feelings well up in "doormat" situations. Lack of meaningful dialogue or mutual respect often leads to labor unrest and crisis management. The "garden rake" strikes out and city administration reacts by trying to destroy the tool by removing it or finding a cheaper version - like public safety.

Then there is the "lightning rod." What are lightning rods? Most people don't even remember what a lightning rod is like because modern society doesn't really require them on individual homes. But, on large high-rise buildings, and in some parts of the United States, there is still the necessity for a piece of metal to be placed atop a building to attract electricity in the atmosphere which diverts it before it destroys the structure that it rests upon. Lightning rods stick up higher and are more visible than any other element of the building. They are designed to attract those tremendous discharges of energy that are created in the atmosphere during thunderstorms and other turbulent weather conditions.

The lightning rod sits up there as a beacon and provides safety for the structure that placed it there. It is in the vanguard. It is visible, but it is prepared. It is under attack quite a bit of time. Its greatest strength is in knowing that despite all of the power being generated in the environment, it has been designated to protect the structure that it rests upon and it does so with confidence.

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“Lightning rod” fire departments are departments that attract attention. They are “doers.” They are the departments that get stronger and stronger as the environment gets more and more turbulent.

The reason I have selected these three analogies for organizations is that it appears fire departments operate in environments in which they are treated in fashions somewhat like the three appliances just described. Let me give you an example.

Is it not true that in many of our communities, the fire department is considered to be someone that does the dirty work? They light them, we fight them. We are the doormats for the community. We are supposed to do all the dirty work to make sure that the safety and security of the community is assured even if it means that the lives and safety of our firefighters be sacrificed.

Is it not true, for example, that many people in political life and in local government are convinced that the professional firefighter is an evil necessity? Witness, if you will the tremendous increase and recurring emphasis on the development of “public safety officers.” There is a philosophy in some parts of our society that firefighting is nothing more than a janitorial service. We sweep up after some sort of tragedy has occurred. We are doormats that are there to protect the sanitary aspects of a community and if the doormat gets kind of scruffy around the edges, it can be overhauled or thrown away, if the seasons of the year change.

Fire departments that are organized, managed and maintained strictly for major catastrophes soon find out that they need catastrophes to stay in business, if we stay in the spring and summer of fire losses. If no lives are lost or no property destroyed, then the doormat gets swept off periodically and then eventually taken out of service and placed somewhere else.

Unfortunately, if a doormat is removed and placed in the garage, down in the basement, or stuck away in some sort of closet, and a spring storm or a violent winter weather condition occurs, it is too late.

It is too late to find it. It’s too late to go buy a new one at the store. Mud and water gets tromped into the home. Catastrophe can disable and demoralize a community if the fire department serves only as a “doormat.”

Then there are the “garden rake” departments. Neat, clean, sanitary, organized, but they only work when someone else tells them what their jobs are. Instead of creating problems and Instead of becoming advocates for their activities, they only come off the rack long enough to perform the task of their masters.

If, for some unusual reason, they are left unattended for an extended period of time, they begin to represent a threat to anyone who attempts to change them.

Examples of “garden rake” organizations are ones that fail to take a leadership role in managing the change in their profession and instead strike back against anyone attempting to change their “way of doing business.”

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Ronny J. Coleman

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Look around you and I am sure you can find examples of “garden rake” organizational response. Crucial labor relations events have led to departments not only losing credibility in the community, but in many cases forcing political figures and city managers to start probing around for ways of replacing them with some other new type of “rake.”

Sooner or later, someone comes up with a “mechanized” or “automated” rake or someone comes up with a “joint use rake” and the garden rake finds itself not only exiled from its former use, but obsolete. Peter Drucker has already said that we are going to be managing in turbulent times. “Lightning rod” fire departments are ones right up there in the midst of all the turbulence. They are ones that are attracting a lot of the energy and attracting a lot of the attention that is going on in government because they are descriptive with regard to the community’s fire problem. Anyone who has been in the Midwest or has ever lived in the area of thunderstorms knows that lightning, while it is a discharge of electrical energy, is also followed by horrendous claps of thunder.

“Lightning rod” fire departments are chaos surrounded by a cacophony of sound, and they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. They are protecting the infrastructure of the community.

You may be saying to yourself that these analogies that have just been drawn could just as easily be related to individuals. You are right. They can be. As a matter of fact, it can almost be said that the organizational analogy is probably a good reflection of the combined leadership styles of all of the individuals who have the responsibility for managing the organization.

What kind of an individual are you? What kind of an organization is your fire department? Perhaps you can come up with some other kind of analogy that will be more comfortable for you and reflect more favorably on what you believe is your role in life. I am sure we have got some bulldozers out there. We have probably got a few life preserver organizations and there has got to be a couple of you out there that could only be classified as “dynamite.”

In the final analysis, however, it is really not important what we think we are, it is what other people think we are. How do you believe you would be referred to by other elements in your community? What we are all striving for and what we should all be attempting to achieve is to receive a favorable comparison and contrast in our communities. This can be reflected by one of two things.

It can be reflected by the degree of community support that we receive for our programs or it can be reflected by the confidence reflected in our department by those in political and administrative authority over the delivery of fire protection services.

We cannot afford to have a negative analogy applied to us. The fire service has an awesome responsibility. Make sure that we are using the right tools to do the job and our communities will be safer, our jobs will be more secure, and our communities will be stronger. It’s far better to be a “lightning rod” than a “doormat” - don’t you think?

Combs Cartoon

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Progress by a Nose



On the Job - Guam



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Fire Warden Training During COVID-19

By Fire Prevention Chief Angel Roman Naval Base Guam Fire and Emergency Services

Fire Wardens undergo comprehensive training to ensure fire safety standards, evacuation plans, and awareness of emergency reporting procedures are intact and adhered to. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, Naval Base Guam Fire & Emergency Services implemented measures that enabled this critical training to continue while reducing the risk of exposure in the classroom.



The challenge for my fire prevention staff was when (not if) COVID-19 reaches the island, what protocols could we develop to increase the safety of the students and instructors? For classroom training, we implemented CDC guidelines which included social distancing, and wearing of face coverings. We also disinfected the areas after each training session to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As part of the new normal, we have also begun utilizing Microsoft-Teams to conduct Fire Warden and other training classes.

These proactive measures will allow for "business to continue" by modifying the normal and using technology to adjust to the abnormality of this pandemic virus in a safe manner.

Last Alarms

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Last Alarms

The USFA reported 41 line of duty deaths in 2020. The following line of duty deaths were reported since we published our last issue:

Joseph Nealon, Jr. ♥
Nanticoke, PA

Eric Gore 🦠
Philadelphia, PA

Joshua MacDonald
Berthoud, CO

Klayton Manning
Luling, TX

Ronnie Cordero 🦠
Little Falls, NJ

Russell Roberson ♥
Jaeger, WV

2020 Totals

♥ 11 (26%) 🚗 6 (14%) 🦠 12 (29%)

♥ Indicates cardiac related death

🚗 Indicates vehicle accident related death

🦠 Indicates COVID19 related death



TCoOO Update



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Taking Care of Our Own

There are currently six DoD firefighters in the Taking Care of Own program.

Taking Care of Our Own invites all DoD F&ES personnel to donate ONE HOUR of annual leave to DoD F&ES members in need to enable them to focus on recovery rather than financial distress.

Name	Location	Point of Contact
Kevin Stuebs	DLA Columbus, OH	Brent.Moreland@dla.mil
Steve Holekamp	Tinker AFB, OK	Thomas.Trello@us.af.mil
Alfie Soyosa	Metro San Diego, CA	Nicole.Stacy@navy.mil
Scott McGee	Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, NH	Marc.J.Smith@navy.mil
Andrew Swick	USAG Yuma, AZ	Daniel.P.Goodwin2.civ@mail.mil
Robert Viafranco	NAS Corpus Christi, TX	Matthew.Sedgwick1@navy.mil

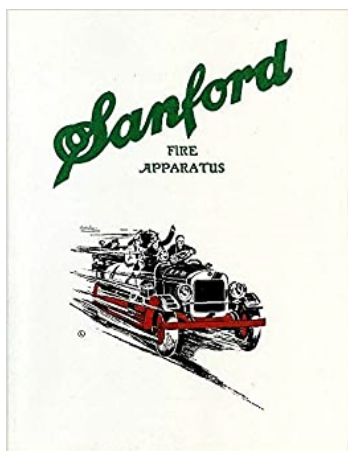
We provided all the service component chiefs with the proper procedures to enroll someone in the Taking Care of Our Own program. There was a trend of people using their own formats and forms which worked okay until the inevitable breach of personal identifying information (PII). We were very concerned about protecting PII when the program was stood up in 2003 and we designed standard procedures and forms to address those concerns.

Please contact your service component chief if you haven't seen this information recently.

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The Last Sanford Pumper From World War II

By Tom Shand



By October, 1941 with the threat of war on the horizon all fire apparatus production was restricted to fill government orders and with prior approval certain municipalities where these fire departments protected industrial facilities that were in wartime production. The Office of Production Management prohibited the use of aluminum, chrome, cadmium and tin for exterior components and fittings. After the outbreak of World War II virtually all manufacturing was devoted to support the troops and the war effort with several fire apparatus manufacturers tasked to supply both trailer pumps and fire apparatus to the various branches of the military.

During this period there were four major builders of fire apparatus within the State of New York American La France in Elmira, Ward La France in nearby Elmira Heights, Buffalo Fire Appliance in its hometown of Buffalo, and the Sanford Fire Equipment Company in Syracuse. Each of these companies rapidly switched to producing hundreds of structural and airport crash rescue vehicles for the military, all of which were devoid of chrome fittings, adapters, nozzles and other appliances.

While a smaller builder when compared to American and Ward LaFrance companies, Sanford Fire Equipment produced a number of trailer pumps for the Coast Guard, Army Corps of Engineers with the rest of their production dedicated to building pumps for the U.S. Navy. Sanford completed a number of different model chassis several Dodge pumper were built for the ammunition depot in Bayonne, New Jersey with Ford pumps destined for Bremerton, Washington. Sanford also produced a number of International model K-5 commercial chassis pumpers for the U.S. Navy with many of these shipped to the South Pacific between 1942 and 1944.

Sanford built ten model N-75 pumpers for the U.S. Navy which were delivered between 1943 and 1945. These rigs were built with a 175 inch wheelbase and powered by a Continental 22R six cylinder gas motor rated at 145 horsepower and were equipped with a Hale centrifugal fire pump rated at 750 gpm along with a 500 gallon booster tank. The fire pump was enclosed behind hinged doors with the front grill, hood and fenders all custom fabricated in the Sanford factory.

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Tom Shand

TSP News



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These pumpers were delivered to U.S. Navy bases in Cape May, NJ, Portsmouth, RI, Naval Hospital in Astoria, OR and Amphibious Training Base in Morro Bay, CA. Three pumpers were each delivered to the Navy Supply Depot in Scotia, NY and three for overseas shipment to the Hawaiian Islands.

Sanford was in the process of building additional pumpers for the U.S. Navy when VJ day was announced in August, 1945. The Navy wished to cancel the contract, but did accept one of the two pumpers leaving Sanford a partially completed vehicle. The following year the Stockport, New York Fire Company was in desperate need of new equipment and contracted with Sanford to complete the last model N-75 pumper that was ordered by the Navy. In addition to being the last pumper ordered by the Navy during the war, this vehicle was the last Sanford custom chassis apparatus built.

The influences of producing vehicles for the military had a long lasting impact on fire truck production and lead to many innovations Back in the Day including two stage fire pumps, high pressure fog and four section, steel aerial ladders among others.

Options for Participants Affected by COVID-19

Temporary loan options made possible by the CARES Act for TSP participants affected by COVID-19 are now available.

To be eligible for the CARES Act loan options, you must be a qualified individual. You're a qualified individual if you meet at least one of the following criteria listed in the CARES Act:

- You have been diagnosed with the virus SARS-CoV-2 or with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by a test approved by the CDC.
- Your spouse or dependent has been diagnosed with such virus or disease.
- You are experiencing adverse financial consequences as a result of being quarantined, furloughed or laid off or having work hours reduced.
- You are unable to work due to lack of child care, closing or reducing hours of a business owned or operated by the individual or other factors as determined by the Secretary of the Treasury (or the Secretary's delegate).

The maximum loan amount is increased from \$50,000 to \$100,000, and the portion of your available balance you can borrow is raised from 50% to 100%. To apply, [log in to My Account and use the online tool](#). The deadline for applying is 18 September 2020.

You may suspend your obligation to make payments on your TSP loan or loans for the rest of calendar year 2020. This applies to existing loans and loans taken between now and November 30, 2020. To apply, complete and submit [Form TSP-46, CARES Act Loan Suspension Request](#). Carefully read all of the instructions on the form before submitting.

If you are thinking of getting another loan in 2020 in addition to placing your current loan on suspension, request the loan first so that the suspension can be applied to both loans.

On the Job – El Centro

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Adapting to the Times

By Gil Chavez, Assistant Fire Chief

For the last four months, the United States has faced a national crisis not seen since the Poliovirus peaked in 1952. In 2020, we face greater challenges from the ease of transmission assisted by the availability of travel through air, land, and sea. First responders and medical personnel have had to manage caring for those who have been infected with COVID-19 while also ensuring they do not become infected as well. This has been troublesome with the lack of knowledge on how to combat the virus, and the lack of resources to protect themselves. Many agencies have sought ways to overcome those limitations to protect patients and themselves, and NAF El Centro Fire & Emergency Services is doing its part to keep themselves safe, while still providing excellent service to the community.



Sean Stratton, Interim Fire Chief for NAF El Centro, urged his firefighters to come together and develop ideas and strategies in order to maintain its level of service. "I knew that COVID-19 was going to go on for some undetermined amount of time. Therefore, we had to come up with an organic manner in which we can ensure that our station stays disinfected along with our apparatuses' that may be exposed to COVID-19. This is paramount for the protection of our firefighters, their families, and our community"

Chief Stratton researched what other fire stations were doing and decided to start using a gravity fed spray gun filled with a solution of water and 5% bleach. The spray gun is attached to a spare air hose of a SCBA. The protocol for using the spray gun as a way to sanitize surfaces includes wearing impermeable personal protective equipment, and letting the solution sit on potentially contaminated areas for at least five minutes. The concept of using a spray gun was placed into action after identifying the possibility of potential exposure to firefighters by hand-cleaning surfaces and other areas. As Chief Stratton explained, "using the spray gun allows our cleaning measures to move fast and effectively." This also works on cleaning the fire and medical apparatus. As he continues, "It overwhelmingly saves us time. After a response to a COVID-19 related emergency, upon our return to the station, we will switch out our ambulances, disinfect the unit that responded to the emergency completely, 100%."

This method is not only unique to NAF El Centro Fire & Emergency Services, but also adopted by Security Forces on base. Our regional fire command staff endorsed the idea, and it quickly spread throughout several agencies. "We are just trying to 'think outside of the box'. Funding has been limited everywhere within the DoD that we had to find ways to keep our costs down, and this was one way for us to do it ourselves," Chief Stratton said. All firefighters at NAF El Centro agree that it is a creative way of saving money and lives.

Risk

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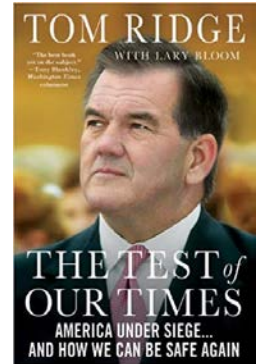
Practical Risk Management for Firefighters

By Robert Wagner

Risk management? That's that thing chiefs sit around and talk about when deciding how to allocate our annual budget, right? I'm just a line firefighter; that's above my pay grade. Not so fast.

What if I told you that you – the hose-line stretching, vent-hole-cutting, apparatus-riding, shift-working firefighter – are an expert at managing risk?

Tom Ridge, America's very first secretary of Homeland Security, said it best in his book *The Test of Our Times: America Under Siege ... And How We Can Be Safe Again*: "Risk management is a concept all of us practice in our daily lives, but we don't call it that. People make financial decisions, without ever thinking they're practicing risk management. Do we really need to pay more in order to raise the coverage ceiling on our auto and home insurance policies today? ..Do we need a car that has side air bags? Should we bother with our seat belt, or should we make appointments to get a flu shot?"



Just as Secretary Ridge was making the concept of risk management relatable to the everyday American, I want to show how it applies to you – the men and women on the fireline.

Whether you realize it or not, your job is full of risk management. From deciding when to don your SCBA to what diameter hoseline to stretch, you're always subconsciously conducting a risk-benefit analysis – you're always sizing up how much risk you're willing to accept in exchange for efficiency in getting the job done. Secretary Ridge put it quite simply when he wrote, "Risk management involves making choices – trade-offs." Every time you read smoke to predict the time to flashover, decide which rooms in a burning building should be searched first, or put on your PPE, you're managing risk. You do this every day – and you're really good at it.

The mental game of risk management

If I'm already great at managing risk, why waste time reading this article? Why study risk management? The world is infinitely complex – too complex for our minds to even grasp just how complex it truly is. In *The Knowledge Illusion*, Steven Sloman and Philip Fernbach explain that our brain is flooded all day with information about our environment, yet our mind doesn't seem to get bogged down in the details. How does it do this? How are we able to successfully navigate an endlessly complicated world?

Cognitive scientists once believed that our minds functioned like a computer, but thinking about how a computer works quickly shuts that theory down. Like humans, computers are logical – too logical. They analyze every input of information they are given thoroughly – too thoroughly. Computers lack the ability to see the big picture. In other words, as Sloman and Fernbach put it, if your mind was a computer, you'd never get anything done.

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Unlike a computer, your mind is built for pattern recognition. When it encounters a problem in the form of a familiar pattern, it's able to quickly reach into memory and produce a response based on what worked to solve a similar problem in the past. In *Deep Survival*, Laurence Gonzales calls this a mental model, and it's the shortcut that allows you to see the big picture and make quick decisions in fast-paced situations. It's that gut feeling that tells you where to cut that vent hole and when to open the nozzle. Your mind says, "I've seen this before, and I know precisely what to do – I have a model for this."

We find ourselves in trouble when our mental model doesn't match our environment and, in an infinitely complex world, that's not hard to do. Gonzales underscores that our environment is constantly changing, and our models can easily grow outdated or encounter foreign situations. We simply can't know it all, and we can't foresee everything.

So, we need to constantly be preparing for the unthinkable and setting ourselves up for success when things don't go according to plan. How do we do that? Easy: We manage our risks, and we do so by practicing safety. This requires that we identify hazards (things that can hurt us), anticipate their probability of doing us harm, and take steps to minimize the chances of that occurring.

As the risk management guru Gordan Graham likes to say, "Predictable is preventable." We may not be able to see into the future or completely eliminate all our risk, but we can implement safety measures to reduce the likelihood of bad things happening.

6 easy steps to staying safe

The quality of firefighters I admire most is that they are pragmatic; they like actionable information without the fluff. In this spirit of efficiency, here's a practical list of six things you can do every shift day to ensure you are effectively managing your risk and staying safe.

1. Train: Half of you are shouting "amen" while the other half are rolling their eyes at "those guys." I get it. For some of us, this is a job and, for others, a passion. I'm not here to launch into a sermon about how into the job anyone needs to be. No matter where you stand on the debate of how much (or little) we should be training, we can all agree that nobody wants to feel incompetent at their job, everyone wants to go home alive at the end of their shift, and we all want to do the right thing.

In this career, we have the potential to find ourselves in situations that require us to react quickly but don't encounter often enough for our brains to develop an automatic response. As such, we must artificially build models for these instances – the mental models described by Gonzales – and we do that through training.

Chances are most people reading this article have never had to call a mayday while operating at a fire, yet they can probably rattle one off without giving it much thought if prompted. How are they able to do this if they've never actually had to do it? Simple: They practiced calling maydays under stress while attending the fire academy. Their fire instructors artificially built them a mental model – one that, should the situation arise, could very well save their lives.

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Things we have to build artificial models for, like calling a mayday, are called critical tasks. These are things we don't do often but really need to be proficient at should the need arise. We should train on critical tasks every day we are at the firehouse.

Effective training for critical tasks doesn't have to be long, drawn out or complicated. When I conduct my morning check of my SCBA, occasionally I'll practice putting it on, securing the waist belt, turning it on, and donning my facepiece – all while wearing my fire gloves. Early in my career, I had my facepiece knocked off during a collapse. It's not fun, especially if you aren't prepared to quickly remedy the situation. Adding this simple training drill to my morning routine not only provides me an effective way to prepare for such dynamic situations, it also builds my familiarity with a critical piece of my PPE – an awareness that could possibly save my life in a mayday event.

2. Work out: By now, it's been drilled into our heads that heart attacks are the leading killers of firefighters, but are you aware that the NFPA has identified overexertion and strains as the leading causes of fireground injuries?

Maintaining your physical fitness isn't just a matter of preventing heart disease, it's about ensuring your body is fit to do the job. A fit body does the job well, and performing well is the foremost way we stay safe.

And while you're at it, don't forget to drink water – a lot of water. Dehydration is a risk that can be easily managed.

3. Take a shower: I can hear your significant others applauding in approval from here. Cancer prevention is a huge topic in the fire service right now, with debates focusing on the best ways to protect firefighters. Regardless of where you stand, we can all agree that you should probably go back to the firehouse and take a shower after a fire.

During every hazmat lecture I give, I conclude by reminding students to go back to the firehouse and take a shower after the response. The hazmat industry recognizes that, in most cases, contamination can be effectively mitigated by removing your clothing and washing off. In fact, if you ever attend the Hazardous Materials Technologies Course at the Center for Domestic Preparedness, colloquially known as the Live Agent Course, you'll probably end their decontamination process with a shower.

Research shows that dermal absorption is a significant source of our exposure to carcinogens during structure fires. We can easily manage this risk by simply practicing good hygiene. Even if you don't buy in to the arguments for post-fire contamination reduction, your coworkers will appreciate you not stinking, as will your significant others.

4. Rest: Yes, I've just told you to nap on the job. Before I'm flooded with angry letters from chiefs and taxpayers, let's consider the science. For firefighters, risk management is a game that requires extensive use of the mind. The sleep deprivation and interruption that come with 24-hour shift schedules wreak havoc on firefighters' ability to perform cognitively. They also contribute to fatigue, depression, cancer, and host of other health issues that negatively impact firefighters' ability to do the job well.

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As the famed Dr. Louis Pasteur said, “Luck favors the prepared mind” – and a prepared mind is one that’s well rested. Firefighters must show up to emergencies mentally and physically ready to make good decisions and take quick actions under unfavorable circumstances. Napping and going to bed early increase the likelihood that you will perform optimally under stress.

5. Communicate: In almost every post-incident critique I read, poor communication is listed as a contributing factor to failure. It is fascinating how people can be so terrible at something they do so frequently. It proves that communication isn’t inherent to humans; it’s a skill. Fortunately, skills can be learned, practiced and improved upon. By doing so, you ensure your ability to operate successfully and safely under high-stress conditions.

In *Team of Teams*, General Stanley McChrystal, former commander of special operations forces in Iraq, explains that teams that promote an atmosphere of openness, transparency and mutual trust among members are the most successful at facing adversity. Be a thinking firefighter, actively engaged in the tactical decision-making process on the fireground, not a well-programmed robot. Understand the overall strategic aims of your officers, and trust the judgment of your teammates. Most importantly, speak up when something doesn’t feel right – it probably isn’t. This is your mind’s subconscious way of saying, “I’ve seen this before, and I know how the story ends.”

6. Study failure: As Gonzales advises in *Deep Survival*, “If you could collect the dead around you and sit by the campfire and listen to their tales, you might find yourself in the best survival school of all. Since you can’t, read the accident reports in your chosen field of recreation.” In your case, study the investigatory reports covering line-of-duty deaths and serious injuries. By learning from the fatal mistakes of others, you can steer clear of similar situations.

Safety IS risk management

Risk management is not an obscure, abstract idea or strategic game played out in the offices of agency executives; it is a mental process we employ every day. By practicing safety, we manage our predictable risks and prepare for the day our mental models fail to accurately forecast the future. While you are already great at managing risk, including these six steps in your daily routines will improve your chances for success when the stakes are high.

About the author

Robert Wagner is a firefighter with the Indianapolis Fire Department, assigned to Engine and Tactical 7. He’s a hazardous materials specialist for Indiana Task Force 1, a radiation specialist for Indiana’s Radiation Nuclear Detection Task Force, and a USAR/CBRN subject-matter expert contracted to U.S. Army North. Wagner is a nationally registered paramedic and currently pursuing his masters degree at the Naval Postgraduate School.



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Your Legacy

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You Do Not Write the Final Chapter

By Gary Ludwig, IAFC President

If you were to die tomorrow, what kind of leader will you be known for while you were serving in the fire service?

If you retired tomorrow, will your firefighters be happy to see you go or miss your leadership?

And if you were retired and died years later, would the fire department you served even send representatives to your funeral?



The true judges of you

Taking assessment centers and interviewing for a fire leadership position is just the first step. The real assessment center on how well you performed and, ultimately, how you will be judged, takes place the rest of your career.

A positive or negative impact?

I've been in fire departments where some company and chief officers have made such a positive or negative impact that 15, 20, 30 years or more after they retire, they are still remembered and talked about by those who served with them. Even newer members of the department who never worked with the person hear stories of them and the actions they took while on the job. I've seen those firefighters carry on the stories.

Some are remembered in a good way, and others are deemed "the worst" firefighter, company officer or chief in the history of the fire department. Some are admired, and some are despised.

I have witnessed firefighters come to an officer's funeral and salute the casket one last time, even when no order to salute was given at that moment because they admired and respected the person so much. On the other hand, I have known fire officers who were so loathed that when they held their retirement party on a day where people on their shift could come because they were off duty, no one came. I have even seen chief officers sneak out the backdoor on their last day to avoid anyone knowing they left because they know anyone saying goodbye to them would be joyous. That is how little they were respected as a fire officer.

Be remembered for the right reasons

What was the difference between those who were revered and those who were vilified?

Those whose legacy will live on positively were change-agents. They chose to lead firefighters, not manage them. They promoted a culture of diversity and inclusiveness so that even when a firefighter who was not carrying their own weight, they weren't disciplined, but they were lifted-up, mentored, coached and encouraged to be better than they were.

Your Legacy (Cont.)

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Gary Ludwig

These change-agents did not believe in a rule-driven fire department; they believed in a value-driven fire department where firefighters did the right things for the right reasons, treated everyone fairly, and gave their all on every call, regardless of the nature of the call. They knew if you operated with values, all the rules would be followed.

These fire leaders who have been remembered long after their retirement or death did not allow bullying of other firefighters. They did not insist that you were either a part of the “Good Ole Boys Club” or you weren’t. Everyone was a part of one team.

These fire service leaders mentored and coached their subordinates so that the next generation of firefighters was prepared to step into leadership roles and serve. They lead by example.

Another method for being remembered well beyond your days as a fire service leader is to respect others and be honorable. Do the right things for the right reasons, and don’t try to screw over your fellow firefighters. Don’t abuse your position and use it to harm others like I have seen so many do, as they are remembered for just that – being a bully.

Chances are you will not be remembered for curing cancer, wiping out some horrible disease, revolutionizing the world financial system or anything else that will rise to the level that your birth or death date will be announced by some radio announcer 50 years later because of how important you were. Instead, you will be remembered for how you treated others, how well you performed your job, and how much you prepared those coming up behind you to carry on the tradition and service found in your department.

This quote sums it up: “They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

All of us should leave it better than we found it. Your mission as a company or chief fire officer should also be to leave your fire department better than you found it the day you walked in the door for your first shift.

CNIC Staff Change



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Valerie Douglas Joins CNIC HQ N30 Team



Born and raised in Washington, D.C., Valerie brings years of experience as a programmer, database analyst, software tester, and trainer before joining CNIC N5 where she served as the DRRS program lead for 10 years. She fills Wallace Ansari’s position on our Integration Branch.

She coaches middle school basketball, runs a senior women’s basketball league and competes competitively in senior women’s basketball and volleyball. She won a silver medal at the 2017 National Senior Games in

basketball. Loves the outdoors, hiking, camping, fishing and gardening. Valerie is the mother of 3 children, 2 dogs, a cat and grandmother of 7.

Please join us in welcoming Valerie to the CNIC N3 team!

SA Matters!

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The Impact of Oversharing

By Rich Gasaway, PhD.

Have you ever been around someone who takes twenty minutes to tell a five-minute story? What does that do to you? I know what it does to me. It lowers my vigilance (i.e., the amount of attention I am channeling to them), it can cause me to become frustrated, bored, tune them out and find other things to give my attention to. And, it flaws my situational awareness. The same thing can happen on an emergency scene when someone is oversharing on the radio. Let's explore this challenge.



Information Overload

When operating in a high stress, high consequence environment, being exposed to high volumes of information is not your friend. It is your enemy. Stress impacts the brain's ability to analyze complex, detailed and massive amounts of data. When bombarded with information, the information processors of the brain will begin to shut down.

If the information is auditory and your processor shuts down you may go deaf and not even realize you have. In the process of shutting down, you may experience a phenomenon where you are hearing something but cannot make out exactly what the words are. Think of the teacher on the Peanuts cartoon when she's talking to Charlie. You hear something, but you cannot make out what she is saying.

Speed of processing

There is a limit as to how fast the brain can process auditory information and, unfortunately, a flaw in our human design is being able to talk faster than we can comprehend. This leaves us in a deficit position, trying to comprehend the meaning of a message when the words are coming at us faster than we can make sense of them.

When this happens, you may begin to cherry-pick familiar phrases or key in on words that have emotional meaning to you. But, full comprehension of the message is not likely. Unfortunately, we may "think" we are fully comprehending the message and we may find ourselves acknowledging the message as if we are fully comprehending it, only to find out later, usually after some event makes our lack of comprehension evident, that there has been a flaw in our understanding.

Radioactivity

Have you ever known someone who was "RADIOACTIVE" meaning once they keyed up their radio they just didn't seem to know when to shut up? We can learn to tune out people, regardless of what they are saying when they have proven they cannot control their use of the radio.

SA Matters! (Cont.)

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Rich Gasaway, PhD.

I once heard someone say (jokingly) that every first responder should be issued a radio (for the benefit of their safety), but not all should be issued a battery. Actually, the answer (obviously) isn't withholding the battery. The answer is teaching responders how and when to talk on the radio and how and when to NOT talk on the radio.

Communications Training

Very few responders (myself included) were ever taught how to talk on a radio. I don't mean a class on how to manipulate the various features of the radio's knobs, buttons, and switches. I mean how to talk on the radio. Some of us have been fortunate enough to have good role models who took the time to demonstrate best practices. Others, unfortunately, have not been so lucky.



I have seen classes on the topic of radio communications springing up at various conferences I am attending and I find that encouraging because flawed communications is a significant barrier to the formation of situational awareness. Being able to convey an accurate meaning, in a few words, in a way that is commonly understood, while under stress, is an art. But it can be mastered with training and practice.

Dr. Gasaway's Advice

Obtain some radio recordings of stressful, complex incidents and listen to them with a critical ear. Assess the volume, speed, complexity, and detail being shared. Opportunities for improvement should jump out at you, especially if you notice there is little open airtime or if there are multiple occurrences where radio traffic is being covered up.

Some radio traffic is critical. Some is necessary. Some is completely unnecessary and can, with discipline, be avoided or shared face-to-face. Identify each category and ensure members know what should not be said on the radio, especially during critical times of an incident.

Radio traffic can, over time, become sloppy and inefficient. This is especially true if the sloppiness/inefficiencies have not had any consequences. For example, missed radio traffic from at-risk personnel is a near-miss. How so you may ask? Remember a near-miss is an event that, if the circumstances were just slightly different, might have a catastrophic outcome.

In some departments, it is common that radio traffic from at-risk companies must be repeated two, three or four times. It has become such a standard that no one gives it a second thought. This is especially likely to happen when there are high volumes of traffic on the radio channel. Organizations that do not see the huge potential of this problem have likely become complacent. Their guard is down because there has not been a consequence of excessive radio traffic.

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Failure to Lead

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The Consequences of Doing Nothing

By Bruce Bjorge

Firefighter Rick Willard is a newly promoted driver/operator with the Springview Fire Department Engine Company 5. Although he's only been driving the engine for a few shifts, Firefighter Willard is already demonstrating aggressive driving tactics. En route to calls, he drives above the posted speed limit and doesn't always come to a complete stop at stop signs and red lights. Captain Anne Bieber has also observed Firefighter Willard making aggressive comments and gestures at other drivers.

Responding to a structure fire, Battalion Chief Angel Herrera finds himself just behind Engine 5. He observes Firefighter Willard weaving rapidly in between traffic and moving through a red light after slowing only slightly. Arriving on scene, BC Herrera passes Captain Bieber on his way to the command post. "Rick's driving like an idiot," BC Herrera says. "You should probably say something to him."

Two weeks later, Engine 5 is again dispatched to a structure fire with Firefighter Willard behind the wheel. Moving through an intersection, the apparatus is involved in a motor vehicle crash with another vehicle that results in a civilian fatality.

This is, of course, a fictional scenario. But a similar situation can happen to any fire service organization at any time. For sure, Firefighter Willard bears responsibility for engaging in reckless, risky driving. But his behavior was observed by two supervisors over a period of weeks or months. Their failure to lead is at the heart of this tragedy.

As the company officer, Captain Bieber was responsible for knowing the department's policy on driving, recognizing behavior not in compliance with policy, and taking actions to get that behavior back in alignment with department expectations. That did not happen.

Battalion Chief Herrera's responsibilities are no different—the scope of his supervision is simply bigger. Yet he, too, failed to lead.

Unfortunately, such behavior is all too common in the fire service. Sometimes, the failure to lead is situational—an officer may be having a bad day or might be sick or fatigued. On a deeper level, however, leading is uncomfortable. It requires us to ask ourselves whether we're really doing everything we're supposed to be doing—and sometimes the answer is difficult to face. As a result, we're not sure what decision to make so we don't make one at all.

It's important to distinguish between failure to lead and ineffective leadership. Poor leaders are still moving the organization in the right direction—perhaps not quickly enough or with the needed intensity, but still moving forward. Failure to lead is moving backward, because in high-risk industries like the fire service, there is no sitting still. Failure to act moves the organization and its personnel backward.

Failure to Lead (Cont.)

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Three main factors contribute to the fire service leadership failure:

Lack of mentoring before the supervisor promoted to a leadership position. Put simply, no one showed them how to lead. It's a lot easier to replicate the needed behavior when you've seen it in action.

Wrong people in leadership positions. Firefighters who are "book smart" and can pass written tests and promote quickly may lack practical skills needed to take decisive action on the fireground. Since most departments are responding to fewer fires, it takes longer to expose the deficiency, and by the time it is obvious, the ability to reassign them may have passed.



Burnout. Sometimes, failure to lead is seen even in excellent supervisors who are can-do people with a track record of turning problem personnel around and fixing problems. This reputation sometimes leads to them being assigned more and more problems, until they become burned out and give up. We see this even at the chief level, with chiefs who have been beaten up by the city council one too many times or endured one too many rounds of budget cuts and station closings. At one time they led, but now they're just getting by.

In our scenario, any of these three factors could apply. If Captain Bieber never had a strong supervisor who demonstrated effective ways to correct behavior, she may recognize the problem but lack the knowledge of how to step in and stop Firefighter Willard's reckless driving. On the other hand, perhaps Captain Bieber simply isn't suited for a supervisory position—she fails to recognize the problem or even if she does, she is not willing to make the right call. Or, perhaps this is Captain Bieber's third assignment this year. She keeps getting sent to new stations to solve problems and she's over it. We could run through these same possibilities for BC Herrera.

Fire service leadership failure has consequences that start with the particular situation and spiral out from there.

In our scenario, the most obvious consequences are physical. A civilian was killed; firefighters might be injured; those involved in the crash may experience mental trauma. But the consequences extend beyond physical. There are "political" consequences, too—Firefighter Willard might lose his job, Captain Bieber or BC Herrera may be disciplined or demoted, and the department's reputation may suffer. And finally, there will almost certainly be a lawsuit, which is guaranteed to be expensive since the crash involved a fatality. If the city is self-insured, the money for the suit will come out of the city's general revenue, which means fewer resources overall. The city might have to postpone raises for all city workers for a few years, for example. There's a host of consequences we hardly ever consider when thinking of the incident itself.

But even more dangerous is when a failure of leadership permeates the organization, becoming the norm rather than the exception limited to a specific incident. Then, additional consequences arise, including:

Failure to Lead (Cont.)

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Bruce Bjorge

Increase in firefighter injuries and risk of line-of-duty death. Strong leadership is needed to keep firefighters safe. Fire and EMS work is inherently risky, but when supervisors are reluctant to make decisions, the risk is exacerbated.

Poor morale. Lack of fire service leadership means personnel don't understand the "why" of the work they do. Leaders must articulate the mission in a way that's easy to understand and get behind. When they fail to do so, personnel will lose enthusiasm for the work they do as well as the perseverance needed to get through long, challenging shifts.

Going rogue. Fire chiefs complain about firefighters having a "rogue mentality," coming off as rebellious or going against the organization mission. In fact, such behavior is often the result of a lack of strong leadership. "Rogue" firefighters often have the best intentions and are driven to do the right thing, but no one is showing them the path—so they do their own thing. Even in organizations with strong leadership, there will be employees who operate outside the organization culture. But they will be fewer and have less impact.

"Raising" the next generation of poor leaders. Leaders cannot grow and develop in a culture that lacks leadership. As new leaders move up in the organization, they are likely to replicate the problem. Often the only way to break the cycle is to bring in leadership from outside the organization to shake things up.

So how do we fight the scourge of fire service leadership failure? On an organizational level, it involves empowering employees and encouraging them to have a stake in the overall mission. Perhaps counterintuitively, this means setting high expectations—for firefighters and for officers.

At the same time, the organization must support personnel as they move up. We can't simply set a high bar and then sit back and watch the firefighter fling themselves repeatedly at the bar, trying to clear it. We must provide professional development resources at all levels, from probie to fire chief, which includes identifying educational opportunities and skills proficiencies. This program should include opportunities to work out of grade and participate in the next level up before being promoted so the organization has a better feel for whether someone is suited for the position.

On an individual level, fighting the failure to lead means you must take the time to care. Our people are our best resources, but too often our actions don't support that. Don't say it, do it. Invest in your people. Care about them, ask them what's going on, get to know them. Equally important, know your organization's policies. What does your organization expect? When you see people operating outside those expectations, get them on track using passive or active discipline. This doesn't mean writing up a firefighter for a minor first offense, but it does mean doing something to change the behavior.

Leadership requires courage. Imagine you're standing on a railroad track and you start to see the glimmer of a headlight in the distance. Do you have the courage to step out of the way? In so many cases this is not hard. It requires knowing what to do, a little bit of discipline, and caring enough to do the right thing. And every day you don't do something is one day closer to tragedy.

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Mentorship

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The Good, The Bad, The Indifferent

By Nicholas Christensen, CFO, MPA

It would be fair to say that in today's society there are many different types of mentorship approaches. The ones we naturally choose to hold onto and emulate ourselves are predominantly the positive ones. Throughout a Firefighter's career, they will get to experience many positive mentors who will influence and mold them into professional masters of their craft. However, there are some approaches that can be negative and indifferent that can also be of value to hold close in your mind.



The Good:

Everyone has that Firefighter, that Officer, and that Chief Officer that they remember and looked up to when they first came on the job for their positive characteristics and approach. Normally, these are traits that you choose to emulate and help define yourself as you move through your career. Professionalism, integrity, honesty, loyalty, strong interpersonal skills, and taking the time to always help those around them to become better, just to name a few. These of course are truly expected in a career field as competitive as the fire service. As a family and a brotherhood/sisterhood that operates with each other under extreme circumstances on a regular basis, this is the type of environment you would want to have. However, not all are one in the same.

The Bad:

We have all encountered them at some point. The "Doomsday" mentality, where nothing is ever good enough. The "High Horse" mentality, where the work you produce is never sufficient, the job you completed is never as good as what they could have done. The "Autocratic" mentality, where it is their way or nothing else. Of additional note, those that choose to talk down to their people in a group setting in an attempt to belittle and degrade. It seems that no matter how good things are, something is always wrong and their approach is negative. However, learn from these mentoring opportunities as well, and choose to use that as an education in what NOT to do. Take the negative experience and make it your positive on how you remember those situations or personality types. Turn that into a positive growth experience for yourself, in how you will remember how not to treat people or conduct yourself.

**"We must find time
to stop and thank
the people who
make a difference
in our lives."**

JOHN F. KENNEDY

Mentorship (Cont.)

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Nicholas Christensen

The Indifferent:

This one is a little tricky, but stay with me. At times you will encounter a mentorship opportunity in which perhaps you don't really care for the person, and you may not see eye-to-eye, but they have certain characteristics that are of tremendous value. Story time...I once was a Captain in my early days in that role. I had a personality conflict with an individual, in a previous organization at the time, who exhibited some of the negative characteristics mentioned above. It would have been easy for me to simply write that individual off and just focus on positive leadership characteristics of others, but there were some things that I held onto from that experience. Although this individual was condescending, sure, and autocratic, absolutely, but they also were a very proactive leader with a unique way of motivating Firefighters and reminding them of the importance of our responsibility, and the need to always train and be prepared. Ultimately, did I enjoy working with this individual? No. However, I still have held onto some of their characteristics for my own mentorship. Although we were indifferent, this was still another opportunity to be mentored in an out of the ordinary way.

Everyone's personality is unique and different, you can't always treat everyone the same these days. Some will have all the good mentorship traits, some will have all the bad ones, and some will have the indifferent. Shift your focus beyond just the positive traits, and take the negative and indifferent traits to turn into a positive mentorship take away. Sometimes you can learn just as much from how people shouldn't act as you can from how they should. Every day is an opportunity to mentor someone, do it right.

IAFC News



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Fire-Rescue International 2020 Cancelled

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) announced that Fire-Rescue International (FRI) 2020, scheduled to take place 19-21 August in Phoenix, AZ, has been cancelled due to the impact and ongoing concerns about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). A virtual FRI format will be announced on 7 July 2020 and will take place over the week of 9 August.

"While much of the country is beginning to transition into the different phases of stay-at-home orders and opening up businesses, the IAFC Board was concerned by the rise in COVID-19 hospitalizations in Arizona. We could not compromise the safety and health of our attendees, exhibitors, customers and staff above all else," Chief Gary Ludwig, IAFC President and Chairman of the Board, said in a statement to the IAFC Membership. "We are all disappointed that we have had to cancel FRI 2020 in Phoenix. Phoenix is a beautiful, vibrant city; all of us were certainly looking forward to visiting," said Ludwig. "However, we are looking forward to rolling out a virtual FRI format to offer our members and attendees the opportunity to connect with fire service thought leaders, apparatus and equipment manufacturers, and to conduct the annual business of the IAFC."

The IAFC Board would like to thank the City of Phoenix, the Phoenix Convention and Visitors Bureau and Convention Center; and Phoenix Fire Chief Kara Kalkbrenner and the staff of the Phoenix Fire Department for all of their support and assistance during the years of preparation for FRI 2020.

What If I Told You...

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...That Your Bunker Gear Was Causing Cancer?

By Larissa Conroy, <https://firerescuemagazine.firefighternation.com>

We all believe that our bunker gear is keeping out the big “C” word (cancer). What if I told you that the same bunker gear you’re wearing contains chemicals that are linked to cancer? How bad do you want to go out and put your gear on now? The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has minimum requirements for what your bunker gear should do. NFPA 1971, *Standard on Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting*, states that your gear must have an outer shell, thermal liner, and moisture barrier. It also states you must have a means of securing the liner to the shell that must be inherently flame resistant, coats are required to have wristlets, a drag rescue device (DRD) must be accessible from the exterior with a gloved hand, and you must have a Thermal Protective Performance (TPP) minimum of 35 and a Total Heat Loss (THL) minimum of 205. However, it does not go into detail on what your bunker gear should be made of. That part is up to the manufacturers.

Let’s begin with the basics. The NFPA requires your gear to have a TPP minimum of 35, maximum of 50. The NFPA also requires your bunker gear to have a THL minimum of 205, no maximum. Your TPP is going to protect you from the outside heat, where the THL is going to protect you from your own inside heat. TPP (divided in half) measures the time a firefighter has to escape from flashover conditions. For example, if you have a TPP of 50, you would theoretically have 25 seconds to escape flashover conditions. THL measures the ability of the garment to let heat escape. You cannot max out both numbers. The best way to configure your bunker gear is to have a happy medium of both.

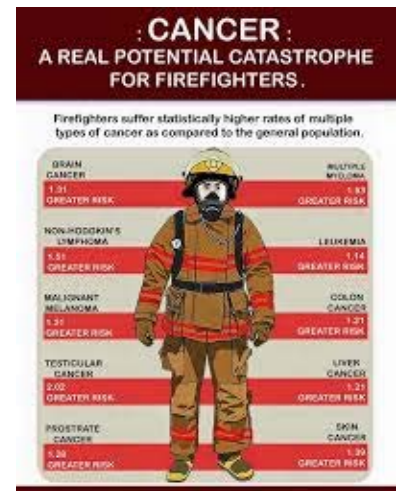
Dr. Graham Peaslee, professor of physics at the University of Notre Dame, has tested various types of bunker gear. His research is highlighting the amount of Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in our turnout gear. Two common types of PFAS that you may have heard of include Perfluorohexane Sulfonic Acid (PFHxS) and Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS) found in Aqueous Film Forming Foams (AFFF). PFAS is a class of man-made chemicals found in flame-resistant and water-resistant items, including AFFF and turnout gear. Conveniently enough, your bunker gear is flame resistant and water resistant. When PFAS chemicals break down, some of them can create PFOA and PFOS. These particular PFAS have been linked to thyroid disease, hypertension, immunosuppression, kidney cancer, and testicular cancer (2020, ATSDR). PFAS as a class are known as the “forever chemicals.” Once they get into the environment, they build up and never leave. They can also accumulate in your body, and although they will eventually leave, it will typically take months to years to do so. It’s so bad that, in fact, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a lifetime health advisory on the levels of PFOA and PFOS in our drinking water. European firefighters have known about the issue of PFOA in bunker gear and have set a 0.1 microgram/dm² limit on textiles in general. By July 2020, Europeans will have phased PFAS-containing foam out completely. The U.S. military is required to replace this foam from their trucks by 2022 and treats it as a hazardous material.

What If I Told You... (Cont.)

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In May 2017, the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) released a statement claiming that there was no need to be concerned about PFOA in bunker gear because it had been phased out of bunker gear manufacturing since 2013. No studies were released along with the IAFF's statement. However, Dr. Peaslee's findings were released in February 2018. Many "experts" and bunker gear manufacturers have refuted the claims and even called them false claims, saying that there has been no use of PFOA in turnout gear. There are some sources that say it's the fireground, not the turnout gear. Despite the many articles saying there are no toxic chemicals on our bunker gear, there are no facts or research supporting those claims. The only published proof is Dr. Peaslee's work, showing the presence of these chemicals on bunker gear. Diane Cotter, wife of a former Massachusetts firefighter, had spearheaded the campaign for more research and testing of our bunker gear. Push for more research came after her husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Today her husband lives cancer free, but Mrs. Cotter presses on for the testing of PFOA in bunker gear.



Many attempts at reaching out to manufacturers themselves have not proved to be fruitful. No bunker gear manufacturing company wants to release the chemical composition of its bunker gear. Bunker gear manufacturers aware of the harmful PFOA claim they have switched to newer "safer" chemical compounds; however, the newer/safer compounds are still a form of PFAS. Some of these chemicals come from other PFAS in the gear that turn into PFOA with exposure and wear. Still others release certain PFAS for which the toxicity in humans is unknown.

How do we go about fixing this? Well, first it is important to say that in a fire situation it is important to wear your PPE. It keeps you safe in a fire. However, I have a few ideas of things you can do and some things you shouldn't do that will keep you safer in your gear:

- Don't work out in your bunker gear. Working out causes your pores to open up and accept the unnecessary risk of letting these chemicals into your body. While preparing yourself for the intensity of what you may come across during a fire, I see no reason why anyone should put on bunker gear for physical fitness—especially not until we have all the facts about what exactly is put into and/or on our bunker gear. You are putting yourself at an unnecessary risk of exposure to PFAS by doing so.
- Clean Cabs. There are departments working toward the initiative of cleaner cabs. This is important. Keeping your bunker gear in the cab of your truck, you are unnecessarily exposing yourself to not only the harmful chemicals on your gear but carcinogens from previous fires. We need to strongly consider the risk vs. reward aspect of keeping your bunker gear in the truck under the small chance that you might get a fire.

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- Don't allow children to touch your bunker gear. If your station does frequent tours and children walk through the truck or touch your gear, you are exposing children to these harmful chemicals as well as anything else that may be on your bunker gear. If you cook dinner for your crew, groceries may come in contact with the back of the truck, another unnecessary exposure. These exposures are affecting not just you but other people around you.
- Don't take newborn/marriage/family photos with your gear. New parents sometimes like to have professional pictures done with their babies in or on their bunker gear. This is now something that seems more horrifying to me than cute.
- Handle your bunker gear with gloves whenever possible. You respect the fires and what carcinogens you may come in contact with when you fight fire. Why not treat your gear with the same respect and glove up before taking it apart, putting it together, or handling it for inspection?

I could go on about the risk of PFAS in our bunker gear and class B foams. Diane Cotter and Dr. Peaslee have done extensive research and are continuing to push nationally for the research and funding required to test bunker gear. As firefighters, we are required to take measures to protect ourselves from cancer. New cancer legislation requires current firefighters to be nonsmokers. Fire academies are requiring new students to be tobacco-free for one to two years prior to enrollment in fire school. We, as firefighters, understand the risks we are taking when we sign up for the job. We are taking measures to prevent cancer because we want to live long, healthy lives after we retire. Shouldn't we require the manufacturers to provide us with a list of chemicals that goes into the manufacturing of our bunker gear? This way, we can make a smarter, more informed decision about what gear we are choosing. We don't need bunker gear that withstands hotter temperatures; we need smarter firefighters! Humans haven't evolved to the point of survival that if they are trapped in a fire, we will be able to save them by having bunker gear that withstands hotter temperatures.

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Navy F&ES Hall of Fame



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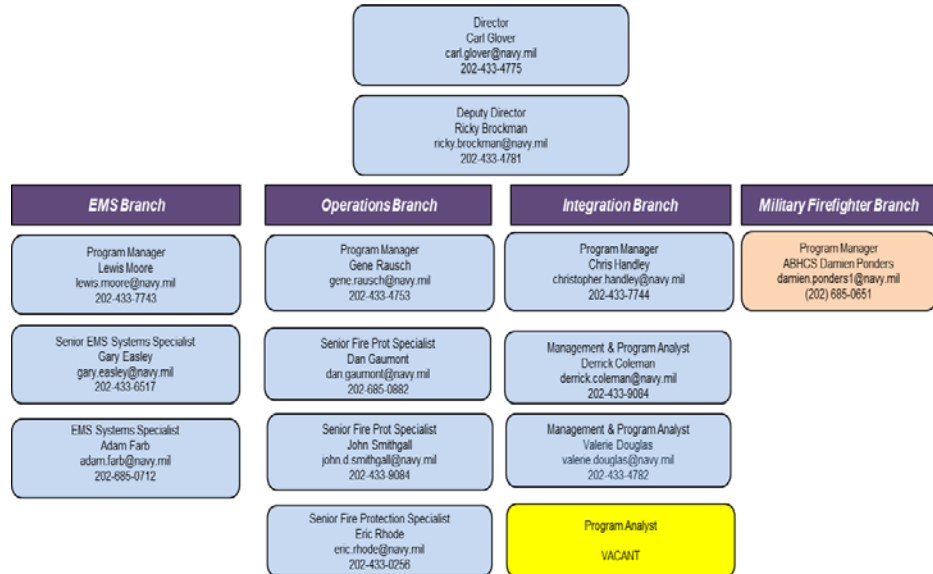
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Navy F&ES Hall of Fame

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