

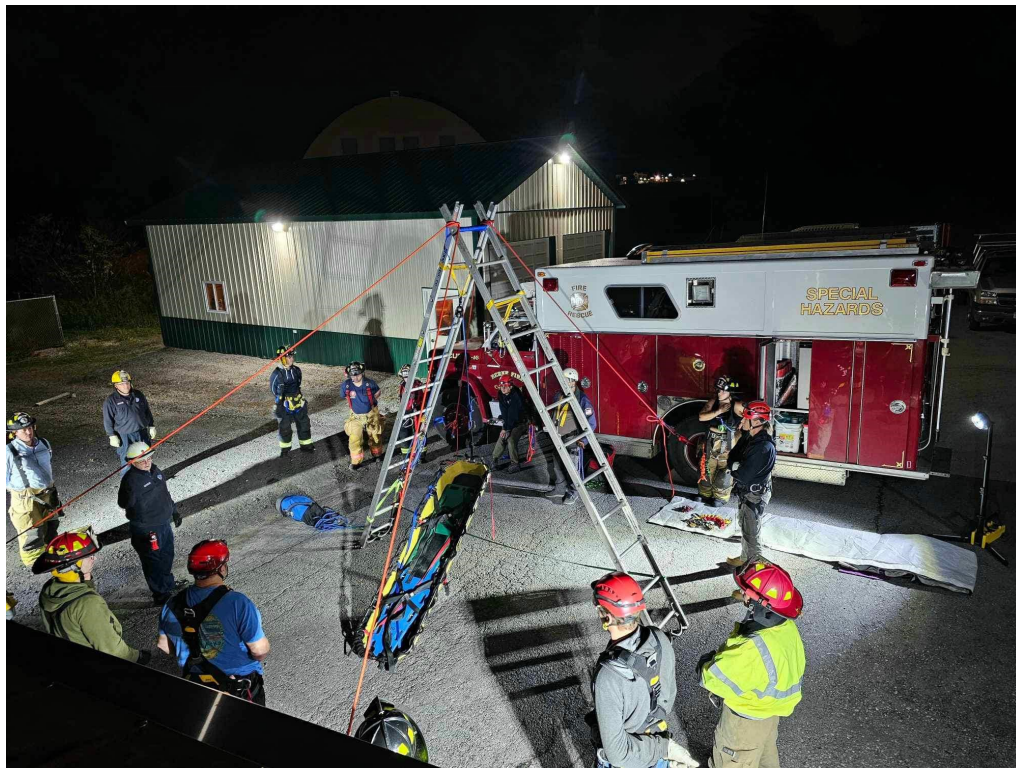


# Albany County Sheriff's Office Critical Incident Emergency Management Unit

November, 2023

## Critical Incident/Emergency Management Unit

This is the monthly newsletter for the Albany County Sheriff's Office Critical Incident Emergency Management Unit. **If you have events that you would like posted in this newsletter please email them to the Fire Coordinator's office.**



**Rescue Tech Berne**

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Retention and Recruitment  
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Management

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## Rescue Tech Basic Berne



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### Rescue 1 by Lexipol

By Sam DiGiovanna

## Disconnected: Lost peer support in the firehouse

**Times have changed in the fire service and some of the best peer support opportunities have fallen by the wayside as firefighter culture has evolved**

Nov 2, 2023

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Lately, there is a lot of emphasis being placed on peer support training for first responders. It's a growing trend and I certainly see the need. I just completed the peer support training from the **National Emergency Responder and Public Safety Center**, which is now a part of Lexipol's Cordico wellness solution. Now, more than ever, peer support is needed as first responders are experiencing more stress and responding to tragic incidents.

**Formal peer support programs** are important, but so is the much more informal type of peer support, also known as fellowship. In my opinion, some of the best peer support we ever had in the fire service has begun to disappear. It was right in our stations, and we held the keys. The problem is, we didn't see it for what it was, so we've let it slip through our fingers.

The fire service has changed since the beginning of my career. Here are a few examples of how I notice the decrease of informal peer support in many firehouses.

How can you encourage peer support opportunities at your station? (Photo/Getty Images)

### PEER SUPPORT IN THE FIREHOUSE KITCHEN

In the traditional fire station, the kitchen served as a major hub of camaraderie. No matter who happened to be cooking that day, jumping in to **help prepare meals** brought us all together. Sharing ideas, laughing and trying new recipes helped us bond as firefighters, coworkers, brothers and sisters.

Of course, one of the most sacred places at the fire house is the kitchen table. There's something so elemental about breaking bread together at **the kitchen table** — sharing experiences, laughing at each other's jokes and coming together as firefighters.

Unfortunately, this form of peer support is in danger of being lost. Some personnel bring in their own food. Maybe they are vegan or have other special dietary needs, or they might





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prefer to walk across the street and grab an easy bite at a fast-food chain. Sometimes a firefighter spouse will bring food in, and that person will eat on their own while staring at their phone. For a number of different reasons, bonding at the kitchen table has diminished.

### PEER SUPPORT IN THE FIREHOUSE DORM

In the past, the firehouse dorm was seen as something close to a sanctuary. In reality, it was often more like a space for group therapy. I can remember many times in my career as a firefighter, getting on the station all call system and saying, "Therapy time!" Sometimes just a few of us would make our way upstairs to the dorm; other times, practically everyone would head up for a gab session.

The typical firehouse dorm used to be a **big room with no walls** — 15 beds where we would lay around and just talk firehouse talk. Some discussions were serious, but most were full of laughs and gossiping. It was always great bonding time, nonetheless.

Nowadays, though, most firehouse dormitories have been redesigned as "snore dorms." Instead of open areas (perfect for group discussions), these four-walled cubicles seem like they were mostly designed to prevent one person's loud snoring from waking up everybody else. In reality, they are closed in so personnel can have **privacy** — something nobody in a traditional fire crew expected or even wanted. Also, they're a necessary change as firehouses evolve from all-male spaces to more inclusive facilities where everyone can feel welcome.

They also have small televisions and computer workstations with chargers for iPhone and iPads. Many have locks installed. These "snore dorms" have isolated firefighters from one another, reducing or eliminating the "therapy" sessions we once shared.

### PEER SUPPORT IN THE FIREHOUSE REC ROOM

With televisions and workstations now in the snore dorms, many firefighters no longer use the firehouse recreation room. This is where we would gather after lunch in our station recliners watching "All My Children," where we would congregate in the evenings and on weekends watching sports, movies, or simply playing chess or backgammon.

From what I can tell, many young firefighters would prefer to watch sports and movies on their phones or tablets — often in the privacy of their individual sleeping rooms. Board games have given way to video games, usually played all alone on a small screen instead of hooting and hollering with others in the rec room. Another avenue for peer support ... gone!

### OTHER LOST OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEER SUPPORT

**"If you build it, they will come!"** I remember at one station, the crew pooled their own money for supplies to build a "park-like" area in the yard behind the station. We called it our "Hard Luck Park," and you'd often find crew members back there smoking cigars on the park benches and having after-hours therapy sessions.

Unfortunately, this kind of thing just isn't possible today. Because of liability issues, all new construction has to be approved and built by the city's public works department. That means the teamwork, bonding and support is affected, too.

**Where do you live?** There was once a time when we would get off duty in the morning and go to breakfast somewhere. We'd spend the time talking about the calls (good and bad) during



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the shift that just ended. Back then, firefighters would spend a lot of off-duty time together: Attending classes for upcoming promotional exams, catching a baseball game, hitting the car races, or showing up in force to celebrate the birthday of a fellow firefighter's child or family member.

This is less common now, as many firefighters **don't live in the communities they serve**. The high cost of housing means many of us live 30-50 miles away from the firehouse. It has become a work-only environment, which results in less time socializing with each other when we're off duty.

**Engine 101 out of service!** In the old-fashioned firehouse, when an engine broke down for whatever reason, we had so much talent in the station to help make the repairs. It used to be common for all personnel to get together, take off the pump panel and work together on our rigs. We'd tinker as a team, learning from each other as we laughed and yes, even played together. All of this made for solid therapeutic work.

Let's face it: There's not a better group than firefighters to design, build, repair and remodel things at the station. Working together to improve and enhance the firehouse helps personnel bond while instilling a great sense of pride in the department. Unfortunately, most repairs, remodels and building projects are now being outsourced to private entities or government departments. This means less time working together, solving problems, and bonding as we did it.

If you've been in the fire service for more than a decade, you understand what I am talking about. Times have changed and some of the best **peer support opportunities** have fallen by the wayside as **firefighter culture** has evolved. So I ask you, how do we correct this decline of peer support in the firehouse?

Here are a few suggestions:

**Bring company dinner back:** As often as you can, get everyone to sit down together for a meal. This may require extra planning to accommodate special diets, food allergies and so on. But it'll be worth it.

**Make better use of common areas:** If your firehouse has abandoned dormitory sleeping in favor of individual rooms, make sure there's somewhere in the station where everyone can gather and be social. Consider a "no phones" policy for these gatherings and do what you can to make them enjoyable for all.

**Pass on perishable skills:** One of the best opportunities to bond with other members of your fire crew is while teaching and learning. This doesn't have to be firefighting-related, but it could be. Consider informal classes on equipment maintenance and repair, or even cooking classes to make mealtimes even more enjoyable. The possibilities are endless.

**Boost your peer support team:** With all the changes in the fire service, formal peer support has become more and more important. If your department doesn't currently have a peer support team, it's critical to get one up and running. If it's been a while since your team has received training, doing so can reinvigorate the members and make them more effective.

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### Fire Rescue 1 by Lexipol

#### The spark: What put you on the path to becoming a chief?



Chief Holly vanSchaick, fire chief of Orcas Island Fire & Rescue, in Eastsound, Washington. (Photo/Courtesy of Holly vanSchaick)

I came to the fire service for a love of the work and the team environment. At its best, the fire service unites a diverse group of individuals around one common goal – helping someone on their worst day. Early in my career, it did not occur to me to ever want to leave the line and move to admin.

As I transitioned from volunteer to career, I had a variety of experiences with fire chiefs I worked for; some positive and some negative. As I grew up as a first responder, it became apparent to me that positive cultural change can't happen effectively when it is only being driven from the bottom up. An organization's leadership sets the tone for what the culture of the team will be.

Back when I was training for a few different running events, I had a coach who would say, "You can't outrun a bad diet." In the context of my work environment, I turned that into, "You can't outwork bad leadership." I realized that in order to help bring about the cultural development the fire service was in need of, I would need to be willing to put myself in the arena in a leadership role. Two of the best chief officers I had the honor to serve under encouraged me to enroll in a Fire Service Administration degree program. I did so and earned a bachelor's in fire service administration from Eastern Oregon University.

#### Look ahead: What's something you want to accomplish in your first year as chief?

In my first year as chief, my goal is to continue to build on the positive groundwork we have laid in the last two years at OIFR. When I joined OIFR as assistant chief in 2021, it was amidst significant turmoil between labor and management, and between career and volunteer staff. Volunteers rarely just dropped by our headquarters station. Many told me they avoided it altogether because it felt like a dark cloud was hanging over it.

Fast forward to today, and some days I have trouble finishing a project I am working on because volunteers and career staff pop into my office so frequently. As far as I am concerned, this is the best "problem" a chief officer could have, and one I will strive to keep!



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Our department is now united, labor and management have the best relationship I have ever seen (including during my own time as a union officer), and volunteers have told me time and time again how much they now enjoy working with the career staff. My goal in the next year is to continue to foster these strong relationships, while also looking forward to the significant impending apparatus needs of our aging fleet.

### **How will you create an organizational culture that people want to be a part of, to join and to stay in?**

Again, as discussed above, I think we have mostly gotten there today in terms of creating an organizational culture people want to be a part of. Now, we have to be committed to keeping it going. In 2022, our department participated in a culture and values workshop with Rob Nielson of **All American Leadership**. This was an important endeavor for a few reasons. First, it helped refocus and unite our team on our purpose – that thing that is the foundation of our relationship, the reason we are here, together. Second, it provided (and still provides through ongoing surveys) feedback regarding **what those of us in leadership positions are doing right, and what we still need more work on**. Building on the positive while not ignoring the negative is essential to ongoing cultural maintenance.

### **How are you going to support and stand up for your personnel, internally and externally, to show that you care about them as a person and a professional?**

Our relationships need to be built on trust. Trust is mutual. As their chief, it is my job to extend my trust to my personnel, *before* asking them to trust me in return. This doesn't mean that everything is perfect; extending trust means that I know their intentions and purpose in their work. Every conversation I have with those who report directly to me has to start with that premise. I trust *why* they are doing things. Then, when we sometimes have to discuss *how* we get our common goals accomplished, we are doing so from a collaborative, trusting team approach. When we have a good pattern of communication and trust, it is easy for me to stand up for them if needed.

As far as showing them that I care about them as a person? It's a two-step process:

- **Step 1.** Caring about them, authentically. This is easy. I currently work with the best team I have encountered in my entire career. I wouldn't know how to NOT care about them.

**Step 2.** Making sure I take the time to let them know that I care.

### **How do you demonstrate servant leadership?**

My job is to serve the members of my department so that *they* can go out and do their best work to serve the public. This isn't accomplished in any one action. I may cook them dinner, or take out the trash, or roll hose with them after a fire or training, but if my heart and mind aren't in the right place, that will be obvious. Servant leadership starts from within, from constantly refocusing my own mind on acts of service toward the members of the department that I am responsible to. One of my favorite quotes is from political satirist and journalist P.J. O'Rourke; "Everyone wants to save the earth; but no one wants to help mom do the dishes." I remind myself that "doing the dishes" is as much a part of my job as anyone else's.

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## Beyond the traditional fire-rescue mission: Loveland's TAC Fire

How to enhance response to law enforcement incidents utilizing our firefighters' existing expertise and skill sets

Aug 22, 2020

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By Division Chief Greg Ward

Built off a strong relationship and a common desire to serve our community, the **Loveland (Colorado) Fire Rescue Authority's** (LFRA) Tactical Firefighting (TAC Fire) Team functions as a critical element of the Loveland Police Department's (LPD) SWAT Team.

This unique concept grew from LFRA's Special Operations personnel working closely with SWAT in the planning and execution of clandestine drug lab raids and hazard mitigation, with LFRA performing decontamination procedures and hazmat technician-level support to law enforcement.



Personnel providing fire protection with SWAT. (Photos/LFRA)

In 2006-2007, LFRA and LPD conducted several joint operations in dealing with these lab sites in and around our community. Through these operations, a new level of appreciation of the specialized skills that LFRA personnel could provide to law enforcement began to evolve.





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### COMBINING FORCES: THE TAC FIRE IS BORN

Through this new relationship, a discussion on forcible entry – or, in SWAT terminology, breaching – took place between firefighters and the SWAT tactical operators. The SWAT commanders requested that firefighters train the SWAT breaching team on the use of the forcible entry tools carried on the LFRA heavy rescue truck, to include power saws, torches and hydraulic entry tools, to expand the breaching capability of the SWAT team.

The next major step of building the relationship began when LPD SWAT started to request LFRA to stand by at SWAT incidents. This was something that did not happen prior to 2006.

One of the early SWAT incidents to which LFRA responded was a barricaded suicidal/homicidal subject in a duplex structure on the east side of the city. LFRA responded with an on-duty engine company and the heavy rescue apparatus along with a battalion chief. The battalion chief reported to the command post as a resource for the incident and tactical commanders.

During the operation, the SWAT tactical commander requested that a camera be placed under the garage door to get a view of the interior of the garage. Several breaching options were discussed, but the one that was ultimately selected came from the battalion chief. Firefighters quickly trained a SWAT operator on the use of a small high-pressure airbag that is generally used for vehicle extrication operations, and the operator was able to use the airbag to quietly gain enough space under the door to insert a camera.

Following this incident, leaders from LFRA and LPD came together to discuss the next steps in interagency cooperation to support law enforcement incidents. From this meeting, the LFRA Tactical Firefighting Team (TAC Fire) was initiated.

This unique concept grew from LFRA's Special Operations personnel working closely with SWAT in the planning and execution of clandestine drug lab raids and hazard mitigation, with LFRA performing decontamination procedures and hazmat technician-level support to law enforcement.

### DETAILING TAC FIRE

TAC was established with a small contingent of firefighters who volunteered to engage in SWAT support operations. Today, these firefighters are assigned to Station 5, and they respond as a company to all SWAT incidents. In total, the TAC Fire Team is currently made up of 12 members under the leadership of a captain.

**Mission:** The mission of the TAC Fire Team is truly to support the SWAT Team; it is not to engage in a SWAT or law enforcement role.

**Weapons:** The members of TAC Fire are unarmed; however, they are trained in the use of the SWAT weapons in the event that they would need to defend themselves or a fallen officer.

**PPE:** The members of TAC Fire are issued the same level of protection as the SWAT officers in regards to **ballistic vests** and **helmets**. On scene, the only way to identify a member of



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TAC Fire is by the white lettering on the vest that indicates fire-rescue. Other than this minor difference, the TAC Fire personnel blend in with the SWAT members.

### TAC FIRE RESPONSE TYPES

The SWAT Team responds to 25-30 incidents a year. LFRA's TAC Fire Team is attached to most of these operations, which typically involve barricaded subjects, active assailant incidents, hostage rescue, clandestine labs, warrant service and VIP protection details to provide fire-rescue support.

The role of TAC Fire is broken down into 10 areas:

- 1. Fire suppression planning and engagement:** At each SWAT incident, the TAC Fire Team is responsible for developing a fire plan. The plan includes the route of travel, initial attack plan, water supply opportunities and location for an elevated master stream if needed. If engaged, the fire plan would be carried out under the protection of law enforcement. The initial attack and water supply operations would be completed by members of TAC Fire, and the elevated master stream operation, if needed, would likely be assigned to a responding ladder or tower company.
- 2. Rescue of downed officers and civilians:** TAC Fire members are positioned close to the entry point under the protection of SWAT to be ready for a rapid rescue of a downed officer or civilian.
- 3. Back up to the Thompson Valley EMS (TVEMS) tactical medics (TEMS):** The majority of emergency medical care falls to the TEMS medics, but in the event that they become overwhelmed with patients, TAC Fire members will perform basic life support care as needed.
- 4. Advise and assist with forcible entry/breaching:** In many cases, the breaching team will have a member of TAC Fire advising on techniques or tools if the entry is outside of a normal residential door. Firefighters have a strong training background in forcible entry, so this is a natural fit.

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**5. Provide ground ladder operations:** Again under the protection of law enforcement, TAC Fire will position ladders as requested by tactical commanders. Firefighters are highly efficient in ground ladder skills, which makes for quicker and more efficient operations versus training SWAT operators to throw ladders.

**6. Rope rigging for SWAT tactical rappelling operations:** LFRA trains for both urban and wilderness rope rescue operations, so applying these skills to providing rigging for tactical rappelling operations was an easy transition for members of the TAC Fire Team.

**7. Initiate rapid decontamination and hazmat operations/technician-level support:** Having the TAC Fire members respond as a company with an engine allows for rapid gross decontamination operations if a SWAT member were to come into contact with a hazardous material during a tactical situation.

**8. Drive and operate the armored SWAT vehicle:** Members of TAC Fire have been trained to drive and operate the armored SWAT vehicle. This frees up a SWAT member for a tactical assignment. Generally, an off-duty TAC Fire member that responds to a full team SWAT call-out would receive this assignment. Our firefighters are already trained and certified to drive large vehicles, so with some additional training on positioning the vehicle for SWAT operations, the firefighters easily fill this role when needed.

**9. Fire/rescue battalion chief or captain in the incident command post:** Positioning the on-duty battalion chief or TAC Fire captain in the command post during the initial stages of the incident sets the stage for a unified command if the incident escalates into an event that fire-rescue has to engage in a larger role.

**10. Provide active assailant rescue task force (RTF) training to all LFRA operations personnel annually:** In late 2013, LFRA, LPD and TVEMS began to develop a joint response procedure for active assailant responses. The initial step in this process was to identify each agency's role in these types of responses:

- Police – Locate, contain and neutralize the threat
- Fire – Rescue victims

EMS – Patient care and transportation

Once the roles were defined, a response procedure was written, followed by intensive multi-agency initial training that culminated in several days of large-scale exercises.

In the years since the original program was developed, the operations procedures have been modified to closely follow the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) curriculum for active shooter incidents.

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## Retention and Recruitment



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### **Albany County Training**

ALBANY COUNTY FIRE TRAINING SCHEDULE #11 2023 is posted on our website

<https://www.albanycounty.com/home/showpublisheddocument/45691/638360690020192708>

There is now a link on our website with instructions on how to get an LMS sign-on ID . We recommend that all new members should register as soon as they join so they have access to training opportunities.

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# ALBANY COUNTY FIRE TRAINING SCHEDULE #11 2023

**Pre-Registration Required: Students may register by clicking on the Learning Management System link on the NYS OPFC Home Page ([NYS Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services - OPFC](#) )**

Registration opens 45 days before the first class

COURSE	LOCATION	DATE	INSTRUCTOR	PREREQUISITES
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**Please Note that a training authorization letter is now required for all courses offered by the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control**

Basic Exterior Firefighting Operations  <b>IN PROGRESS</b>	Ravena	August 31 Orientation September 7, 18, 21, 28, October 5, 12, 16, 19, 26, 30, November 2, 6, 9, 13, 16, 20, 27, 30, December 4, 7, 11, 14, 18, 21 1830-2130	Messinger	None
Principals of Instruction  <b>In progress</b>	Colonie Village	November 7, 14, 21, 28, December 5 1830-2130	Clawson	None
Fire Officer 1 Module Series: Firefighter Health & Safety	Guilderland Tower	November 20, 27, 29, December 4  1830-2130	DeGroff	Firefighter I or Equivalent
Tactical Fire Ground Simulations	Fort Hunter	November 30: 1830-2130 December 2 0900-1700	Flensted	ICS 200



