

Service Level Designation and Related Issues

Training of personnel within the SSIFR has historically been regarded as an "operational" decision, one left exclusively in the hands of the Chief and his staff. The BC Fire Commissioner has made it clear, though, that the ultimate responsibility for determining the minimum level of training for structural fire fighting is a ***policy*** responsibility of the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ)...in the case of the SSIFPD, it is the Board of Trustees.

As elaborated in the Fire Commissioner's "Playbook", this determination "should be based upon":

- local conditions;
- consultation with representatives of local fire service delivery organization;
- availability of resources and the ability of those resources to respond;
- the realities of the community in terms of demographics, risks, travel distances, fire hall locations, equipment and staffing models; and
- the ability of the AHJ to financially support its fire department to enable it to meet all applicable training, safety and operational requirements for the chosen **Service Level**.

The Board was provided a report by Chief Bremner who recommended adoption of the third tier of training...the Full-Service Operations Level. This recommendation seemed to be based largely on the assurance that the SSIFR has been performing at this level for some time, and that no additional costs are anticipated related to this service level inasmuch as the necessary apparatus is already in-house.

This report, however, does not address the array of other factors to which the Fire Commissioner urges consideration. These are significant issues, many of which may point toward adoption of a less rigorous training level:

- *Availability of resources and the ability of those resources to respond* There are two questionable resources on this island: water and manpower;
 1. Sufficient water for fire fighting is problematic, and is only available in a timely manner to part of the fire district. How will this be factored into the policy service level considerations?
 2. Questions pertaining to manpower/retention of volunteers are raised in bullets below.
- *Risks* Salt Spring Island is a rural community with very little industry and, with the exception of Ganges, few buildings that could be considered complex structures. Responding to a fire in any of those complex structures (e.g., the hospital) can be accommodated via the "Interior Operations Level" as long as a "pre-plan" has been developed for which personnel are familiar and trained. If the nature of our structural fire "risk" is minimal as compared to most urban centres (for which the Full-Service level is intended), would the Interior Operations Level be more appropriate to our community's needs?
- *Travel distances/ Fire Hall locations* Since both of these factors were included in the Playbook as items for consideration, in what way do our circumstances affect the service level determination?
- *Staffing Model* Although the SSIFR has several "career" fire fighters, we rely heavily on its roster of volunteer (Paid-on-call) personnel. The organization seems to have little difficulty recruiting new members, but faces issues with retention.
 1. Have training requirements increased substantially in the last several years and, if so, is that having a detrimental effect on retention...i.e., the inability to balance these increased demands with work and home life?
 2. In addition to fires, the SSIFR handles first response, motor vehicle incidents, and other services requiring training. If the Board adopts the Full-Service Operations level (with the attendant training required), does it overburden our volunteers?
- *Financial support.* While Chief Bremner has assured that apparatus required for Full-Service status is already in place, the main influence on the District's budget is related to

personnel. Is the community willing and able to support a "career" fire department and, if not, are the demands related to training compatible with the needs and expectations of personnel for whom this is not a full-time job?

According to articles in several Fire Industry journals, the Fire Commissioner's Playbook was developed in recognition that the previous "one size fits all" rigorous training standards were not appropriate to many communities, resulting in communities whose fire departments were therefore not in compliance.

Without question, personnel should be trained in such a way that they can safely perform their job while addressing the needs of the community they serve. Is it possible, though, to "over train"...to create performance demands in excess of (and inappropriate to) the risks? I suggest that the answer is "yes", and that doing so will create a self-fulfilling prophecy: that the SSIFR can no longer rely on "volunteers", and that we must continue to increase the number of "career" personnel.

Given all of the above, I encourage you to consider adopting the Interior Operations Service Level as the current policy.

Respectfully,
Julia Lucich