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Registration Opens November 1st
In my last article I was sharing the first of a four-part article on a SWOT analysis for your State Fire Academy. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In this article I will be examining what I feel are some weaknesses at the Utah Fire and Rescue Academy (UFRA). The general areas for assessment are human resources, our physical resources, product, and internal processes.

**Staffing** In terms of human resources, staffing in certain areas of UFRA has always been an issue. Our Logistics and Transportation Division is typically understaffed due to the nature of their work. They not only have the day-to-day work of rehabbing, maintaining, and fabricating props and equipment, but they are easily pushed off-task when the unexpected occurs such as the recent broken water line and resulting flood in our building. Even planned events such as Winter Fire School and Regional Fire Schools will naturally put them behind because of other courses being offered at the same time. The Certification Division is in a constant state of catch up due to the cyclic and seasonal nature of some fire disciplines (wildland) and the unpredictable nature of promotional exams.

**Instructors and Testers** Keeping instructors and testers up-to-date on changes in curriculum, oriented on new props, and aware of new and changing test standards is another challenge we constantly face along with maintaining adequate instructor cadre to handle the increased deliveries and new training courses. UFRA struggles with the most effective and efficient ways to deliver this information to our instructors and testers. Recently we have shifted away from large annual instructor and tester Seminars, and moved to smaller regional deliveries to lessen the burden away from large annual instructor and tester Seminars, and to naturally put them behind because of other courses being scheduled. As an example, instructors and testers in our NFPA mandated training standards reflect our past. Take Firefighter I for example: When was the last time you rolled a double doughnut using supply line (2 ½ in) in the field? Why are we timed donning a Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus when the majority are mounted into the apparatus seats? Why does a recruit firefighter have to understand the difference between a primary and secondary feeder on a municipal water system? Why do we concentrate a majority of our time on individual skills in the ultimate team sport? As you can imagine, if we could reformat many of our courses to reflect the actual job requirements needed for the 21st century, we could save classroom time, money, and we could focus on evolution-based (team) training. Another weakness in terms of product is delivery format. The majority of our courses use the traditional (there’s that word again) classroom model. Countless hours are spent delivering information that is not needed, such as war stories or irrelevant information, and in terms of relevant information, we could use online training followed by a short classroom review before heading to the drill ground. Just a thought... complaints go to the Training Division.

**Database** The UFRA database is archaic and needs replacement. Our ability to data-mine is limited due to our database. We are unable to identify trends in training, certification, testing, and demographics because of our database. Although we are able to complete our mission and based on evaluations keep our customers happy, we will need to replace the current system to take training and certification in Utah to the next level.

**Processes** Although we have made great strides in the past few years in terms of inventorying assets using a new barcode system, there is still need for improvement. Props and trailers need to be “turned around” faster so we can deliver more courses. We will be looking at new technology to accomplish this goal.

**Customer Service** Although we “hang our hat” on customer service, I would be remiss if I didn’t include this as a weakness. Not to include our service to you folks might suggest we had “uncared” in this area and that could lead to complacency and quite possibly less service to the customer. I think we can do a better job of communicat ing with you, training you, certifying you, assisting you in planning for training, and keeping you informed on what services are available to you. For that reason, in my mind, customer service will always be a weakness regardless of how hard we try.

**Critical Assessment Meetings** Every spring I conduct Critical Assessment Meetings. If you ask a UFRA employee about the meetings, you will get an eye roll and a groan. I have the opportunity (my perspective) to confidentially meet with each full and part-time staff member to identify not what we are doing well but where we need improvement in terms of product, process, and procedures. Even though I get the same eye roll and eye roll when we begin each meeting, it amazes me how aware the operational folks are of where the “holes” are in our operations and what needs to be done to correct the problem. I remind each employee that UFRA has weaknesses: the trick is to find and correct them before someone else does. Countless changes have been made internally because of these meetings, and fortunately, or unfortunately depending on whom you talk with, the meetings will continue.

If UFRA is going to remain progressive, we are going to have to be upfront about where we need improvement. As I’ve told the people here that work so hard to keep you guys and gals well trained and safe: “We strive for perfection, we’ll settle for excellence.” Next month part three of four: threats.

Hugh Connor was hired by the Orem Fire Department in 1979 where he worked for 27 years. He served as a Firefighter/Paramedic, Engineer, Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief. Connor has worked at the Utah Fire and Rescue Academy since 2005.
FROM THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL
Firefighters and Cancer Issues – Part II

Last issue, we talked about studies that have been done and the current study underway that links firefighting and cancer. Now we need to talk a little about what else can be done to provide the best options for preventing incidents and, if the worst news comes from one’s doctors, where he or she can turn for additional support for oneself and family.

There are foods associated with lowering the risk of getting cancer. While that’s positive news, remember that this is based merely on what goes on in Petri dishes, mice, and human epidemiology studies; revealing, largely in retrospect, that people who ate A, B, and C for “x” years had a y-percent reduction in a cancer risk compared with a bunch of slackers who did nothing to maintain a healthy diet.

Many causes of cancer are environmental, largely from tobacco, excessive sun exposure, and workplace hazards, such as chemical solvents and fumes. In these cases, avoidance is the best prevention strategy. Aside from that, to have turn for additional support for oneself and family.

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Awhile back at a meeting with Chief Rampton, who was president of the State Fire Chiefs, we were having a casual conversation about our longevity in the fire service and the question came up, as it often does when reliefs talk about their careers, of how long he was going to stay in the service. It was then that Jim told me he was on the short list for a job in California. That was great for him, and I thought about how long I have known Jim. It was then that it dawned on me: if he gets the job and leaves the state, everyone on the State Chiefs board moves up and “I’m the guy.” Jim got the job so now I’m president for the State Chiefs. Before you get too nervous, please know that I enjoy this position and hope that as a State Chiefs organization we can make a difference for us all in the state. We cannot predict when opportunity arrives at our doorstep.

This is not the first time opportunity has presented itself before it was anticipated. It can catch you off guard if you let it. Years ago - many years ago - when I started my career in a different direction, I had things laid out as how I wanted it to look, and I began to move forward. Back then, 30 plus years ago, I was a school teacher and coach, and I knew the school where I really wanted to coach. But at that time I was coaching at a school, where I had a strong, very intelligent, and savvy mentor who I looked forward to learning from for at least a few years. After the first year I learned quite a bit and looked forward to the upcoming season, poised to move up in the ranks. Then the phone call came from the school where I wanted to end up, and there was an opening for the likes of my qualifications. Not only had I wanted, according to my plan, to stay and learn for a few more years, but I was also overcome with a feeling of guilt knowing I was leaving a void that would have to be filled immediately. I felt like I had betrayed the school where I was currently at, but I also knew that the opportunity that presented itself would not be there again for a long while. This was the first time I realized that opportunity does not always come at the opportune time.

Being on the job is much the same way; we must always be on the alert and be ready. At the station we must always be prepared for the next medical, fire, hazmat, or really any call for service that comes our way. One thing is certain: calls do not come when we want them; we may be sleeping, having dinner, working out, in the middle of inspections far into a building away from our apparatus, but in these instances we respond with all the vigor and passion that we can. Or at least that’s how we should respond.

Anyone reading this is most likely already working for the fire service or anxiously awaiting the opportunity to test or get hired. Trying to break into this career at a young age is tough; it always has been. Most of us put our lives on hold as the opportunity to move through the process presents itself.

Once we are hired, the road can take different turns. Many are content being a firefighter for their entire career and that is great, especially having a passion for what you do. Many are looking and hoping for a step in a specific direction as their careers move forward, whether it is a specialty such as a paramedic, hazmat, special ops, or other fields within our service, and some move towards promoting up the ranks as officers. As much as we anticipate our time on the job, we can’t predict how long current officers will stay in those positions. As our careers move along and we are basking in our profession in the fire service, something else happens - life happens. Marriage, kids, new homes, divorce, other jobs, and many other things happen that will need your undivided attention and devotion. When life’s stress level is at its highest point, this is when notification of a promotional exam, an opportunity to go to paramedic school, or any other calling is announced and you fall into panic mode.

When I was a shift captain, I loved it: still on shift, riding the engine or truck, battling fires, and responding to EMS calls. Life was great. After only a couple of years, the opportunity for battalion chief was announced - I was torn. I loved being a captain - it is probably the best position in the fire service (except when you get older and being awakened in the middle of the night is very painful). Talking with a friend from another department who was well seasoned in the fire service, we discussed how when an opportunity arises you just don’t know when and if it will come around again. It became evident that opportunity does not always present itself when we would like it to or when we’re prepared for it. If we know what our goals are and the direction we want to pursue, we’d better be willing to jump in when the opportunity presents itself or we may regret our decision - regrets haunt us forever. I didn’t get the promotion to battalion chief and enjoyed my time for a while longer as a captain, but from then on I made sure I kept an eye on the future and what was potentially ahead and made an effort to be prepared. With all of this being said, I am glad and proud to be serving on the board of Utah State Fire Chiefs. I only hope that we can represent you well. Please do not hesitate to bring forward any issues or concerns you have or would like addressed; we are here for you.

Message from Utah State Fire Chiefs Association

Opportunity Does Not Always Come at an Opportune Time

Gil Rodriguez has worked for Murray City Fire Department for twelve years. Rodriguez is originally from Los Angeles, California. He attended college at Southern Utah University, and upon graduation he moved back to Los Angeles, where he taught for three years. He moved to the Salt Lake area in 1981, where he taught for three years at South High School before getting hired by Murray City Fire Department in 1984.
Lesson Learned: Vent – Enter – Search

Vent, Enter, Search (VES) is a search technique used when fire has cut off the normal means of entry into or egress from part of a building. This could include, but is not limited to, times when credible reports indicate one or more victim(s) are trapped in a room cut off by fire, however there is access from outside.

This technique may involve the use of ladders to access upper areas of a structure for ventilation in front of the attack crew and for rapid, primary searches of individual rooms. At a minimum, this is a two-person operation and should not be done alone.

A common practice in some departments is to routinely enter the upper floors via ground ladders to search all areas above the fire. A firefighter will raise a ground ladder to an upper floor window, enter the structure, and search the entire floor (only entering the building from one portal). This is not VES; it is just a search from an alternate means of access/egress.

When conducting a true VES, one room is searched, via a window, isolating said room by closing the connecting hallway door. When the search is completed one would exit through the same window from which he or she entered. Sometimes, if applicable, one would conduct a search of a connected bathroom as part of the VES.

VES begins with selecting the area for the search to begin. The most common area to VES are the bedrooms of residential dwellings or other areas isolated from the rest of the structure by the simple act of closing a door.

The crew must, from the exterior, determine the location of the fire and the area(s) to be searched. By looking at the external construction features, such as windows and balconies, the crew can visualize the layout of the interior rooms and decide on the proper window to enter first.

Prior to executing a VES, it is important that Incident Command (IC) and interior members, particularly the attack crew, are aware that members will be entering the upper floors from the exterior. The members performing the VES will be above the fire and/or in front of the advancing fire attack, which will require the coordination with the interior crews and the IC.

It is also important, any time ventilation is performed, to ensure that it will not cause uncontrollable fire spread. Vent for life vs. vent for fire. However, in some instances involving a known life hazard and victim location, ventilation can be performed before the attack crew is in position to control the fire.

When selecting the correct size of ground ladder for the window chosen, the member will raise the ladder to the window so that the tip of the ladder breaks the glass as it is lowered into the building. The ladder can then be twisted and maneuvered so that the remaining glass, sash, and window dressings are completely removed. If this is not possible, the member should set the ladder tip at the sill and climb the ladder to clear the window with a hand tool.

If fire vents from the window at this point, members should probe the area directly under the sill for any possible victims, and then, if none are found, reposition the ladder to an uninvolved window that can be entered for a search.

If a hose line is available and the fire can be darkened down, entry may be possible to continue the search. Depending on the amount of heat and smoke in that room, the victim survival ability decision must be made to consider whether the search should be continued.

If no fire vents, the member should probe the area beneath the sill for victims and floor integrity. The member should then straddle the sill with one leg in the room and one leg outside, his or her shoulder locked into the window frame and his or her head on the outside of the window. This position will keep the majority of the member’s weight and body mass on the outside the window, as the first foot touches the floor. The hope is that if the floor gives out beneath the member at this point, he or she will have a better chance of making it back to the ladder.

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After the integrity of the floor is further verified with a single leg, the member can swing the other leg in, and begin the search. The second member positions on the outside at the window and is the eyes and ears of the searching member. He or she can verbally assist the searching member by guiding him or her back to the window to exit the room when needed.

The first action to be taken inside the room is the location and control of the door to the hallway. As discussed earlier, closing this door will protect the member from the conditions in the hallway while the search is performed. This can be especially important if the fire is attacked and the conditions are “pushed” in the direction of the room being searched.

Continued on next page
After closing the door, the member can then begin a rapid search of the room. If a victim is found, the primary removal route will be the ladder used to enter the room. Because the member is unaware of the building’s interior layout, any attempt to remove the victim via the interior stairs would be difficult and time consuming. If the fire is under control then the interior stairway would be easiest, but the fact that a VES is being conducted would probably not indicate this.

Throughout the search period, the secondary member of the crew can remain on the ladder at the window to monitor conditions, alert the searching member of any emergencies, and serve as a reference point if a rapid egress is needed. If the search is to continue into the hallway, the member on the ladder will have to enter the room and head deeper into the building in order to maintain contact with the searching member. Again this is not VES; this is done then the second person better know where the exit is at all times!

If a victim is found, help must be requested, unless this is a child or small adult. The removal of any victim is time consuming and labor intensive. A second ladder must be placed next to the original ladder and another crew will be needed to quickly remove a victim from the interior to the exterior.

If no victim is found, the member should return to the door, open it carefully and check conditions in the hallway. If severe heat and smoke conditions are encountered, the door should be left closed. If conditions are not severe at the door and there are no more rooms to VES in that area, the door can be left open to assist in overall ventilation, making sure the IC and the vent crew know the door was left open. Caution: by leaving a door open while a fire is not under control, the fire will draw to that area.

When checking for extension by opening the hallway door and conditions are not as bad as first thought, the decision should then be made as to whether the search will continue out into the hallway and on to other rooms. If conditions are bad, then the door will remain closed, the member will return to the ladder, exit, and begin the process again at another window.

If conditions have improved and the decision is to continue the search into the hallway and other rooms, then this needs to be announced to everyone and confirmed by the IC. This is not VES; this is searching a structure by entering by another entry point. At this point a third member should be deployed to assist the searching member on the interior and a search rope or tag line would be recommended to be utilized.

Crews should keep in mind the need for an alternate escape route (ladders, porch roofs, adjacent apartments, or rooms) in the event crews cannot exit through the entrance that he or she entered. The unit officer should always notify command when using an alternate route and explain the reason why he or she had to exit. Make sure the crew does a self-accountability check after exiting and report it to command.

If crews are unable to reach the floor above the fire because of high heat conditions, additional ventilation should be ordered and completed. Crews should check for extension of fire as they execute the search, closing doors and venting windows as the search progresses. Anytime fire is found during the search, a hose line must be requested.

Because the VES crew will be working above or ahead of the fire line, a hose line, the crew will be put in a precarious position. It is recommended that the only seasoned and well-trained firefighters be assigned this task. Crews should be thoroughly trained in this procedure prior to performing it on the fire ground.

Larry Jenkins started his 36 year fire career with Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. Washington D.C.; as a volunteer in 1969; he then became full time in 1974, retiring as a captain in 2010. Some of Jenkins’ vast experience includes his deployment to NOVA Task Force I, assisting with Hurricane Katrina; lead instructor for numerous fire schools; helped author all of the firefighting operational manuals used by the Northern Virginia Fire Departments; and served on the IFSTA, technical writing committee for “Strategy and Tactics”, 1st edition.

have you ever tried to drive a nail with something other than a hammer? Say a rock or a flat crowbar? With less than a hammer this simple task becomes a potential mauling. Nothing is more basic than making certain you have the right tools for the job. Firefighters have a lot of potential tasks, consequently the job demands a litany of tools. Do you favor a sledge and margin Murphy’s Law (“Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong”) by doing daily equipment checks. Firefighters must not only make certain the tools needed for the job are there but also must ensure all tools remain in a ready state.

There are both good and bad examples of firefighters who either take great care to do daily equipment checks or those who don’t seem to care. After all, you’ve been there, done that…right? Wrong! Too many variables exist with specialized equipment to overlook equipment checks. Check out what may go wrong if you miss the most important part of your day (equipment checks).

- SCBA’s seem like a simple piece of equipment to some. Nothing could go wrong…right? This important piece of equipment is composed of seals, face piece, gaskets, bypass valve, regulator, batteries, pal alarm, etc. The wrong tool incredibly comes to mind, as in untenable environment. The word sounds so harmless until you’re actually in that environment – in air so thick that one breath will erase any motivation you ever had to become a firefighter. When you start your shift remind yourself that you may very well end up in an “untenable” environment. Now how important is your SCBA check?

- Have you or “somebody you know” ever gone to a fire only to be shocked that your gloves are not in your fire coat pocket? It’s amazing how fast you can acquire an extra pair of gloves. Save yourself the panic and associated shortened life span. Check all of your PPE at the beginning of every shift and after any somewhat significant fire or medical run.

- We’ve all been on scene and had a radio start to make the dying battery beeping signal. It always seems to happen at the most inopportune time too. Do you have a spare battery for your handheld radio? Do you routinely perform radio checks? Do you know your radio channel matrix and understand the zones and channels? Radios can be complicated. Frequently spend time with your radio, understanding the buttons and use of each.

- Have you ever seen a firefighter tapping or banging his flashlight at a fire scene trying to make it work? One firefighter flashlight manufacturer listed their product as being “bear proof”. A better test would be to ask if their flashlights are firefighter proof. Follow your own department’s policy (and manufacturer suggestions) on changing the batteries. Finding out your flashlight has dead batteries, a bad switch, or a broken seal while at a fire is wrong. How important is having light when you need it?

- If you’ve been a firefighter long enough you will have a story about what can go wrong with hydraulic extrication equipment. Everything from failure to start to hydraulic connections gone bad. Whatever your department’s routine calls for with respect to hydraulic tools and equipment inspection, follow it. Your nose will never fail to itch when your hands are coated with hydraulic fluid and oil. It beats the heck out of the alternative though.

- AED’s can be so complicated that equipment checks become training on remembering how to use them. Showing up to a full arrest with a dead life pack isn’t only an oxymoron but can be disastrous. Make sure it doesn’t happen.

This article would be a book if every firefighting piece of equipment were listed here. You may have started to lose interest in this topic by now. After all, firefighters are somewhat A.D.D. by nature. Just remember to do yourself and your crew a favor. If you haven’t done so recently, update your inventory check sheets. After updating your check sheets, spend the first part of each shift having one crew member read from the check sheet while a second crew member touches every piece of equipment listed. Checking the equipment on your fire apparatus may prove to be the most important 30 minutes of your shift.
PROMOTIONS:

Fire Chief Roger Bodily served with North Davis District for 42 years and has begun a new role as the fire chief for Riverdale. He began his fire service career as a volunteer with the Clearfield Fire Department in 1970, which is now a part of the North Davis Fire District.

On July 29th, 2013, Brandon Thueson was appointed as the Fire Marshal for the Weber Fire District. Brandon’s fire service career began as a firefighter for Farmington City; he then became a part-time firefighter for Layton City. He has spent the past 16 years serving full time with the Ogden City Fire Department, where he also served as the Fire Marshal. Brandon serves as the 2nd Vice President of the Utah Fire Marshal’s Association and is a member of the Fire Marshal Association’s code committee.

Jeff Bassett has been appointed as the new fire chief of the South Davis Metro Fire Agency. He began his career with the Bountiful City Fire Department in 1991 and has worked as a firefighter, fire investigator, fire inspector, engineer, lieutenant, captain, public information officer, and deputy chief. Bassett holds a bachelor’s degree in public emergency services management as well as an executive fire officer degree from the National Fire Academy.

Val Farnsworth has retired from the Sandy Fire Department after almost 30 years of service. He began his firefighting career as a volunteer while in his fifties. Farnsworth’s service with the fire department extended to teaching Community Emergency Response and CPR classes, as well as teaching children about fire prevention and safety.

RETIREMENTS:

Neil Coker, 64, retired from the Sunset City Volunteer Fire Department after nearly 25 years of service. He joined the fire department in 1976 and then left the department in 1988, only to return on May 1, 2001, as the assistant fire chief. Coker was appointed fire chief on September 19, 2001, role he kept for nearly 12 years.

John Alverston retired on August 3, 2013, after a total of 34 years of government service; 28 years as a firefighter. Inspector Alverston started his government career at Tooele Army Depot in 1979 as a supply clerk. He transferred to the fire department in 1985 where he started his firefighting career. John was promoted to a Fire Inspector in 1995. He was instrumental in developing and implementing the Fire Department (FD) Extinguisher program and the FD over sight for the start up and closure of TOCDF Chemical Weapons Mission, and he served as a member of Tooele City Volunteer Fire Department.

Fire Inspector Val Farnsworth has retired from the Sandy Fire Department after almost 30 years of service. He began his firefighting career as a volunteer while in his fifties. Farnsworth’s service with the fire department extended to teaching Community Emergency Response and CPR classes, as well as teaching children about fire prevention and safety.

Fire Inspector John Alverston retired on August 3, 2013, after a total of 34 years of government service; 28 years as a firefighter. Inspector Alverston started his government career at Tooele Army Depot in 1979 as a supply clerk. He transferred to the fire department in 1985 where he started his firefighting career. John was promoted to a Fire Inspector in 1995. He was instrumental in developing and implementing the Fire Department (FD) Extinguisher program and the FD oversight for the start up and closure of TOCDF Chemical Weapons Mission, and he served as a member of Tooele City Volunteer Fire Department.

DEATHS:

Russell Yates died on July 28, 2013, after a total of 30 years of government service; 20 years as a firefighter. He started his government career at Tooele Army Depot (TEAD) in 1983. Russ took a 2-year break in service to serve a LDS Mission. He was rehired at TEAD in 1986. Due to BRAC closure, Russ was hired at the Department of Defense Ogden in 1993 as a firefighter. In 1996, Firefighter Yates transferred back to TEAD as a firefighter. He was very instrumental in mentoring new recruits and willing to help out any way he could. He is also a past fire chief for North Tooele County Fire Department and serves on their Fire District Board of Directors.

Ivan Erskine died Monday, July 1st at the age of 63 after three decades of overseeing the management of fire on the Ashley National Forest. Erskine’s first temporary Forest Service appointment was in 1968 on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in Nevada. He joined the agency full time in 1976 with an appointment to the Fishlake National Forest in Richfield.

In 1984, Erskine became the fire management officer for the Ashley, assuming responsibility for fighting wildfires and for using prescribed fire to improve the health of the forest.

Erskine’s contributions to fire management went well beyond the Ashley. He was an integral part of the fire community on the regional and national level, organizing training academies and serving as a member of several incident-management teams.

Administrative Captain James Edward Brisbane, passed away last year, 2012, on August 19th, having served 35 years with Unified Fire Department. Jim was hired as a firefighter for Salt Lake County in August of 1977. He attended Weber State College, where he received training to become a paramedic. Jim was later promoted to the rank of lieutenant with Salt Lake County after he accidentally crashed the engine into the station garage after returning from a call.

Captain Blake Forsey, 46, passed away on August 16, 2013, after a 15-month battle with cancer. Forsey was born and raised in Utah and served as a paramedic/firefighter for Sandy City Fire for 16 years.

To submit a Fire Mark please contact Andrea Hossley at andrea.hossley@uvu.edu.
The paradox of gossip: Firehouse scuttlebutt

The fire service is not unique in having a rumor mill where information is informally passed among the community. At least 60% of adult conversation involves discussion about someone who isn’t present (Emler, 1994). Gossip and rumor are generally regarded as negative social activities because (1) rumors tend to involve unreliable information and (2) confidential information that is shared is a betrayal of trust. Once power conflicts occur between people and get carried away, the work environment can become toxic. What is at stake is people’s reputations and group cohesion.

A person’s reputation is important because, once established, that person must do things noticeably different and with overt consistency for their reputation to change. However, the negative information passed via rumor and gossip can be devastating. The paradox of gossip is that it is not always a bad thing. Gossip is a social norming process that informs people in a group about those who might potentially hurt him or her. Prosocial gossip is a way of letting us know who to “watch out” for in an organization, what kinds of harm that a person does, and by staying clear of him or her, it communicates to a person that he or she must change or continue being ostracized (Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012). We cannot impress enough on rookies how a bad reputation of being self-centered, lazy, or unsafe can be a monumental thing to overcome and at times may never actually be overcome.

Gossip is how culture is passed on from one generation to another in a group. We may not think of gossip this way initially, but the heroic war stories, tragic tales, and institutional knowledge is passed to newcomers and helps inform and institutionalize the group. Members of a department are problem solvers and thus making an individual the target of gossip helps solve the problem by tearing him or her down. An individual’s reputation needs to be valued. Mere slander and misinforming (like exaggerating) is wrong and deconstructive for the fire department in the long run. By necessity, some people problems must be solved by natural group processes. But one must be mindful of what he or she says and is also willing to listen without questioning the motives or source from where it is coming.

As one can see, gossip is a paradox that can be used for prosocial reasons to build bonds, enforce cultural norms and rules, teach cultural and historical lessons, and stabilize the organization. On the other hand, slander and reputation-damaging gossip for the purpose of hurting others happens all too often. Most of the time, the negative gossip feels justified saying things damaging to the reputation of a brother or sister firefighter. I am encouraging the reader to stop and be more critical about what he or she is willing to hear unchallenged and what he or she is willing to say. We must make sure that the talking you and me…” can really be understood as not exactly expecting that the secret be kept but that discretion about whom to share it with next must be exercised. In other words, the group wants the person to hear it eventually but wants the responsibility for the unsavory details to be diffused in the crowd. Like physical violence, the norm for people to act more aggressively with words when the responsibility for what he or she says is diffused among the crowd than when having to deliver hurtful messages face-to-face. This is why gossip has taken on a derogatory or pejorative connotation. Negative scuttlebutt can create a toxic environment where conflict and power struggles reign and the workplace becomes a jungle rather than a safe place for the crew between calls.

Organizational stress, such as unfair assignments, inequitable discipline, inadequate training, unprofessional management, favoritism, and other things (Kirschnan, 2007) has been identified as the lead cause of stress for emergency responders. Further, much of the frustration within emergency responders comes from the bureaucratic machinery of working in a government context (Mills, 1959). Paton (2008) found that social support is one of the key ingredients for resiliency and the development of posttraumatic growth in emergency responders, meaning that among other aspects, the kinship and closeness of the group helps support the responders who have suffered a critical event. In such cases, the gossipy information about him or her self, the law of reciprocity makes the other feel obligated to share like information in return (Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1996). When someone shares information that is secret, its reasons for being secret must be assessed by the listener so that he or she knows how best to respond. Also, the person who is the subject of the gossip (whether self or other) must also be considered. If someone gossips to another for the sake of warning him or her that a certain person tends to cause a certain kind of trouble, this obligates the hearer to share like information when he or she has it. That way, as a group, the social field and dynamics seem less like a mine field. Negative gossip will eventually get around to whom it is about, which is not a type of paradox of gossip paradox. Negative gossip about a person has to get back to the person who is the subject of the gossip whether he or she is willing to hear unchallenged or particular member who has been impacted hard and needs to lean on others.

References


Dr. Rodger Broome is a public safety psychological researcher/professor serving as chair of the department of emergency services at UVU. He retired as a battalion chief and fire marshal from West Jordan Fire department after 23 years serving the city as a firefighter/EMT and police officer. Rodger serves on the Utah Critical Incident Stress Management team and works part-time for Woods Cross Police. His teaching and research interests are in the psychology and human science of emergency and disaster response.
To say that the new Salt Lake City Public Building is a significant improvement from the old digs is an understatement akin to “the Grand Canyon is sort of pretty”. The facts are that the old home of Utah’s biggest municipal fire and police departments was declared by its police and fire occupants a disaster waiting to happen. The Pacific Northwest Pipeline Company built the 95,000 sq. ft. building in 1958 for $2,500,000 on the corner of 315 East 200 South. It is the sister of the historic International Style, First Security building and was truly state-of-the-art for its time. Decades of intense use and deferred maintenance have taken their toll. After 32 years of ownership, Salt Lake City convinced voters to fund the new 175,480 sq. ft. facility at 400 South 300 East with a $125,000,000 bond. Leaking plumbing and roofs, stuck elevators, and dysfunctional cramped spaces that included closets converted to offices, are now a thing of past.

Firefighters and police on hand for a week of tours, following a ribbon cutting, were enthusiastic with their praise for the new super energy efficient (Net-Zero) home. Unlike many rather fortress-like public safety buildings, the SLC building is open and inviting with soaring architecture that blends well with the nearby Library Square. The lobby provides access to community meeting rooms, a soon to be completed museum area, gift shop, the Fire Prevention Bureau, Police Records, and Community Outreach. Access to elevators and stairways to police, fire, dispatch, and EOC areas requires a trip through security and escorted access.

Public tours drew thousands prior to the move-in date. On a recent Friday afternoon, SLCFD PIO, Jasen Asay, gave the Straight Tip a guided tour of Fire, 911 Dispatch, and EOC facilities. He was effusive in his praise for the thoughtfulness of the design to maximize efficiency and inter-departmental communications. One of the greatest worries about the old building was an earthquake knocking it to pieces. Built long before earthquake resistance was part of building codes in SLC, the old building was expected to incur major damage if the “Big One” hit. The new building includes 52 giant shock absorbers to dampen lateral movement in a temblor. The shock absorbers are evident throughout the interior and make for interesting features in some of the offices.

The Fire Department will initially have 38 permanent staff members on-site from the first floor Fire Prevention and Investigation offices to the fourth floor headquarters where administrative, EMS, logistics, and support staff will work in spaces flooded with natural lighting and high tech communications systems. There will be room for temporarily assigned personnel, interns, and room to grow.

The new Smart 911 Dispatch Center will feature enough of the latest high tech workstations to handle a large-scale disaster. The center plans to begin answering calls for Sandy Fire and Police in the fall of 2013, after the SLC functions are up, tested, and fully functional.

Asay said the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) will be used day-to-day by many of the people who will staff it during a disaster, thereby preventing the often encountered situation of arriving at an EOC to find things not working as expected and not having access to the information needed back at your desk. The building features computer systems that allow personnel to log in anywhere in the building and work as if he or she were at his or her own desk, with access to all files and applications. The EOC has a giant screen that can be divided into as many as 95 separate scenes so that remote camera feeds and other vital information can be displayed simultaneously and accessed from individual workstations throughout the building.

While the $125,000,000 price tag may seem steep, it amounts to an average of just $75 per homeowner per year. Asay said that the cost included all furniture, technology, appliances, and other furnishings. (Disclosure: This writer is one of those taxpayers and I’m ok with that!)

The fate of the old building remains unclear. The city can’t sell it until homes are found for police evidence storage and Crime Lab functions. An earlier bond proposal that included those areas failed. The Utah Heritage Foundations is urging the city to find a developer who would update and preserve the unique structure, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Steve Lutz has spent the last 37 years working in the fire service as a firefighter, fire chief, instructor, Public Safety Director, and currently as an Assistant Director at the Utah Fire & Rescue Academy.
ON CALL: SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND POLICE PRESENCE

Often emergency responders are called to the scene of a domestic disturbance, dispute, drug or gang related crime, and terrorist incidents such as bombings or chemical weapon threats. These scenes can present several potential hazards such as violent individuals, the presence of firearms, booby-traps, or persons under the influence of narcotics. Emergency responders are typically not equipped or trained to handle these situations beyond providing force protection, rescue, medical care, and fire suppression. Any attempt by responders to handle a violent situation may end with the responder either being injured and unable to provide care or increasing the level of hostility and violence in the moment. This is why situational awareness with a police presence to secure the scene is so important.

There are many cases where emergency responders are not aware of the situation one is getting into. This was the case when first responders in Berkeley, California, responded to a medical call, which ended in a firefighter being shot by a patient who had locked himself in his home. When the first responders arrived at the home there were no police present and at the time there was nothing indicating police presence was needed. Whether responders have or do not have knowledge of a violent situation, law enforcement should be on hand to assess the situation and secure the scene. There are instances when police are on scene but their presence does not prevent responders from being harmed. In New York, two firefighters were killed and an officer wounded while responding to a fire. The suspect set the fire then positioned himself in order to assassinate the responders who came in to handle the blaze. In response to the shots fired in New York, firefighters called for immediate police assistance and escaped from the scene as best as they could. This situation does not happen often but is a growing concern. In the case of New York, although law enforcement could not immediately secure the scene, they were present to provide return fire until reinforcements could arrive.

Increasingly, responders unwittingly approach a violent scene involving acts of terrorism or domestic extremism. Because of this trend, it is important for emergency responders to remember the basics of situational awareness. When approaching a scene, be sure to observe your surroundings and ask yourself if violence is present or if there is a risk of violence. First responders need to weigh the benefits of assisting the injured to the risk of their lives being threatened. An injured or killed emergency responder only exacerbates the situation. If violence erupts, responders are taught to find cover from a barrier of some kind or find concealment. Be aware of your surroundings by taking note of any firearms, how many people are in the incident area, drugs and drug paraphernalia, signs of labware, strong odors, and symptoms such as skin itching or burning, difficulty breathing or nausea indicating a chemical or drug lab. Awareness of individuals on scene can also present clues to whether or not a situation is or can become violent. Utah, especially northern Utah, has a large number of gangs and white supremacist groups who could pose a threat to the responder. Gang members are more likely to have weapons and drugs in their possession or be under the influence of drugs. Drugs can cause their behavior to be more erratic and unpredictable, and the presence of first responders can cause nervousness and stress if there are illegal items present. Watch for tattoos with identifying phrases such as “White Power” or “White Pride” as well as gang tattoos on the face, the numbers 13 or 14 and words like “crip” or “blood”. These tattoos do not always mean the individual is a current gang member, but the tattoos can provide clues into what a person may be involved in (gang violence, drugs, and other crimes). Behavior is also a good indicator as violent or disturbed individuals are known to act with nervous behavior, scratching, irritability, hostility, constant movement, loud chatter or vulgar speech, and in some cases will pat or pass their hand along their pockets or belt line which could indicate the presence of a weapon.

Having law enforcement present on scene is just as critical as the first responders’ situational awareness skills. The ideal condition is to arrive on scene with law enforcement already there and everything secured, allowing responders to safely move forward with their duties. Orange County, California, has implemented a new policy emphasizing first responder safety. Eleven fire departments under Orange County Fire Authority are now required to wear helmets and ballistic vests when responding to the scene of a shooting when the gunman is not in custody or accounted for. These firefighters are also required to enter the scene of a shooting with a police escort.

The Orem Fire Department in Utah has standing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)’s requiring an officer to respond to every EMS/fire call regardless of the situation. This is both a manpower-related and a safety-related SOP. When fire units arrive first, which is not always optimal, and the situation is assessed to be safe, law enforcement is usually cancelled by the company officer. When law enforcement arrives first, it is possible to update incoming fire units on the status of the call and the current situation. Law enforcement and first responders should understand that there is a perfect situation and no one can be 100% sure if a situation will not turn deadly, but having effective situational awareness and a police presence on the scene increases the safety of everyone involved.

Mary Ellis has been working for the UVU Emergency Services Department for two years. Her background includes serving seven years with the US Army National Guard and achieving a bachelor’s in Anthropology from Weber State University. She is currently earning her master’s degree in National Security and terrorism from American Military University and is specializing in domestic extremism.
Science On-Scene
by Steve Lutz, Assistant Director, UFRA

It seems like just about everyone has a smartphone or tablet these days but few of us really explore the full power of these handy devices. Turns out these devices can be used for more than just Facebook and Google. A growing number of apps either have been developed for rescue services or have great useable features for us. This issue, Science On-Scene takes a look at a few of those.

Knots 3D for iOS and Android is a cool, inexpensive (99 cents) app that shows 87 different knots in 3D animation, with more being added. Each knot and its uses are thoroughly described and alternate names shown. Just click on a name on the main list and the knot ties itself and allows you to turn it around to view from different positions. Speed it up or slow it down to stop action to help make learning a new knot a snap. Click on the “heart” and it’s great fun for drills and personal learning.

On the extrication side, there’s the also free Hybrid Vehicle Extrication Guide. It lists cars by brands, models, and years. When you click on the one you want, it brings up color coded wiring diagrams with easy-to-see (on an iPad) legends for high voltage danger zones, airbag components, electric or electronic components, seatbelt pre-tensioners, and battery locations. There are both top and side views that also show reinforcement components that would be difficult to cut. http://www.extricationguide.com/

And finally, download QRG, a free app at http://www.afsafetytraining.com/qrg/. West Virginia University developed this alternative fuels vehicle guide with some useful information on everything from hazard assessment, knots, and airbag components, electric or electronic components, seatbelt pre-tensioners, and battery locations. There are both top and side views that also show reinforcement components that would be difficult to cut. http://www.extricationguide.com/

Across

2. Chemical process of oxidation results in a glow or flames. 19. Cold zone is a ______ area designated as hot, warm, or cold. 11. A smooth ____ wrench has an enclosed end. 14. A ____ end nozzle produces a straight stream of water.

4. A water catch-all will ______ water until it can be removed. 6. A spring-loaded center ____ is used to break automobile glass. 7. Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus. 8. Rim locks are mounted in a door with a ____ for extra security. 9. Signal ______ indicate the relative toxicity of a material on the labels of pesticides.

10. These areas are deemed unsafe. 12. Roof ladders are equipped with retractable ______. 16. This type of chemical extinguish-er is for use on class K fires. 21. Safety officers have the authority to _______ any activity that is deemed unsafe.

10. Chemical process of oxidation results in a glow or flames. 19. Cold zone is a ______ area designated as hot, warm, or cold. 11. A smooth ____ wrench has an enclosed end. 14. A ____ end nozzle produces a straight stream of water.

5. A rubber-covered ____ is more resistant to damage. 16. A ____-end wrench has an enclosed end. 21. Assemblies of small pieces of wood or metal.

12. Roof ladders are equipped with retractable ______. 16. This type of chemical extinguisher is for use on class K fires. 21. Safety officers have the authority to _______ any activity that is deemed unsafe.

One helpful iOS & Android rescue app comes free, courtesy of CMC Rescue. (http://www.cmcrescue.com/app/) the Rescue Guide has nicely illustrated Field Guides for setting up rope and confined entry rescue systems with information on everything from hazard assessment, knots, and a rubber-covered ____ is more resistant to damage. 16. A smooth ____ nozzle produces a straight stream of water.

There is a lot of information in the Rescue Guide. Of course there is no completely free lunch; CMC has links to their equipment catalogue and user guides. That bit of promotion is not obtrusive and could be helpful if you have CMC equipment.

On the extrication side, there’s the also free Hybrid Vehicle Extrication Guide. It lists cars by brands, models, and years. When you click on the one you want, it brings up color coded wiring diagrams with easy-to-see (on an iPad) legends for high voltage danger zones, airbag components, electric or electronic components, seatbelt pre-tensioners, and battery locations. There are both top and side views that also show reinforcement components that would be difficult to cut. http://www.extricationguide.com/

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So there you have it, we only spent 99 cents and got a lot of great, current information right at our fingertips.

I’ve only got one tiny little beef, and that is the knots animation shows tying as if some invisible force is just pulling the rope into the knot. Obviously real rope and fingers work differently. Even computer animation has its limits. OK, one more thing, you’ll need to watch the screen vertically; it doesn’t switch if you turn the iPad screen vertically; it doesn’t switch if you turn the iPad

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STRAIGHT TIP CROSWORD PUZZLE

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Originally known as Pond Town by the first settlers (due to several ponds that arise from aquifers that are created by runoff from the nearby mountains), Salem was founded as a city in 1886, being named after Salem, Massachusetts. The name Salem was chosen because of its meaning “The City of Peace”. The citizens of Salem have always helped and served each other to promote a place of safety and peace. In addition to being there for each other, the citizens have a history of extending a helping hand to the people of the surrounding areas when times of need have arisen. This spirit of compassion, desire to serve, and love of the area has resonated with those who live in Salem. Even before the fire service that will better serve the community. Train desiring to improve their skills and certify in the areas of the fire service. Bi-monthly training is offered to all members to maintain skills and learn new methods to better improve the department’s performance and build camaraderie with each other.

Salem Fire Department responds to an average of 70 fire calls per year and the Salem Emergency Medical Association responds to an average of 170 medical calls per year. Of the 70 fire calls each year, we will respond to a variety of situations that require us to adapt and work together to see a good outcome. We respond to the typical calls of CO alarms and vehicle accidents with no injuries to the occupants to severe life-threatening injuries requiring extrication. Several structure fires are encountered throughout the year ranging from room and contents to fully involved structures. We also have special considerations where water supplies are not accessible and the use of water tenders are required to accomplish the fire attack. It is not uncommon to respond to barn fires or residential fires in the rural areas where water shuttling is set up to douse the flames. During the summer months we assist Utah County Fire and the surrounding agencies with the wildland fires that are frequent in the nearby mountain ranges as well as in the valley fields. Last year we participated in several of the large wildland fires from the northern end of Utah County all the way down to Cedar City and everything in between. Though our call volume may seem small in number compared to other departments, we always seem to encounter the gambit, requiring us to have a vast fire knowledge base.

The apparatus we use to accomplish our jobs are 2 engines, 1 rescue truck, 1 water tender, 2 brush trucks, and 1 heavy brush truck. The 2 engines are a 1993 Westates 1500 gpm pump and open seating in the rear of the cab. The rescue truck carries a 300 gallon tank with a 500 gpm pump as well as extrication equipment, a generator, various hand tools, an air pump unit for stabilization bags, and various other tools to assist in most situations. Our 2 brush trucks carry 200-gallon tanks and equipment to assist on any wildland fire. The heavy brush holds 1500 gallons with 2 hose reels and hand tools. The heavy brush is often requested by outside agencies to assist with wildland fires due to its capabilities to be able to go almost anywhere in any type of terrain.

The newest member of the department is our water tender that arrived in August. It is a 2015 Kenworth T370 that holds 3000 gallons of water with a 1000 gpm pump. The tank can be emptied in 80 seconds through a 10-inch dump chute that can be maneuvered to empty on either side of the vehicle or directly behind the vehicle. Its capable of being refilled in 3 minutes. It has the capability to be a great asset in those areas where water supplies are not accessible.

For a small department, Salem is as diverse as they come but ready to handle any type of call that may arise and proud to serve all those with whom we come in contact.

The citizens of Salem have always helped and served each other to promote a place of safety and peace. In addition to being there for each other, the citizens have a history of extending a helping hand to the people of the surrounding areas when times of need have arisen. This spirit of compassion, desire to serve, and love of the area has resonated with those who live in Salem. Even before the fire department was officially organized in 1951, Salem banded together to protect its residences from the dangers of fire and other hazards. Salem Fire Department has been staffed by volunteers from its simple beginnings to its diverse capabilities of today. The heritage of service carries on with those who volunteer with the Salem Fire Department.

Salem City covers an area of 10.2 square miles with 6,500 inhabitants; however, the Salem Fire Department covers the surrounding rural area as well, totaling around 30 square miles within its fire boundaries. The department is often called out to help the surrounding agencies in Southern Utah County, thereby increasing the area that it responds in to well over 700 square miles. The response demographics are diverse from businesses with high volumes of chemicals, to residential homes, to farmland, and to mountainous terrain. Salem has mutual agreements with the surrounding agencies to assist on any incidents where manpower and equipment are needed. These other agencies include Spanish Fork Fire & EMS, Payson Fire & EMS, Woodland Hills Fire, Elkridge Fire, and Utah County Fire Departments.

The Emergency Services Department of Salem is split between the fire service side and the EMS side. Though there is a separation, the two entities work closely together in a team effort to cover all the needs of the citizens. There is a great bond between those who serve on both sides of the department, and when they are on the scene at incidents, the separation is nowhere to be found. Both the Salem Fire Department and Salem Emergency Medical Association are solely volunteer-based organizations. The Salem Fire Department currently has 18 active members and the Salem Emergency Medical Association has 31 active members. The fire department is organized with a fire chief, an assistant chief, 4 captains, and 12 firefighters. Members currently hold certifications in Firefighter I, Firefighter II, HazMat Awareness, HazMat Operations, Instructor, ADO Pumper, ADO Aerial, and Red Cards in Wildland Firefighter. The members of the fire department all have a strong desire to improve their skills and certify in the areas of the fire service that will better serve the community. Training is ongoing to improve the skills already obtained and to be more proficient in using those traits on scene when needed most. The department members participate annually in the state offered Winter and Summer Fire schools, which provide great opportunities to network with our fellow brothers and sisters in the service, as well as to learn new techniques and expand our knowledge within the fire service. Bi-monthly training is offered to all members to maintain skills and learn new methods to better improve the department’s performance and build camaraderie with each other.

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND DISASTERS: Social media has changed the disaster landscape

When Hurricane Katrina hit the shores of Louisiana and Mississippi in 2005, Facebook was just getting started and Twitter didn’t exist. Now Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a Twitter account <http://twitter.com/FEMA> with over 200,000 followers and FEMA director, Craig Fugate, has his own page @CraigatFEMA with over 39,000 followers.

FEMA indicated in the 2013 National Preparedness report earlier this summer that during and immediately following Hurricane Sandy, “users sent more than 20 million Sandy-related Twitter posts, or tweets, despite the loss of cell phone service during the peak of the storm.” New Jersey’s largest utility company, PSE&G, reported that during Sandy they used Twitter to notify the public of the daily locations of their giant tents and generators.

By far, the fastest and most effective means of reaching the public, he says, is Twitter. While all the public doesn’t use social media, most listen to the radio or watch television during a disaster. Every news organization and journalist is on Twitter and they follow local emergency service agencies. When they get information from a trusted source on Twitter, like a fire station chief or a county or municipal PIO, they quickly broadcast the information to the public.

Radio is fast but Twitter is even faster, Dougherty says. He tells how Twitter beat the shock waves from the Virginia earthquake to New York City. As soon as people felt the earthquake in Virginia, they tweeted messages about it.

Facebook pages are also easy to set up in a disaster, says Dougherty. However, people have to know a specific Facebook page address in order to join in the discussion. It is important to plan for social media before a disaster. Get people following your agency Twitter and Facebook page prior to the emergency. If they are following you on Twitter, you can send out updates and the Facebook page location when the event happens.

Facebook was used effectively in Utah’s Washington County during the floods of 2010. The county posted the location of sandbags. When they ran out at that location, someone let them know on Facebook and they were able to let the public know a new site for sandbags.

Websites are still valuable tools but are not easily changed. Sometimes they can only be changed by IT people who may not be available in an emergency situation. A better approach, says Dougherty, is a blog.

The researchers found that 80 percent of the information was generated by people living the disaster, with the remainder being generated by the local and national media. And the majority of information that was retweeted was news because it didn’t exist elsewhere or on the Internet.

Continued on next page
Another factor that made Twitter unique was that Twitter didn’t only serve as a means of broadcasting news but also as a platform for informational interaction. This provided a way for people to navigate through the enormous amounts of information, placing “virtual signposts,” which they could follow.

Twitter may also be a valuable source of information for policymaker decision making as well, although some doubt whether policy makers can synthesize the enormous amount of information in time to arrive at a consensus about what the information is really saying. Nevertheless, public officials and policy makers can get feedback from their followers on Twitter.

Social Media Protocol

While the use of social media has become the norm in the coverage of disasters and emergency situations, most agencies still do not want their personnel initiating or involved in social media during the event. Some even would have their people not use social media at all. Agencies need to have social media protocol in place so that first responders and other personnel are clear about the agency policy and the ramifications if they engage in social media.

An article in The Counsellor on June 1, 2011, about social media policies recognizes that emergency services personnel have the right to use social media for personal purposes but not in their functions as first responders without the permission and approval of their agencies. It says, “This policy is not intended to limit your right to freedom of speech or expression; but as we are a public entity, it has been put in place to protect the rights of this organization, its members and the public we are sworn to protect.”

The suggested policy states: “No information, videos or pictures gathered while on Department business (this includes emergency calls, meetings, drills, details, trainings or anything obtained on organization property or at organization functions) may be shared or posted in any format without the approval and written consent of the District’s Public Information Officer.”

Further, “Members and employees are prohibited from disseminating or transmitting in any fashion photographs or images of individuals receiving emergency medical assistance. Any such transmission may violate [state] laws and/or the HIPPA privacy rights of such individuals and may result in a criminal and/or civil proceeding being commenced against members and employees violating this provision of the policy.”

This policy may seem harsh. Yet, it protects both the agency and the first responder.

Conclusion

The use of social media has changed the way the public is informed about disasters and how to recover from them. While the traditional media continue to play a key role, social media has given citizens a means to inform and protect each other as well as to alter public policy and the official approach to dealing with emergencies. The Haiti earthquake was a watershed moment that changed how social media is used in disasters. While social media was independently evolving in the years leading up to 2010, the use of social media in the Haiti disaster made public officials aware of its potential in disaster response. Since then social media has played an important part in informing and keeping the public safe at both the local and national levels.

Social media and disasters will be discussed at the annual Utah PIO Conference to be held September 24-25, 2013, in St. George. More information is available by contacting Renae@parkcity.org.

Dr. John Fisher is a faculty member in the Emergency Management bachelor’s program at UVU. Before coming to UVU, he taught management and communications at Northwest Missouri State University, Boise State, Athabasca University, and the University of Alberta. John began his career as a newspaper reporter/photographer, reporting the court and police beats and covering emergency services. For eight years he was a public administrator in the Alberta government, working in policy analysis, public information, and legislative affairs. He has a BA and an MA from Brigham Young University and a PhD from the University of Alberta. http://works.bepress.com/john_fisher/
Layton City Fire Department is putting the final touches on a 1.3 million dollar training facility located at 1890 N. Fort Lane. Creating this facility/site included developing the three-plus-acre lot, live fire training tower, remodeling a 2,400 square foot existing building, and building a 5,000 square foot apparatus storage facility. Most of the funding for this project was generated from local emergency service impact fees.

Layton City fire and police personnel will utilize the facility. It will also be available to Davis Applied Technology Fire Academy and all Davis County fire departments. The facility will also be available for the continued training needs of the Davis/Weber County Urban Search and Rescue Teams.

The three-story, almost 5,000 square foot training tower will allow rescue personnel to conduct live fire training, rappelling, search and rescue, firefighter survival, victim rescue, roof operations, forcible entry, and anything else your imagination will allow for scenario-based emergency training. This facility will also be the location for the Davis County Entry Level Firefighter Physical Agility Test, as well as yearly physical fitness testing for Layton City Fire Department.

The apparatus building will provide a location for our Fire Corp volunteers to store equipment needed for firefighter rehab. We will also be storing a fire engine to be used for training, an air supply trailer, and much more. Keeping a majority of the training equipment on site will allow our crews to train without taking front-line apparatus out of service. Allowing for quicker response times from the training site and less wear and tear on front-line equipment.

Layton City Fire Department is extremely excited about the positive impact this facility will have on its firefighters, as well as the emergency services personnel for the entire county.

Updated International Fire Code Guide Books

In July the new International Fire Code went into effect for Utah. The Legislature adopted the 2012 code with a few modifications. UFRA, with the expert assistance of Park City Fire Marshal, Scott Adams, has created a new edition of our popular IFC Fire Inspectors Guide. It’s a pocket sized (if you’ve got a big pocket) collection of the most commonly needed IFC sections along with the Utah modifications and the latest info on Utah fireworks and other regulations. UFRA also publishes an international version for International Code Council (ICC). Here’s the ICC product description:

“Your Ideal pocket-sized resource for effective, accurate, consistent and complete fire inspections. Features:
- Page count increased by about 20% compared to previous editions
- Learn the most important and most relevant fire inspection information from the fire codes
- Quickly identify the relevant IFC section for each topic listed
- Increase the efficiency of fire inspections based on an occupancy-specific format
- Become aware of common hazards and the most frequent violated safety issues for various uses
- Increase fire inspection effectiveness by focusing on the most relevant issues
- Increase fire inspection consistency based on a common listing of important subjects.”

While the ICC charges $22.95 for the book, UFRA will provide the Utah version to Utah fire departments for free. UFRA uses the profits from sales of the ICC version to provide this service. The State Fire Marshal’s office and UFRA’s Program Managers will be distributing the books. For a digital version of the guidebook or further information or to receive larger numbers of books, e-mail steve.lutz@uvu.edu.

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LAyTON TRAINING TOWER

by Jared Sholly

Layton City Fire Department is putting the final touches on a 1.3 million dollar training facility located at 1890 N. Fort Lane. Creating this facility/site included developing the three-plus-acre lot, live fire training tower, remodeling a 2,400 square foot existing building, and building a 5,000 square foot apparatus storage facility. Most of the funding for this project was generated from local emergency service impact fees.

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The Fire Alarm Remote Annunciator: A Wealth of Information for the First Responder

One of the better definitions of a Fire Alarm System is as follows: “A fire alarm system consists of interconnected devices and controls to alert building occupants to fire or dangerous conditions and provide emergency responders with information on those conditions” - OSHA.

Obviously, to avoid loss of life, we in the fire service are most concerned that the occupants of the building receive early notification of a fire emergency, and can then proceed to exit the building safely and quickly. However, a key phrase in the definition is that the alarm must “provide emergency responders with information on those conditions.” However, if the desired information is incomplete, incorrect, or unavailable, then a great disservice has been done to the first responder, and this lack of information can place the well being of both occupants and fire department personnel in jeopardy.

Ideally, this is where properly designed and programmed Fire Alarm Annunciators come into play. An annunciator panel displays information about the location and type of alarm. In older buildings, this annunciator is simply the display on the main fire alarm panel, wherever it may be located in the building (see Figure 1). The information being displayed may be in the form of lamps next to handwritten or typed labels or, in more recent construction, digitally displayed information from a fully addressable fire alarm system. There are several problems, though, with having only one annunciator in any building of substantial size:

1. Is the location of the main panel clearly marked and easy to find?
2. Are the labels and zone maps still in place and up to date?
3. Does everyone in the fire department know where the alarm originated?

Oftentimes, the answer to all those questions is no. That is why the installation of Remote Annunciators is vitally important.

A Remote Annunciator is essentially a miniature version of the main fire alarm panel located at or near the main entrance or entrances of buildings. The remote annunciator displays important information for the first responder, and, if fully addressable, can provide exact details of the nature of the alarm and/or condition (see Figure 2). A large building should have multiple remote annunciators to serve multiple entrances that the fire department may use. Think about it, would you respond to a large facility the same way for every alarm, regardless of where the fire might be in the building? Probably not. Conditions such as time of day, road construction/congestion, fire department personnel on duty, and location of the responding units at the time of the alarm may dictate the use of various entrances.

It’s important to remember to not let the designer or architect decide where the annunciator will be and how many there will be. All modern fire codes allow the AHJ or Fire Chief to decide where the annunciators should be placed and how many are necessary in a given building. For instance, in a large university arena, it would be not only practical but also extremely advantageous to have a remote annunciator located at three or four different entrances to the building. The annunciator should be placed in a location where responding fire department personnel do not have to search to find it. In addition, the annunciator should not be placed where it could be obscured, examples being an open door, furniture, decorations, or window coverings. Think rapid access.

The remote annunciators you see in Figures 2 and 3, when properly programmed, can provide a treasure trove of information for first-in personnel. The annunciator can tell you the following things:

1. The floor of the alarm.
2. The zone or area where the alarm originated.
3. The type of device that is in alarm, trouble, or supervisory condition.

In addition, a fully addressable alarm can also provide first responders with a description and location of the exact device that is in alarm. This becomes extremely valuable in large buildings with multiple floors and multiple rooms, such as a high school.

When inspecting and/or approving a fire alarm system with remote annunciator(s), make sure to check for the following items:

1. Do the alarm addresses and locations make sense to a responding firefighter? If the display panel says “ALARM ZONE 2”, do you have a means of knowing where zone two is? If the alarm is zoned and not specifically addressed, a graphic map indicating each zone and the boundaries thereof must be located next to the remote annunciator. If the display says a heat detector is going off in electrical room 317, is a map provided to show responding units where that location is? In extremely large or high-rise buildings, this is an absolute necessity.

2. Do the room numbers or room descriptions match reality? If the annunciator indicates a smoke detector is activated on the fourth floor, west hallway by room 414, then there needs to be an actual room assigned and indicated as 414 and a hallway in that approximate location on the fourth floor. Sometimes alarm programmers make mistakes in relation to directional indicators or room numbers. These can all be verified during testing and changed if necessary with minimal effort on their part.

3. Are the messages on the annunciator coming across as technical jargon, or would they be clearly understandable to a rookie firefighter? For instance, a sprinkler water flow alarm in zone three should be addressed as “Waterflow, Zone 3”, which can then be found on the ad-

Figure 1. The days of large, wall-mounted main fire alarm panels in a corridor have long passed.

Figure 2. The compact and aesthetically pleasing Remote Annunciator should be found in almost all newly constructed buildings.

Figure 3. Another example of a remote annunciator. Note the status indicators above the display screen.

The fire alarm remote annunciator is indeed a valuable tool to the fire department when it is properly programmed and located. The point of this article is to remember that you as the AHJ can decide where you want the annunciator and how many you want. You can also determine how you want locations addressed, using a language with terms that make sense to you and your department. Don’t be intimidated by an electrical engineer telling you that what you want can’t be done or is impractical. The truth is changing the address description on annunciator or adding annunciator to a project under construction takes very little time and minimal expense in most cases. You can help yourself, your department, and the occupants of the building by taking a little extra time to inspect the annunciator and make sure its functions work and descriptions are readily discernible by fire department personnel. As technology rapidly increases, so will the ability of these time-saving devices.

Be safe and inspect thoroughly!

Todd Hobhein has been employed with the State of Utah Fire Marshal’s Office since 2000 as an inspector and fire investigator. Todd was previously with the Nebraska State Fire Marshal’s Office from 1997-2000. Todd lives in LaVerkin, and his jurisdiction as a fire marshal includes Washington, Iron, Beaver, and Kane counties.
DEAL or NO DEAL

I was at the gym one day riding the stationary bike when a firefighter friend of mine came up to me and said, “What is wrong with the generation today?” My first thought was, “This is going to be interesting,” and my second thought was, “I like it when someone talks to me while riding the exercise bike because it makes the time go by faster.”

Being aware that I teach and have written many articles about ethics and character, he started telling me about Jennifer. Jennifer’s mom agreed to let her go to a party if she promised to be home by midnight. But as the Cinderella hour approached, the 16-year-old did a quick risk/reward calculation.

She knew her mom would be angry and probably ground her, but she was having so much fun she decided it was worth it. Sure enough, when she got home at 2:00 a.m. her mom was waiting for her, enraged that Jennifer had violated her promise but relieved she was safe.

“Breaking your word was bad enough,” her mom said, “but how could you be so cruel and selfish to not call and say you were safe? I was worried sick.”

Jennifer concluded her evening of bad choices with another: “You forced me into agreeing. The curfew was unfair. As to your worrying, that was your choice. I was perfectly safe. Just tell me the punishment and let me go to bed.”

We decided that Jennifer’s first mistake was to think she had a right to break her promise because she was “forced” into it. Mom’s proposition was “Deal or no Deal?” Jennifer made a deal, and like it or not, she was morally bound to keep her word.

Her second mistake was to think she could buy off the moral duty to keep her promise simply by accepting punishment. Her mom’s trust wasn’t mended because Jennifer paid a penalty. Ultimately, the issue wasn’t about curfews and parties; it was about trust and credibility. Her lack of remorse and accountability only made things worse, critically damaging her relationship with her mom.

Her third mistake was to think she wasn’t responsible, despite her refusal to accept responsibility for inflicting mental anguish on her mom. She was responsible. If she bothered to think about it, Jennifer knew her conduct would cause gut-wrenching worry, every bit as painful as a punch to the stomach. A person is ethically accountable for the predictable consequences of his or her actions.

In a nutshell, Jennifer didn’t act with character. She was untrustworthy, irresponsible, disrespectful, and unkind. It will take her a long time to build the healthy bonds of trust that both she and her mom want and need.

As we continued our discussion, along with solving the problems of the world (even with no alcohol), our conversation turned to, of course, firefighters and ethical behavior. We both agreed that if there is one profession that is considered trustworthy it is firefighting. As a matter of fact, not too long ago I read an article in the Harvard Business Law Review that indicated that of all the professions in the world, firefighters were considered to be the most trusted and respected professionals. You probably can imagine where politicians ranked.

This public trust of firefighters is corroborated during a fire. When we go to a fire in an apartment house, it is often necessary to go to the apartment next to the one on fire and check for fire exposure. If the occupant is home we ask if we can check the apartment for exposure. Of course, we are let in. It is interesting how much the occupant trusts us because when we go through the apartment the occupant doesn’t follow us. We agreed that trust must never be violated.

We also discussed the attitude of some firefighters and the promises that were made during their hiring interviews. This is where the “Deal or No Deal” enters the conversation.

During my career I have personally been involved in over 1,000 hiring and promotional interviews. Every candidate promised and made a deal that he or she would be the very best firefighter one could be. The candidates promised to work hard every day, be a person of character, be honest, courteous to the customer and each other, obey the organization rules and regulations, work hard to improve themselves, never be lazy or bad mouth the leadership of the organization.

We were curious what percentage of firefighters keep that deal. What are your thoughts?

Stay safe.

Paul Stein retired as Chief Officer from California’s Santa Monica Fire Department. After retirement he served as Interim Fire Chief for the Lakeside Fire Department in California. He holds an A.S. Degree in Fire Technology and a B.A. Degree in Management. Chief Stein is a Master Instructor for the California Department of Education.

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Utah State Firemen’s Association Quarterly Meeting.

On October 13, 2013, the Utah Fire Museum is hosting the Utah State Firemen Association’s quarterly meeting.

1:00 PM - Trustee Meeting
4:00 PM - Quarterly Meeting
5:00 PM - Memorial to honor fallen firefighters
6:00 PM - Annual Dinner followed by Auction

Donated items for the auction are appreciated. To donate and item or for more information, please contact the Curator at (435) 830-6556.
Say what? Push the pause button?! What the heck are you talking about? Relax a moment and I will explain.

“Speed kills.” This axiom is familiar to all of us, and we have all seen the realization and reality of this time-tested truth. Speed on arrival may cause us to miss important clues, which would most likely change one’s strategic decisions and tactics and potentially affect one’s safety. Take the necessary time to properly complete a size-up and then act on it.

On arrival, someone keys the radio and begins to spew out an initial arrival report. Some call this a windshield size-up; however, this is not a size-up. What it is, is an arrival report. This arrival report is an expected and normal part of establishing command and control at the incident. However, it is only the initial step. There is a great deal more that needs to be observed, planned for, and communicated on arrival. Once the initial arrival report has been given, push the pause button until completing the remainder of the size-up process, then resume communicating what has been observed, what is being done, and what is needed.

When one is too hurried important steps are skipped and mistakes are made. Officers and firefighters must slow down, engage the brain, and begin to analyze what he or she is seeing. To get a true picture, the initial arriving officer must complete, if possible, a walk-around or 360º survey of the structure to identify all visible problems. This will allow for more accurate and effective decisions. If the structure is too large or obstructions prevent the officer from completing a 360º, the officer must assign someone to access, visualize, and report on what he or she cannot see. This must be accomplished quickly.

The goal is to paint an accurate picture in one’s mind, and in the minds of those who are and are not yet on-scene, as to what problems exist and how to begin addressing the issues. Simplicity cannot be overemphasized. Simply state what is seen on arrival and then tell the responding units that the size-up is being completed and to stand-by for more information, this essentially pushes the “pause button.”

This simple communication takes immediate pressure off of the first arriving officer; allowing him or her adequate time to complete the size-up process and formulate the plan in his or her own mind before keying the radio and finishing the report. This process takes only seconds and will yield huge results.

The initial arriving officer is, by default, in command making him or her responsible for identifying problems and formulating strategies to deal with them. Take the time that is necessary to do it right. Push the pause button to allow for enough time to identify the problems (size-up). One must be prepared, through strategy and tactical assignments, to deal with competing priorities. Keep your arrival communication simple and to the point. Report what can be seen, what is being done, and ask for what is needed. The rest of the blanks will get filled in soon enough. Slow down and do it right....SPEED KILLS!

Stephen H. Higgs

began his fire service career in 1977 with the Salt Lake City Fire Department. Higgs served as a firefighter/paramedic, lieutenant, captain, battalion chief, and deputy chief over fire operations. In 2000, after 23 years with Salt Lake City, he accepted the position of fire chief with Midvale City Fire Department. On July 1st, 2011, Midvale Fire merged with the Unified Fire Authority of Greater Salt Lake (UFA); Higgs now serves as an assistant chief with the UFA.

Higgs holds degrees in building construction and fire science. He has completed Executive Fire Officer Course work at the National Fire Academy and is a graduate of the Senior Executives in State and Local Government, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government. He is a FEMA certified emergency manager as well as an adjunct instructor for UFA.
THE BIG C IN SWEDEN

I saw a report this week, while in Sweden, that one in three firefighters get cancer during his or her lifetime, and I felt compelled to share a lesson that I learned from Sweden. This lesson is a game changer, if we can get our unions, municipalities, and citizens to see the cost benefit of spending money now to save millions in future insurance premiums, LODD benefits, and a more productive and healthy fire service. I’m going to get a little bit direct here but we all go in burning buildings, so I think you can handle it.

One of the incredible things about working with Firefighters Cycling is the opportunity to visit fire departments around the U.S. and elsewhere. In this season, Firefighters Cycling spent nearly a month in Sweden with Uppsala Brandförsvaret.

Like most American firefighters, I was curious to see exactly how Swedes fought fire with their funny-looking helmets and some even stranger-looking trucks.

While I am not one of those who think the only way to put out fire is “our” way, check, our way is so different from East Coast to West Coast, there really is not an “American Fire Service Way”! I was pretty sure we had it right. I did not learn how to put out fires since Sweden’s way is not really a whole lot different than how I was taught. However, I did learn about the “The Big C”.

The Big C

The Swedish have a Clean Firefighter program, and it is brilliant in its simplicity and is light years ahead of the U.S. Their motto is “Don’t take the fire home with you!” Crazy, right? Of course, we aren’t taking the fire home. Or are we?

Well, answer this: what happens after the fire is out? No, really, what happens? Do you brush the soot off your gear, rinse off your helmet, send the dirty gear back to the station in a bag, and get fresh gear for the rig? No? Well, then you are taking the fire home to your quarters, your brothers and sisters, and worst of all, your family.

We all came up as firefighters thinking cherry gear was for newbies! It’s a badge of honour to have a black helmet, cooked on carcinogens, with a look like your gear has been to hell and back. Your helmet is a reflection of you – someone who is hard-core, doesn’t back down or out. Your helmet and dirty gear is to be respected! Right? No - wrong.

Every time we put dirty gear on the rig, we are dumping carcinogens on our coats pants, boots, and helmets. Carcinogens get stirred up every time we get on a rig. We breathe the chemicals in, we have them on our uniforms and then the carcinogens go home with us to our families. Think about it - who does your laundry?

Am I getting my point across?

Not to get preachy, but have you ever thought about how this exposes us over and over to carcinogens? No? Neither had I until I went to Sweden.

How many U.S. departments have two sets of gear for their firefighters? Honestly, there may be some, but in my 25-plus years on the job, I don’t recall ever having two sets of structural gear. I had wildland, ARFF, and structural (I so hated keeping up with three pairs of gloves) but never two of any one of those, and I doubt many of you do either.

The Clean Firefighter program promotes that each firefighter has one set of gear on hand and another set of gear ready to go after a fire. In addition, a crew is responsible for changing gear out and cleaning it, as well as cleaning the tools, hoses, etc. The truck goes back as clean as it left, and no one is sitting in soot.

All of us should have our health as a priority, and Firefighters Cycling is focused on finding ways to keep us alive, get us home to our families, and live healthy, productive lives after our days of fighting fires are over. It’s not all about getting in the gym; we all know that is vital, but all the fitness in the world is not going to keep us from getting cancer.

How much of our cancer problem is centered on our egos? How many of us old smoke eaters will clean our gear more often if it means another day of life? And how many chief officers will take a look across the Atlantic at what a progressive-minded fire service is doing for their firefighters?

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THE COMFORTABLE ROUTINE

We all know we have habits. Some of them are good habits. And some of them are...well...not so good. The less often talked about cousin of a habit is a routine. Habits and routines can impact situational awareness in both good and bad ways.

But where do habits and routines come from? Does a habit turn into a routine? Or does a routine turn into a habit? Do habits and routines prevent complacency or contribute to it? All good questions. Let’s explore habits, routines, and complacency.

Habits & Routines

Webster defines a habit as “a behavior pattern acquired by frequent repetition or physiologic exposure that shows itself in regularity or increased facility of performance; an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary.” Webster defines a routine as a “habitual or mechanical performance of an established procedure.”

The Chicken or the Egg

The definitions offer up the age-old, or should I say the “egg-old” question: What came first, the chicken or the egg? In the context of this topic, the question is: do habits form routines or do routines form habits? An argument could be made for either to come first. Your routines can become your comfortable habits. Your habits can turn into your comfortable routines.

Enter Complacency

Webster defines complacency as “self-satisfaction especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies.” It is very unfortunate that complacency has become a habit for some responders. Some have become satisfied and comfortable in doing things in ways that are dangerous to the point they have become unaware (or arguably, uncaring) about the dangers. This can have catastrophic consequences.

Contagious Complacency

A complacent responder can “infect” other responders. When this happens, the consequences can be significant. In fact, an entire company can become complacent. And worst of all, an entire department can become complacent. When this happens, the department can sink into a comfortable rut and become arrogant.

Members can begin to believe they are so good at what they do that a bad outcome will never happen... because it never does. The success of past outcomes can contribute to complacency. When members perform in ways that are not consistent with best practices - and get away with it (i.e., no bad outcome) - it can build confidence that is based in luck, not ability.

False Confidence

When responders experience successful outcomes, builds their confidence. This, unto itself, is not a bad thing so long as the success was based on performance consistent with best practices. However, all success builds confidence, meaning success resulting from luck also builds confidence, albeit false confidence.

To overcome the curse of complacency, responders must first be aware of the affliction they are facing. This awareness comes from becoming a student of best practices.

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OF COMPLACENCY

they can cheat the system too. In the end, the casino wins. If you doubt this, look at the lavishness of a casino. Those structures are built on the losses of gamblers.

Chief Gasaway’s Advice

To overcome the curse of complacency, responders must first be aware of the affliction they are facing. This awareness comes from becoming a student of best practices. This involves learning about best practices and comparing what your department does to first responder best practices. Read firefighter casualty reports to learn how responders die. Then compare the circumstances, situational awareness, and decision making of catastrophic outcomes to how your department does things.

When you see inconsistencies between established best practices and how your department does things, it may be time to start asking the hard questions. Why does your department do things differently than best practices dictate? Have you found a better way to get the job done? Is your better way safer, or have you just been lucky?

Avoid judging bad outcomes that others experience. Oftentimes when a responder reads a casualty report they can judge the performance of others without turning that harsh judgment on themselves or on their own department. Be lulled into thinking the department that experienced the bad outcome was less competent where, in fact, maybe their luck ran out.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss areas where your department may have become complacent in training or performance.
2. Discuss areas where you have become personally complacent in your application of best practices.
3. Discuss ideas about how to break the cycle of complacency in your organization.

Dr. Gasaway is widely considered to be one of the nation’s leading authorities on first responder situational awareness and decision-making under stress. Dr. Gasaway has a second passion: uncovering and applying research in brain science for the benefit of first responders. His website, Situational Awareness Matters (www.SAMatters.com) has enjoyed over two million visits since its launch in October 2011. He can be reached at Support@RichGasaway.com or 612-548-4424.

Richard B. Gasaway is a scholar-practitioner on first responder safety. In addition to serving 30+ years as a public safety provider, he earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree while studying emergency incident situational awareness and decision making under stress. Dr. Gasaway is widely considered to be one of the nation’s leading authorities on first responder situational awareness and decision-making.

Richard B. Gasaway
DEFLAGRATION IN JENSEN

On March 2, 2013, at approximately 0013 a large explosion rocked Jensen, Utah, and the surrounding areas. One building in the Ashley Valley Industrial Park just west of Jensen was completely leveled and at least a dozen others suffered significant damage. The blast was heard as far away as Roosevelt, Utah, to the west and Dinosaur, Colorado, to the east – each roughly thirty miles away.

First reports of the explosion were received by dispatch at approximately 0014. Jensen Fire Department was dispatched to the scene. Nearby Naples and Vernal Fire Departments were requested to respond as well. Upon arriving on scene, teams immediately began to assess and search the properties involved in the explosion.

Law Enforcement in Uintah County also responded, including officers from the Uintah County Sheriff’s Office, Vernal and Nephi Police Departments, and the Utah Highway Patrol. Gold Cross Ambulance staged nearby for the fire crews on scene.

Emergency responders began to combat the fire in the remnants of what was at one time a facility operated by Adler Hot Oil Service. Crews would also deal with a 1,000 gallon propane tank that was leaking as a result of the explosion. Remarkably, there were no injuries or fatalities from the blast. Due to the time of day, the industrial park was devoid of business owners and employees except for three individuals in separate buildings that were protected from the blunt force of the explosion by shielding and, albeit short, distance.

 Uintah Fire District Chief and Incident Commander, Jeremy Raymond, issued an evacuation order at approximately 0030 for all persons living within a one half-mile radius of the explosion. A Red Cross temporary shelter was opened for displaced persons at the Vernal Middle School with the help of local CERT and Red Cross volunteers as well as school district employees.

When daylight came, Classic Lifeguard Helicopter provided Incident Command with a critical birds-eye view of the incident scene and the surrounding areas. A team of building inspectors arrived at 0600 to help further assess the damage.

The following statement is from the April 5, 2013, press release provided by lead investigator, Brett Lane, of the Jensen Fire Department:

“The explosion damaged 26 facilities including residential dwellings. Initial reports indicate loss in the tens of millions. Adler Hot Oil is an oilfield service company that uses truck mounted propane fueled heaters to warm fluids in the oil and gas fields. Investigators have determined a likely source and amount of propane released inside the building. Multiple possible ignition sources have also been identified throughout the structure. The level of deflagration indicates a near perfect ignitable mixture of propane and air was present at ignition.”

Responding crews brought the fire under control that occurred following the explosion. Responders remained on scene for two operational periods. The residential evacuation order remained in place until 1200 with the commercial district evacuation order extending until 1800 on the same day.

These are the facts, and there is no doubt the aftermath of the explosion put our collective response skills to the test, but there is an underlying narrative regarding how well our response personnel worked throughout the operational periods.

The responding agencies in the Vernal area worked together cohesively under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Additionally, the temperature on this particular morning was a balmy 6 degrees Fahrenheit. Structures, both residential and commercial, had received damage up to one half mile away. The reverberation of the explosion brought newly awakened and interminably bored Looky Lou’s to our scene.

In spite of it all, everyone toed the line: multiple fire departments, state and local law enforcement, Gold Cross Ambulance, dispatchers, Emergency Management, Classic Lifeguard, Red Cross and CERT volunteers, building inspectors, elected officials, school district officials, state liaisons, faith-based organizations, and the local radio media. Everyone played their part and they played it well.

We credit the responders’ smooth interaction on the morning of March 2, 2013, to training, ICS and a commitment to covering each other’s back. This is not to imply that every aspect of our response was perfect. As with any large incident, an After Action Report (AAR) was created and reviewed. We found things that we did well, and we discussed specific items that would be improved upon in future responses.

We have all responded to our share of incidents where turf wars, egotism, and “not my problem” attitudes hindered the response, but the “get it done” attitude of the responders that day in Jensen, Utah, was tremendous and memorable. So much so that it will be spoken of in the Uintah Basin response circles for years to come.

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Article and photography courtesy of the Jensen Fire Department
PRESS RELEASE

FIREFIGHTER TRAINING AND RESEARCH STUDY AT UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY SHEDS LIGHT ON DEADLY TOXICANTS CONTAINED IN FIRE SMOKE

Provo, UT – During the first two weeks in October, live burns will be conducted in coordination with the Utah Valley University (UVU) Recruit Candidate Program to collect data by testing firefighter Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) pre-exposure and post-exposure to simulated residential structure fires adhering to scientific methodology using Gas Chromatography / Mass Spectrometry (GC/MS). In coordination with the Fire Smoke Coalition, Inc., the research methodology and preliminary results will be presented on October 11, 2013, during the final classroom session which will conclude a long-term training program and live burn and smoke practical presented by the Fire Smoke Coalition to Utah-area firefighters and first responders.

The research project, started after a discussion about the field application of (GC/MS) to the fire service related to firefighter safety and fire investigations with representatives from Smiths Detection and approximately 20 first responders during a workshop in Danbury, Connecticut in February 2013. A collaborative research project was initiated. One of the research questions was: “What scientific data is available that documents the tertiary hazards from fire smoke and debris exposure to firefighters related to their PPE?”

David Matthew, the research project manager, is a current manager and educator for the Incident Management and HazMat/WMD curriculum nationwide and serves as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) conducting exercises and course reviews. He is an avid researcher and a recognized subject matter expert in detection technologies.

What is known is that firefighter cancer, cardiac related illnesses and deaths, neurological problems and other chronic health problems are increasing – not decreasing. While many departments have initiated strict Standard Operating Procedures that keep firefighters on air through the overhaul phase of the fire, it’s not decreasing the statistical data related to firefighter illness and death. With only three routes of exposure, i.e., inhalation, ingestion and absorption, if firefighters are on air – that leaves only absorption as a means of exposure, which points directly to PPE.

During live burn practical sessions in Fort Collins, Colorado earlier this year, the Fire Smoke Coalition had the opportunity to utilize GC/MS during the practical. The results were startling to the participating firefighters. “Using the GC/MS gave us an opportunity to look further into the smoke,” said Rob Schnepp, Chief of Special Operations, Alameda (CO) Fire Department. Present in the small burns we conducted were Styrene, Acetophenone, Toluene Diisocyanate, Propenioic acid, Pyridine, and Benzonitrile. -a wide array of chemicals substances, well past the typical gases identified through standard gas detection technology. It’s sobering to think about all the nasty stuff firefighters get exposed to.”

Ultimately, the educational goal is to impart the unquestionable dangers of absorbing toxicants if firefighters’ PPE and bodies are not kept clean. While there are many firefighters that have been exposed to deadly toxicants for years, there may not be much that can be done to offset the damage. For the younger generation, they will be convinced, through absolute research that habits must change for their health and safety. According to Matthew, “The research project produced data that documents the toxic and carcinogenic chemicals that are present in residential fire smoke and debris. We seek verification that our PPE becomes the delivery system that causes significant exposure to these deadly chemicals. Through science and technology we desire to affect attitudes and offer procedures to improve firefighter health & safety.”

There is also a trickle-down effect this information can have on communities as it relates to fire smoke. In the United States, residential fires are the third leading cause of fatal injury and the fifth most common cause of unintentional injury death, yet the majority of fire-related fatalities are not caused by burns, but by smoke inhalation. Despite the amount of fires in the U.S., decreasing each year, the amount of civilians dying in fires is actually increasing. For example, in 2013, 1,348,500 fires were attended by public fire department, a decrease of 7.1 percent from the year before; however, 3,010 civilian fire deaths occurred, which is an increase of 9.3 percent.

While many of the toxicants found during the research would not immediately cause death to a firefighter who is on air, imagine the impact the fire smoke will have on the civilian in a house fire with absolutely no protection during the incipient stage of the fire when noxious gases are forming. For the civilian, the levels of Hydrogen Cyanide have dramatically increased in house fires due to the plastics, laminates and synthetics in our homes today. Hydrogen Cyanide can be up to 35 times more toxic than carbon monoxide, an underappreciated risk that can cause severe injury or death within minutes. In a review of major fires over a 19-year period, cyanide was found at toxic-to-lethal levels in the blood of approximately 33 percent to 87 percent of fatalities.

The October 11, 2013 UVU “Know Your Smoke: The Dangers of Fire Smoke Exposure” training program and the culmination of the research project, will undoubt- edly be life-changing, not just for the firefighters, but the communities they serve. “We’re excited to be a part of the research that will no doubt benefit not only our recruits, but every responder who may be exposed to dangerous materials and hidden hazards. We’re honored to be a part of what can be lifesaving studies with ramifications in safety standards, protocols and procedures for the benefit of present and future generations of responders and the communities they serve.”

About the Fire Smoke Coalition

The Fire Smoke Coalition, Inc. is considered to be the international epicenter of education about the dangerous toxicants contained in fire smoke with a mission to prevent, protect, detect, diagnose and treat the exposure. For more information, please visit www.FireSmoke.org.

References:

1 United States Fire Administration; Fire Loss in the United States in 2009; Michael J. Karter.
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DEGREE AT UVU

Kaitlyn Hedges grew up in Thousand Oaks, California, and moved to Utah to pursue a bachelor’s degree at Brigham Young University. She graduated from BYU in 2012 with a B.A. in English and minors in editing and anthropology. She has been happily married for almost two years. Kaitlyn has been enjoying working as the morning receptionist at UFRA since March 2013, and in the afternoon she works as a freelance editor. In her spare time, Kaitlyn enjoys playing ultimate frisbee, hiking, reading, sewing, and travelling.
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