

## THE NEW REALITY

### FIREFIGHTER TEMP AGENCY

OBJECTIVE: TO REDUCE OVERTIME COSTS AND ENHANCE  
EMERGENCY SERVICE!

Reviewing the past 20 years activity will show the many changes in Fire Departments emergency calls and the significant reduction in fire calls of all types. The reduction of fire calls can be attributed to many things. The number of people smoking today has declined significantly, the use of smoke detectors means early warning and cell phones mean that fires are reported quicker while in their incipient stage. Today we have fewer delayed alarms that allowed a small fire to become a serious blaze. Stricter building codes and the redevelopment of slum areas and old fire hazards took away the old burnable buildings. While fire calls have declined significantly medical and service calls have increased to a level not anticipated by many in the Fire business.

The idea that some say the 1500 GPM or 2000 GPM pumper is the only "acceptable apparatus" for responding to today's emergencies is misguided! This is the only response apparatus that current employees know! Times have changed but the various fire departments have not kept up with the changes! Back to the future!

We have now become an Emergency Service Provider, responding to medicals, vehicle accidents and many other "emergencies" using the 9-1-1 reporting system. Most Fire agencies are responding to 90+% medical and service and fewer than 10% actual fire calls of all types. Unfortunately, our **Doctrine of Response** has not kept up with the times. The current philosophy of staffing and Doctrine of Response utilizing a 1500 or 2000 GPM pumper with a crew of three, Captain,

Engineer, Firefighter (A Paramedic may be one of the ranks) has passed its time of efficiency. Considering the current work load a new service model needs to be embraced by all in today's Emergency Service.

Today the Engineer rank, the driver and pump operator is more a chauffeur. Calls requiring the "Engineer" to utilize the "pump" are rare today. A more efficient model for today's work load would be a smaller, more versatile apparatus that could be staffed with a well-trained crew of two, one being an officer, Captain or Lieutenant, and a Paramedic/Firefighter augmented by an intern or reserve or both! Ideally both the officer ranks would be Paramedics to better serve our citizens. On emergency calls today we have an automatic response by the ambulance company, AMR, staffed with a Paramedic and an EMT. This would have four first responders on scene and if additional support is needed, the radio makes for easy communications to dispatch additional help if needed.

Today, computers make gathering information about our service calls easy. Where and when do most calls occur? This information should be a great help in determining where our "Emergency Service" stations should be located and how staffed. Our citizens do not deserve to be deprived of our most often called need for assistance due to a staffing doctrine driven by MOU or out of date bargaining arguments.

Today with a financial crisis in most all fire agencies, leadership must come into the 21st century and adopt measures that will enhance public safety with the tax dollars available. It is past management or mismanagement that has brought us to this unsatisfactory situation and sadly management looks to the already overburdened tax payer to foot the bill. ***Overtime costs are a cancer in any organization's budget and overtime has become a cottage industry in the Fire Service.*** The tax payers are unhappy with the very poor utilization of their tax dollars with this massive overtime spending. The taxpayers deserve better and this proposal will be well received by both taxpayer and citizen who will

get enhanced service in a more efficient manner. This will mean that the public will again support the revitalized emergency services when a vote for additional funding is really needed. We cannot threaten the voter with dire predictions of death and destruction; instead we must earn the tax payers vote by making the changes that seem common sense to many that will improve efficiency!

*WE CAN PRODUCE A MARKETABLE PRODUCT:*

*"THE FUTURE FIREFIGHTER"*

*DEVELOPING THE "TEMP AGENCY"*

Battalion 7 is the ideal size of an organization to create the Emergency Service Temp Agency.

In 1968 I had the privilege to ride with FDNY Battalion 44. I was introduced to an Assistant Chief who asked how big is the Fire Department where I worked? I said 7 Engine Companies and two Truck Companies, a small Fire Department compared to FDNY. He said your Department is the perfect size organization to make change readily. He told me that if I entered the FDNY and on day one I had an idea that would make for a very positive change in the FDNY efficiency, that idea would still be in the pipeline 20 years later when one reached retirement date! (FDNY has a 20-year pension)

Change is hard but can be accomplished with cooperation & necessity. How do we create our "Interns" for the Temp Agency? We have already taken a few baby steps for the development with the Training Area behind RHFD Station 76. *"If you build it, they will come"*. Many young men and women desire to become firefighters and they have pursued this noble calling by going to school, paying their own tuition and graduating, often as Firefighter I, EMT, Wild Land Fire Training and often Paramedic Certifications, only to find the job market has shrunk with agency layoffs due to budget shortfalls. This reduction in our personnel is dangerous to both the citizen and the

firefighter. Many speak of "Firefighter Safety" and "Citizen Safety" but "safety" starts with who you hire and how you train & prepare that candidate for the career in Emergency Service!

Battalion 7 operating as a Training Battalion, can offer continuing education and classes to those individuals who want to persevere in their desire to become our future firefighters. Offering a two year course of study that will include all aspects of a career in Emergency Service to include Firefighting, Physical Conditioning, Truck Company Operations, Heavy Rescue, Fire Inspection, Hazardous Materials, Leadership Skills, Management & Budget, Officer Training, Fire Ground Operations, Para Medic skills, Apparatus Operator and any other class or course of study that will prepare our future fire fighters to become the **SEAL TEAM of PUBLIC SAFETY!**

WHY WOULD ANYONE UNDER TAKE SUCH A COURSE OF STUDY?

**THE OPPORTUNITY FOR AN INTERNSHIP & FUTURE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES RESULTING FROM THIS INTERNSHIP!**

During the course of study, these preparing students can become part of a Reserve Program that will allow them to gain practical experience with fire companies. *These Reserves will be very well qualified and would NOT put the paid personnel at risk!* They would have a sound resume and be very well prepared for any job within the Emergency Service. Hopefully the paid personnel would look upon the reserve force as an asset enhancing both Citizen Safety and Firefighter safety. The top graduates of this Academy would qualify for an 18-month Internship and would be paid a stipend to be determined.

These TOP QUALIFIED INTERNS would become our Temp Agency employee's and be available to fill any overtime slot in the entire

County at a much lower rate of pay but I in many cases, a better prepared employee to serve our citizens in their hour of need! The Public, the Tax Payer and the Citizen, who may need service from our fire agencies will appreciate that the Interns will be **TOP QUALIFIED** to deliver any service required of them. Only the very top, the elite of the academy, will be in the internship program. This program will provide a hiring place for any agency, anywhere, that needs to hire Firefighters. Battalion 7 will become a place to get the cream of the emergency service crop! Well trained, highly motivated individuals, with the knowledge of what the job entails, these future employee's will be the SEAL TEAM of future firefighters. Battalion 7 will become the hiring Mecca of the Emergency Service!

Can this happen? Of course, it can but it requires a drastic change in thinking and leadership! Most important: The VOTING PUBLIC will support this program and if properly informed and motivated, these same voting citizens will support our future needs for funding our fire and emergency service agencies! Especially those in East County who have rejected several funding measures. Those citizens want efficiency with service and being real with how we respond and deliver our most needed services.

## THE BENEFIT FOR CURRENT EMPLOYEES

The opportunity for the employee's in this reconstituted Battalion 7 will be for increased rank and salary not available in today's District. If one becomes a "Training Officer" that deserves an increase in pay as our Paramedic's earn today, due to their enhanced abilities. I have always supported pay increases based on performance! The idea that one becomes top qualified and top paid just because three years has elapsed since the date of first hired is wrong!

The current model is that after 3 years in service, all members earn the same dollar amount regardless of their ability to perform. The employee's in this District will not only have greater opportunities for earning additional performance pay they will also be able to take great pride in being part of the best organization in this area! ***Pride in performance is what should drive the organization!***

#### WHAT CHANGES CAN WE EXPECT IN THE COMING YEARS?

The ideal time to make change is when a Department has turn over putting the old guard out to pasture and hiring those who will be spending the next 30 years plying their trade. If we miss this boat, miss the opportunity for real change, then our citizens, our taxpayers and those simply traveling through our Rodeo-Hercules Fire District when fate takes a hand and they need emergency service, will be justified in taking action to make changes on their own!

The best change comes when an organization can read the mood of the people and make change from within. We have that opportunity today to think outside the box and do what our citizens and taxpayers want: ***Make real change in doctrine that benefits all not just a few!***

This is what I consider a Leggo approach to solving our staffing problems in Contra Costa County. These ideas can be improved, added to for even more and better changes in our Emergency Services. *If you try to denigrate these ideas you don't belong in a management position. Think outside the box, think inside the box but think in a way that will make a positive difference in these trying times. The Status Quo will not work!*

William "Bill" Prather

Director, Rodeo-Hercules Fire District since 1994