

Fire Service Administration I - FIRE-1100

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nomadic

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Introduction to the Fire Officer

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policies, procedures, and rules to subordinates and to different situations.

History of the Fire Service

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Today, the chain of command creates a structure for managing the fire department as well as for directing fire-ground operations.

As time moves on, so, too, will fire service organizations evolve as departments grow, the leadership changes, and communities determine which services and activities are needed from the fire department.



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Chapter 2 - Firefighters and the Fire Officer



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The fire service is typically structured to deal with the service demands of both day and night shifts. Let's discuss some of the more typical activities in a typical fire department today.

The 'Beginning of Shift' Report

Officers should start their day with a report to the officer in charge, often a chief, to indicate the status of the crew and readiness of the station and equipment for the day's activities. The format of this report can be anything from paper to electronic to verbal, depending on the requirements of the department.

The report will commonly contain information such as on-duty staffing and unscheduled absences that will need to be filled for that shift. These positions are a priority as they may require someone who worked the previous shift to remain on duty until a relief person can be secured and arrive at work to take over the vacant position. Those called in to cover sick leave are often compensated at a premium rate of pay such or overtime at a rate of at least time and one half.

It will be important to report absences as soon as possible to ensure that the holdover firefighter can be relieved of duty and the overtime request to go out quickly to secure the relief firefighter. Sometimes, the holdover firefighter may end up staying longer than necessary due to the fact that the scheduled firefighter failed to report their absence or the station officer took a chance and waited too long for the missing firefighter

to show up at work. The officer likely was attempting to cover for his crew member thinking that he or she simply slept in. The officer was likely well-intentioned but the final outcome could end up much worse than simply reporting immediately and dealing with a lateness or lack of communication issue later on.

Some departments use sophisticated online staffing systems such as TeleStaff, that provide real-time scheduling that conforms to departmental operational requirements. The chiefs rely on this information to make staffing adjustments at the beginning of the shift.

The morning report also deals with the location and condition of all of the apparatus or rolling stock such as a reserve pumper that has been loaned to another station.

Finally, the report provides the chief with any ‘must-know’ information that will require immediate attention.

Other information that will be a priority for the beginning of shift report include:

- Injuries
- Infectious exposure reports
- Other health and safety issues that cannot wait for Monday to Friday administrative staff

Ensuring that critical information is passed on to the appropriate personnel is a key responsibility for the company officer.

Let's now examine some examples of weekday activities in a typical career fire station.

The supervising fire officer is responsible for accomplishing the fire department mission through the efforts of the fire fighters under his or her command – this requires a balance of management and leadership skills. As company officer, one must be able to accomplish the department's mission and complete goals in a safe, timely, and efficient manner. A typical day in the life of a career fire station might look like this:

08:00

- Shift change and equipment check
- Complete appropriate morning reports to the chief
- clean the living quarters, empty trash and wash the dishes

08:30

- dust and vacuum all carpeted areas
- Sweep all tile or hard surface floors

09:00 – morning coffee break

09:30

- Physical training and possibly some outside skills evolutions

- Once the priorities have been completed, head to the store to pick up groceries

11:00 Heavy cleaning before lunch

- Monday: Air out the dorm areas and clean all windows
- Tuesday: Clean utility rooms and shop area
- Wednesday: Tidy and inventory emergency medical supplies, self contained breathing apparatus and decontamination areas.
- Thursday: Move recyclables outside for pickup then clean the weight room and lockers
- Friday: Wipe down and polish the kitchen and clean out the refrigerators

Noon: The officer and crew sit down for lunch

13:30 Scheduled activities- for example – fire safety inspections, school visits, inside or outside training.

17:00 Prepare for shift change if on a 10 and 14 hour shift schedule

Here's an example of a typical volunteer duty night:

18:00 The evening duty crew has arrived and starts work with equipment checks

19:00 Dinner, followed by kitchen clean-up. Run the dishwasher

19:30 Classroom session – training or maybe a community outreach activity

22:30 Remove all trash, tidy up and make a final pass through the kitchen. Empty the dishwasher

General station and apparatus cleaning as well as the formal company evolutions are conducted on weekends. The more significant cleaning tasks are scheduled throughout the year including deep cleaning of the apparatus bays and floors; steam cleaning of carpeted areas in the administrative offices; waxing of apparatus, etc.

It would seem that there are always important goals to complete whether you find yourself in a career, composite or volunteer fire department.

Transitioning from a firefighter to a fire officer

There are roughly four times in a firefighter's career when the relationship with the department and coworkers change. The first is the successful completion of a probationary period. Sometimes this is a point where one receives a badge or a new helmet colour.

The second change is when a firefighter qualifies for a company officer's position – usually starting in an acting role. Once again, the helmet colour likely changes and stripes and collar insignia are worn to indicate the new level of authority in the department.

The third change is when the company officer is promoted to a

chief's position. Yes, another helmet colour change and a much broader scope of authority and responsibilities.

This change in the scope of responsibility often requires the new officer to change some on-duty behaviours or practices. The new fire officer is expected to role-model the appropriate behaviours of an officer – behaviour that was acceptable for a firefighter may be unacceptable for an officer.

As an example, consider a firefighter who was known to be the last one out of a chair when there were station duties to complete. This reputation will likely walk through the door long before he or she arrives for the first day of duty as a company officer. The new officer can expect some push-back from the new crew as a result of the less-than-stellar reputation as a firefighter.

The fire officer's duties fall into three distinct roles – supervisor, commander and trainer.

Let's examine each of these roles separately:

The Fire Officer as a Supervisor:

In the supervisor's role, the officer functions as the official representative of the fire chief. This means to role-model appropriate behaviour and to supervise within the policies or regulations within the scope of the officer's job description.

On occasion, a fire officer may be required to issue and enforce unpopular orders. Even if the officer disagrees with a particular directive, the formal organization requires and expects the

officer to carry out that directive to the best of his or her ability. A fire officer can improve his or her effectiveness in handling an unpopular order by determining background or history behind the order, which would enable the fire officer to put the directive in perspective when delivering it to the crew.

Any concerns that the officer may have about the directive should be discussed in private with the supervisor. The company officer can make suggestions for change or strategies for implementation and the supervisor may be able to authorize some flexibility or adjustments to assist the company officer in a more effective delivery of the order.

Telling the firefighters that their officer does not agree with an order undermines the officer's authority and supervisory ability. The fire chief expects an officer to perform the required supervisory tasks, and the firefighters must understand that the fire officer does not make all the rules or have a choice about which ones to enforce. Enforcing unpopular orders is part of the job.

The Fire Officer as a Commander:

When in command of an emergency incident, the fire officer is expected to function as a commander and to exercise strong, direct supervision over the company members. Functioning as the initial incident commander on a major emergency is one of the higher-profile roles of an officer.. The fire officer needs to be clear, calm and concise in the initial radio transmissions. The communication of incident size-up information must be

consistent with the organization's requirements and Incident Management System.

Developing a command presence is a key part of mastering the art of incident command. Command presence is the ability of an officer to project an image of being in control of the situation – demonstrating the ability to bring order out of chaos.

To be a successful leader, the officer needs to convince others to follow – by demonstrating the ability to take charge and make the right things happen. A fire officer who is going to establish command upon arriving at an emergency incident should have a detailed knowledge of the responding companies, a mastery of the local procedures and the ability to issue clear and direct orders.

The Fire Officer as a Trainer:

The fire officer has the responsibility of making sure that the firefighters under his or her command are confident and competent in their skills. The company officer is responsible for the level of performance of the fire company and must establish a set of expectations to ensure that the company will perform at the highest level possible.

Everyone has a boss. Let's now discuss the relationship between the company officer and the fire officer's supervisor.

Every fire officer has a supervisor. In municipal fire departments, a company officer's supervisor is usually a

command-level officer – often at a chief level. (battalion chief, district chief, platoon chief, etc.).

The supervisor also has a boss – likely a deputy fire chief or other senior officer that generally reports directly to the fire chief. Under the chain of command, the fire chief's orders and directives are passed down through the deputy to the battalion or district chief who then ensures that the company officers apply and adhere to those orders or directives.

Regardless of the organizational structure, every fire officer has an obligation to work effectively with a supervisor. Three activities are necessary to ensure a good working relationship:

1. Keep your supervisor informed
2. Make appropriate decisions at your level of responsibility
3. Consult with your supervisor before making major disciplinary actions or policy changes.

Company officers should not hesitate to make decisions appropriate for their level of responsibility. This means that problems should be addressed and situations resolved where and when they occur. If a fire officer has the authority to solve a problem he or she should not wait for the supervisor to arrive to solve it.

Company officers are required to exemplify Integrity and Ethical Behaviour.

Along with the symbols of power and authority that comes with an officer's uniform and turnout gear, comes the need to provide core values of integrity and ethical behaviour that, combined with the formal symbols of authority, create an effective fire officer.

The company officer and Integrity:

Integrity refers to the complex system of inherent attributes that determine a person's moral and ethical actions and reactions, including the quality of honesty. The fire officer should 'walk the talk' and demonstrate the behaviours that he or she says are important. If the company officer says that physical fitness is important, then the firefighters should see their officer performing physical fitness training during the workday.

Integrity can be demonstrated by a steadfast adherence to a moral code. Such a code combines a fire officer's internal value system and the fire department's official organizational value system. Many organizations publish their expectations as a code of ethics, a code of conduct, or a list of value statements.

The Company Officer and Ethical Behaviour:

The ethical fire officer makes decisions – and models behaviour consistent with the department's core values, mission statement and value statements.

Fire department activity in the community tends to be high profile, regardless of the task. Even a trip to the grocery store to pick dinner draws public attention. The fire officer should act as

if someone is always documenting his or her actions when out of the fire station.

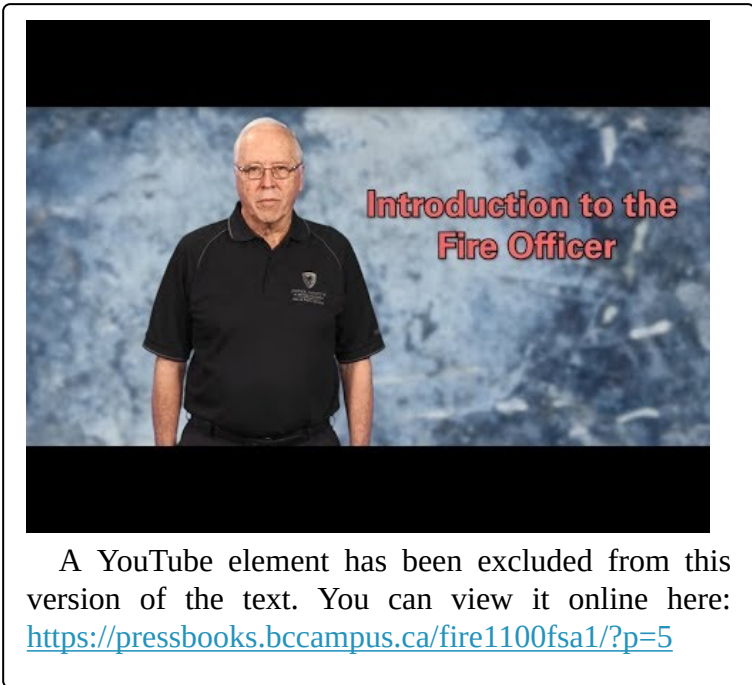
In summary, maintaining integrity and ethical behaviour are key to sustaining the professional reputation of your fire department and you in your role as the company officer.



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Chapter 1 - Introduction and History



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This is where you can add appendices or other back matter.