

Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives

Initiative #5



Throughout the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, there are opportunities for both organizational and personal change. As your department moves toward adopting a safety-minded culture, use the tools offered in the 16 initiatives as guiding documents.

Develop and implement national standards for training, qualifications, and certification (including regular recertification) that are equally applicable to all firefighters based on the duties they are expected to perform.

Most fire organizations recognize national standards and strive to achieve the requirements of those standards. The professional qualification system of the NFPA has established national standards to which individual training programs and performance can be evaluated. The NFPA professional qualification standards are now in the job performance requirement (JPR) format, which makes evaluation of performance easier as it relates to the knowledge, skills, and abilities of a particular standard. In addition the standards are revised every five years so that they remain current and reflect the true status of the fire and rescue services. When individuals within the fire service have been certified as meeting the national standards, they may be recognized at the local, state, and national level for demonstrated proficiency within the standard to which they have been certified.

Most fire organizations recognize the importance of certification. The fire service needs to make certification mandatory before firefighters are allowed to perform certain functions, especially related to structural firefighting and driving vehicles. Those who want to provide these services should be encouraged (either by statute or policy) to seek certification at increasingly higher levels to correspond to the work they are assigned to perform.

Create incentives for those wishing to obtain certification. Link promotions and pay increases to certifications. The opportunity for the greatest success of implementing certification systems lies in the area of increased value and increased incentives for individuals seeking certification. If certification means something beyond personal achievement, then the fire service will benefit in many ways. The opportunities for success and the wide-scale acceptance of certification programs will follow with positive incentive programs.

Support efforts toward mandatory re-certification or refresher training. Refreshing teaches new methods and improves skills which are used infrequently. Re-certification is the next logical extension to be achieved after a certification system is in place and working. The NFPA Professional Qualification Standards are reviewed and modified on a five year cycle and this would seem to be a proper time sequence for re-certification purposes. It is important to remain current within your profession and to be aware of new techniques and requirements; this is a basic requirement of most professions.



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FIREFIGHTER LIFE SAFETY INITIATIVES

TEACHING POINTS



CHALLENGE

The fire service would greatly benefit by having its members certified to the professional qualification standards, at all appropriate levels. Many of the safety issues that we deal with are the result of improperly trained firefighters attempting to perform skills for which they have not been trained. A safer and more professional environment would result from the widely accepted use of national certification. The fire service is in an excellent position regarding certification and recertification because so much of the work has been accomplished. What remains now is the push for universal implementation. There is certainly no reason why this should take more than ten years. If we know that line-of-duty deaths are often tied to incomplete or outdated training, then we must not wait to ensure that all our personnel receive the training they need to do their jobs competently and safely.

DISCUSSION

Are you required by your department to obtain a minimum number of certificates prior to responding to emergencies?

Does your department encourage its members to seek further certification?

Once you have achieved a level of training does your department challenge you with realistic training opportunities to continually hone the skills that you have learned?

Are you required to have completed a Fire Officers course compliant with NFPA standards before receiving a promotion?

Do you feel safety is a primary concern while conducting live fire training within your department?

If your department is financially unable to provide you with the tools necessary to obtain certificates and realistic training, do you take it upon yourself to get outside training?

How can you ensure you and your crew are maintaining a desirable level of competence?

Who is ultimately responsible for YOU to be prepared to do this job as effectively and safely as possible?



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