

PFESI Fire Training Working Group

Executive Summary

Firefighters in Pennsylvania provide a variety of services to their community, often in very hazardous conditions. The service that volunteer firefighters provide to the citizens of Pennsylvania is valued in billions of dollars. In order to provide this service, firefighters require training. National models for firefighter career development, published by the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the National Fire Academy, describe a career path that includes extensive training, certification and/or education. The knowledge, skills and abilities required to advance along this path benefits the firefighter and our society in many ways.

For the past 25 years, educational training agencies delivered this training locally and the PA State Fire Academy provides oversight of training programs and certification. This meant that the State Fire Academy, a community college or a county fire academy collaborating with a community college delivered the training. In 2005 the General Assembly passed legislation, approved by the Governor that streamlined the funding process for community colleges. The streamlined process meant that funds for firefighting training are now included in the funding the State provides community colleges without an earmark. With unspecified funding for fire training, many if not most community colleges see fire training as a loss and community college funding is evaporating.

Firefighters throughout the State provide a multitude of emergency services that include structural fire suppression, wild-land firefighting, water rescue, vehicle rescue, high angle rescue, urban search and rescue and hazardous materials response. Volunteer firefighters save the citizens of our Commonwealth billions of dollars each year. A well trained fire company functions efficiently, effectively and safely. Safe and effective emergency-scene operation benefits everyone. To fund training for firefighters, we propose add a 0.5% surcharge/impact fee on insurance companies based outside of Pennsylvania. This surcharge will generate approximately \$17 million that will be used to finance the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, the State Fire Academy and regional fire training at County Fire Academies and Community Colleges throughout the State.

Problem Statement

The fire and emergency services training system in Pennsylvania is experiencing an unprecedented challenge of;

- increased needs for basic/advanced training,
- increased needs for specialized “all-hazard” training,
- increased demand for upon request, in our station, on our schedule type training,
- and, a reduction in funds available to conduct this training.

This document addresses the needs of both the career and volunteer fire and emergency services in Pennsylvania. Emergency service organizations include fire, rescue, emergency medical services, hazardous materials teams, and specialized teams (swift water, incident management, etc).

Increased demands for services and customer expectations of quality and quantity of those services have been placed on the emergency response community in Pennsylvania. An “all hazards” preparedness approach has increased the need for emergency services to seek additional basic, advanced, and specialized training. Along with this training is the requirement for consistent continuing education to insure quality performance. This sudden increase in demands and challenges has caused the current training system to fail at anticipating future needs and developing the training programs that meets the demands of the “all hazard” emergency response organization. The most recent example is the Marcellus Shale industry expansion prompting the need for new training for all emergency responders.

The greatest challenge, lack of funding for the training system, is resulting in firefighters and all emergency service providers not being trained to perform their new duties being assigned to them. This lack of training will result in an increased number of injuries to firefighters and all emergency responders. It will also result in more members of the public being injured or killed, increased insurance losses, and increased losses to critical community infrastructure resulting in a negative economic impact.

Specific Challenges to the training system include;

- a. A widespread misperception that mandated training requirements exist for the emergency responder community.
- b. A lack of a consistent stable funding source resulting in escalating course delivery costs being passed onto the students and emergency services organizations.
- c. The complexity of managing training programs has greatly increased due to the required safety requirements, curriculum requirements, and federal regulations.
- d. The ability to deliver basic and advanced courses has decreased due to rising costs and minimum student enrollment requirement. This challenge will continue to worsen without sufficient funding; especially in certain geographical areas of Pennsylvania where emergency service organizations do not have funds to pay for the training or the personnel to meet minimum student enrollment requirements.
- e. The lack of a defined clear professional path for emergency responders to pursue the appropriate training. This lack of a clear path is leading to confusion and misinformation within the emergency responder community.

- f. The dependence upon traditional delivery methods (traditional classroom lecture based and field based methods) in lieu of updating to and using new technology where and when appropriate.

Historical Information

- a. The training system in Pennsylvania has evolved over many years since its start in the late 1930’s. The State Fire Academy was established in 1952. The first programs consisted of two weeks of training. At the end of the 1960’s, the Local Level training system was developed with volunteer instructors managed by the State Fire Academy (SFA). These instructors provided training classes at local fire stations. In the late 1970’s, Local Level training was supported by the former Williamsport Area Community College. WACC hired and paid SFA approved Local Level instructors to teach classes on a statewide basis. In the late 1980’s Penn State University assumed operations of WACC and removed them from the Local Level training business. This created a period in which no Local Level training was conducted in Pennsylvania. In 1989, THE SFA established an agreement with several community colleges and full-time county fire academies to conduct emergency services training across Pennsylvania. This system continues today and is known as the Local Level delivery system offered through a partnership with colleges and full-time fire academies known as the education training agencies (ETAs). The following organizations are currently providing training in Pennsylvania:

1	Allegheny County Fire Academy
2	Berks County Fire Training Center
3	Bucks County Community College
4	Butler County Community College
5	Chester County Emergency Services
6	Community College of Allegheny County
7	Community College of Beaver County
8	Delaware County Community College
9	Delaware County Emergency Services Training Center
10	Harrisburg Area Community College
11	Lehigh-Carbon Community College
12	Luzerne County Community College
13	Mercyhurst College Public Safety Institute
14	Montgomery County Community College
15	Montgomery County Fire Academy
16	Northampton Area Community College
17	Pennsylvania Highlands Community College
18	Westmorland County Community College

- b. Demographic of students taking training classes – In the early years (1960/70’s), the Local Level training system would see an average ranging from 700 to 1,200 classes conducted each year across the Commonwealth with 18,000 students enrolled. In the 1980’s, The number of courses delivered each year started to rise markedly. Through the 1980’s we saw 2,000 to 2,500 courses delivered in fire stations and at county fire schools each year with a student enrollment of 34,000 +/- . The 1990’s experienced an even greater increase in the training courses delivered; 3,500 to 4,000+ with student enrollments of 60,000 +/- each year. Currently, the Local Level training system is delivering 6,000+ courses each year with student enrollments totaling over 100,000.

However, with the reduction in funding for delivering these programs, the ETAs are starting to charge students and/or the emergency service organizations to cover the costs of course delivery. Course costs per student range from \$25.00 to \$200.00+. a very large number of students and the emergency service organization cannot afford these costs and are not able to attend necessary training to keep them safe while operating and to provide the best service to their communities.

- c. The PA State Fire Academy (PSFA) was established in 1952 to provide hands on training to firefighters from across the Commonwealth. Over the years, additional responsibilities have been added to the PSFA. Those additional responsibilities included;
- management of the Local Level training program,
 - development and administration of a statewide voluntary certification program,
 - development of up to date professional level training and education programs,
 - being the center for hazardous materials training,
 - provision and management of a Homeland Security training program, and
 - management of the day to day operations of the State All-Hazard Incident Management Team (PA-IMT)

These added responsibilities continues to grow today with the addition of the development and implementation of a Oil Well Emergency Response training program for emergency responders, elected officials and company personnel.

As these responsibilities continue to be added, no additional funding, no additional personnel, and no additional facilities have been added to the increased workload. The additional responsibilities have diluted the necessary administrative structure to effectively manage a statewide system for training emergency responders.

- d. The emergency responder training system is rapidly becoming fragmented. In the 1940’s, a statewide committee and the Department of Education oversaw the training actives in the Commonwealth. As the need for standardized training grew, the PA State Fire Academy was established to provide a central authority on fire and emergency responder training. When the system grew to the point that the Local Level training system was developed, the PSFA took on a major role in accrediting instructors and approving curriculum. The partnership with the Williamsport Area Community College allowed for the Local Level Program to grow as well as an expansion of the curriculum being provided. When the current partnership between the PSFA and the ETAs occurred,

roles were clearly defined. The PSFA developed and approved curriculum, and trained and accredited instructors to teach the curriculum. The ETAs hired the accredited instructors and deliver the curriculum approved by the PSFA to the emergency services in their stations.

In the late 1990's, the State Fire Academy established a standardized entry level firefighter curriculum. The curriculum consists of four courses and utilized a common standardized student manual, instructor guide, and audio-visual materials. However, recently approximately 6-8 counties have chosen to use the accepted standardized curriculum and are offering their own entry level firefighting training programs. This started the fragmentation of the emergency services training system. Additionally, one ETA has chosen not to use the accepted standardized hazardous materials curriculum that is provided by the State Fire Academy. This has added to the fragmentation of the fire and emergency service training system.

As the Marcellus Shale Gas industry has begun to develop in Pennsylvania, another fragmentation of the emergency service training system is occurring. The State Fire Academy, by law, is designated as the Commonwealth's center for hazardous materials training. As such the State Fire Academy is in the process of developing a new curriculum to meet this new need for emergency responder training. However, their efforts have been hamstrung by the lack of sufficient funding and the many entrepreneurs trying to cash in on this industry created need. Independent contractors, community colleges, technical institutes, and four-year universities and colleges are all scrambling to develop and deliver, for a price, well-site emergencies training for emergency responders. This is creating and even greater fragmentation of the emergency service training system.

A central statewide system for training emergency responders is a must and should be placed within the domain of the PA State Fire Academy. This will require sufficient resources, personnel, equipment, and funding, to establish a standardized delivery system for emergency responder training for all disciplines and subject matter topics.

Survey Data

This working group developed a survey to determine the local emergency response organizations' position on emergency service training. The on-line, self administered survey was open from October 2010 through the end of January 2011.

Assuming a statewide firefighting population of 50,000, the 681 responses received provide a statistically significant view of training throughout the Commonwealth. Most survey participants identified themselves as suppression oriented firefighters, as opposed to officers or other related categories, and over 93% had five years or more of firefighting experience.

Most fire companies are training in-house at least 5 hours or more each month with about 16% training in-house over 15 hours each month. The survey found that the vast majority of fire companies prefer training at their own fire station or at a nearby training facility. Of particular concern were the high rates of cancelled training classes reported: almost two-thirds of the

respondents reported experience with local level programs that were cancelled due to low enrollments. Over half of those responding on this issue reported that had the minimum class enrollments been 10 students those classes would have run.

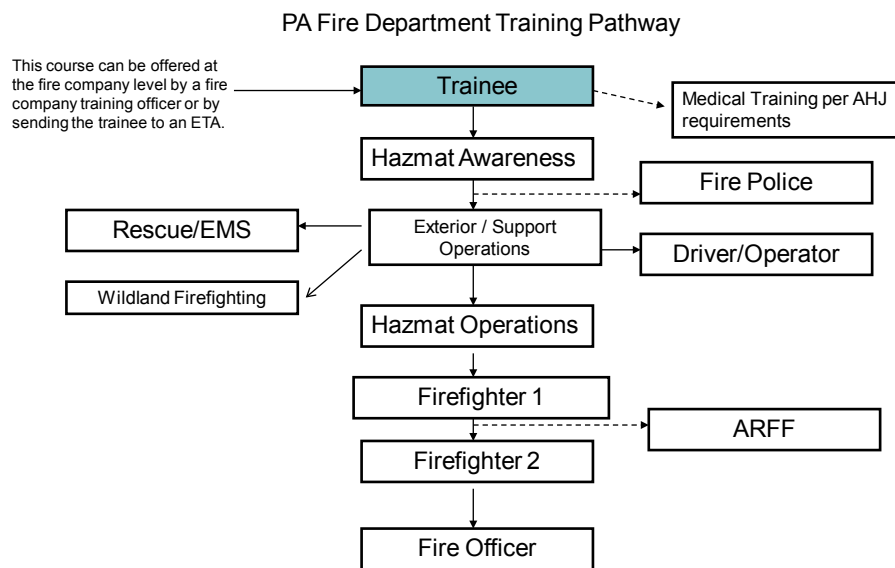
In this survey 74% of all respondents were actively pursuing certification at some level. The top three certification programs identified were Firefighter I, Firefighter II, and Fire Officer I. These were closely followed by Hazmat Operations, and the technical rescue series.

Solution to the Problem

Development of a fire training content core curriculum

The training and certification program in Pennsylvania will continue to be voluntary. There will be no mandated requirement for training and certification. The determination of the level of training and certification an emergency responder lies with their emergency service organization and the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ). However, it is the view of this committee that the Pennsylvania Fire Training Curriculum should be designed to serve the dual purpose of training and certification. The student can choose the outcome: a training certificate, or professional certification.

Basic training pathway's will be developed and used as guides for organizations. An example of a training pathway:



A core curriculum will include the following courses:

- PA State cadet program
- PA State FF Trainee

- FF 1 / FF 2
- NFPA 472 – Hazardous Materials
- General rescue / vehicle machinery

Fire training delivery systems

Training can be delivered in a variety of methods including lecture, in the field, online, and blended (combination of online and hands on). This committee feels that all methods should be used to meet the needs of the organizations. It is also noted that there is a need for a statewide training registry that can be used for common data collection and tracking of individual training.

Training Funding Systems

It has been determined that 17 million dollars would be need to fund the training system in Pennsylvania. It is proposed that the funding for the training programs should be generated from a one-half (½) percent surcharge/impact fee from insurance companies that are based outside of Pennsylvania.

Conclusion.

Firefighters provide an important and valuable service to the communities they protect. According to a 2012 report published by the National Fire Protection Association titled *Total Cost of Fire*, the estimated monetary value of the volunteer firefighter's time for this service during 2009 in the United States was \$129.7 billion. In Pennsylvania this figure would easily surpass one billion dollars. Many citizens believe the most valuable service that firefighters provide is fire suppression; however, firefighters are truly all-hazard responders. Firefighters provide a multitude of emergency services that include not only fire suppression but also water rescue, vehicle rescue, rope rescue, confined-space rescue, and hazardous materials response. Firefighters are often the first arriving responders at a terroristic event. The first arriving unit at the attempted car bombing in Times Square was a ladder company and firefighters are being trained to recognize and report terroristic activities.

Firefighters throughout the Commonwealth place their own lives at risk to save others and occasionally firefighters are injured doing their job. Fire training provides experience for firefighters and fire officers that will help them make better decisions on the fireground. Better decisions at the emergency scene can result in fewer firefighter injuries and fewer injuries reduce the cost to the community of providing fire protection. So, comprehensive basic fire training and education along with certification, the process that requires the firefighter to demonstrate their skills so their skill level may be quantitatively evaluated, benefits both the firefighter and the community they protect.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs and the National Fire Academy describe a career path that includes extensive training, certification and/or education in order to become a firefighter and to advance in the fire service. In basic fire training, firefighters not only learn

hands-on skills with rope, ladders and hose line but they also are taught first aid and CPR, the value of team work, fire prevention, an understanding of hazardous materials and perhaps most importantly responsibility for their own safety as well as the safety of other firefighters. As they advance in their profession they may continue with training courses or start college courses in fire science where they learn management skills such as planning, leadership, organization, delegation, supervision critical thinking and problem solving. In advanced training at the fire academy, college or university, they learn the use of emergency scene management tools such as the Command Sequence and the Incident Command System.

Firefighting training and education provides firefighters with the required skills, knowledge and abilities to protect their community from the ravages of fire and other man-made and natural disasters. Firefighters tend to downplay the importance of this training but not their neighbors. When a sudden illness or injury occurs in a neighborhood, neighbors knock on the door of the closest firefighter and ask for help. Firefighters utilize their basic training skills and the advanced management skills in their home, in their community and in their career. Combine this training with the sense of responsibility that a firefighter has for their community and you have not only a competent firefighter but also a committed and knowledgeable citizen, a skilled employee and a more competitive candidate for advancement in any career. Fire training provides a firefighter with skills that benefit everyone.

Firefighting training in Pennsylvania is facing a critical juncture. While firefighters are asked to provide more response capability than ever before, the funds for fire training are evaporating. This proposal to fund fire training throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania will save our citizens money, protect firefighters and make our communities a safer place to live.

Appendix: A

Current firefighter certifications offered in Pennsylvania:

Airport Firefighter, Firefighter 1 & 2, Fire Officer 1 & 2, Fire Instructor 1 & 2, Fire Investigator 1, Fire Inspector 1, Driver/Operator – Aerial, Driver/Operator – Pumper, Driver/Operator – Mobile Water Supply, Hazardous Materials Awareness, Hazardous Materials Operations – Core, Hazardous Materials Operations – PPE. Hazardous Materials Operations – Product Control, Hazardous Materials Technician, Hazardous Materials Incident Commander, Confined Space Rescue Technician 1 & 2, Rope Technician 1 & 2, Structural Collapse Technician 1 & 2, Surface Water Rescue Technician 1 & 2, Trench Rescue Technician 1 & 2, Vehicle & Machinery Technician 1 & 2, Juvenile Fire Setter Intervention Specialist 1, Public Fire & Life Safety Educator 1, Industrial Fire Brigade – Incipient Industrial, and Industrial Fire Brigade – Advanced Exterior.

