



Albany County Sheriff's Office

Critical Incident Emergency Management Unit

August 2024

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.**



When the career side sees budget cuts, we will give it our all to make up the difference. When the volunteer side is in trouble, we sometimes end up with elderly and juvenile firefighters as the response.

In this issue:

Guilderland Training Facility

HazMat Corner

Events

Training

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Guilderland Firefighters held a work detail at the training facility to repair and update the bail out simulator. It now coordinates with the new training tower which is nearing completion.

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Fire Rescue 1 by Lexipol

How old is too old in the fire service?

The issue of age isn't a simple problem to solve, particularly in the volunteer fire service that's struggling for members

By [Billy Goldfeder](#)

I recently received these warm and fuzzy emails following the deaths of older firefighters:

“C'mon chief, when are we gonna learn? We're killing our own by allowing these senior members respond to incidents. I think that the NFPA can set the precedent and MANDATE a retirement age for ALL firefighters, both career and volunteer. We worry about cancer killing us, but what about old age? Anyone?”

And this one:

“How old was this brother of ours? Past Chief, 32 years on the job. When is someone going to do something about US? We're our own worst enemy! We're killing our most experienced members by putting them at risk and in danger by allowing them to participate in ACTIVE FIRE SUPPRESSION ACTIVITIES. There MUST be a mandatory retirement age for ALL firefighters. PERIOD. Just how many senior members have we lost in the past year alone? One is too many. I'm calling for the NFPA to set forth a mandate to propose a ruling on this! If they can tell us it's not safe to wear our damn helmets while responding on a call, they can certainly do THIS to save our brain trusts. These senior firefighters are our educators for our younger members. They belong in the classrooms, NOT on the fireground!”

So, how old is too old for the fire service?

How many times have we heard (or said), “This is a young person's job”? While this issue primarily applies to the volunteer fire service, there are communities with career members that have no age limit. But is age really the issue?



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Stats don't lie

According to the NFPA, 50% of American firefighters are between 30 and 49 years old, 17% are 50-59, and 10% are 60 and over. Of course, age is a factor, but it isn't the *only* factor. For example, would you rather work with a fit firefighter (one who passed a physical) who is 60 years old, or would you rather work with an obese firefighter who is 30 years old? *I'll take the 60+-year-old every time.* HOWEVER, there are far more overweight young firefighters than there are fit older firefighters. It's just the reality of our profession.

What does science tell us?

Being a very active member of AARP, I read their materials. According to AARP, by the time you reach your 50s, your strength, balance and endurance are already beginning to wane, much earlier than previously thought. Researchers with Duke University's School of Medicine suggest that physical decline begins in the 50s and worsens as we age, especially for those who don't exercise. Specifically, both men and women in their 50s began saw declining ability to stand on one leg and rise from a chair. Declines became more evident in the 60s and 70s. More physical activity was associated with less physical decline, especially in ages 60 to 79.

The findings suggest that functional tests should be conducted long before people reach their 70s and 80s, said co-author Miriam Morey, with Duke's Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development. By waiting too long, doctors miss "40 years of opportunities to remedy problems."

So why not fix it?

On the career side, usually, labor and labor laws will manage this issue with mandatory physicals and retirement ages. Not always, but that is the norm. On the volunteer side, however, there aren't always rules or laws on this issue. Some states DO have mandatory physicals for volunteers, and some states have defined interior vs. exterior volunteer firefighters. Here's one job description as an example:

Exterior volunteer firefighter: Performs limited firefighting duties such as drives fire apparatus, deploys & connects hoses, raises ladders, uses other firefighting techniques such as ventilating burning buildings from outside, rescuing trapped



Albany County Sheriff's Office

Critical Incident Emergency Management Unit

August 2024

occupants of a motor vehicle accident, sets up scene lighting, performs rehab operations, assists interior firefighters with air bottle changes and filling of air bottles, assists incident commanders with scene safety, personnel accountability and communications, and responds and performs emergency medical assistance to the level of certified training.

You'll see that there are strenuous duties assigned even to their exterior volunteers – duties that could bring on medical or traumatic injuries. The fact is that every aspect of what we do is strenuous. Even just [tones awakening us from a deep sleep has proven to impact us negatively](#).

The solutions appear to be simple, but the reality in the volunteer fire service is not that simple. After decades of service, one would think that their services are no longer needed, but as we see with volunteer fire departments struggling to provide service, 70-year-old Mike might be your only daytime driver. I didn't say you have to like it, but that's the way it is. Without Mike and a handful of 17-year-old kids leaving high school when their pagers go off, there would be no local response. High risk? Predictable? Absolutely – for both the young and the old. Is that the way it should be? No. But we don't live in a perfect world.

Predictable may not always be preventable

Clearly, a 70+-year-old trained driver creates a higher medical risk than a 30-year-old trained driver. The proof is simply due to age. But eliminate that volunteer, and that fire department may be out of business. Should a fire department be reliant upon one old member who has been volunteering for 40 years? They shouldn't be, but they are!

Understand that throughout North America, some suburban and most rural areas are “protected” by the above model – some retired members who are “around” if there is a run and staffing from the local schools where young firefighters can respond. And it works ... until it doesn't. It is a known risk that communities, departments and the members themselves are willing to accept. As one senior volunteer firefighter said to me when discussing this issue: “I am around, I can help out as our company needs help; besides, the local community is not willing to give us the tax funds to hire career folks, so we do what we can.”

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So, while it is predictable, and eventually something might go terribly wrong with an engine company having a 70+-year-old driver and the rig filled with high school student firefighters, the fact is that for the most part, the public will get the service they called for, or at least the service they assumed will respond.

Our own worst enemy

We never say no. When the career side sees budget cuts, we will give it our all to make up the difference. When the volunteer side is in trouble, we sometimes end up with elderly and juvenile firefighters as the response.

WHY?

Because we know that what we do matters. We have been there/done that, so no matter the cuts and related issues, we understand that when someone needs help, we will give it our all. We give it our best even though we know it can be done better, even though we are at even greater risk.

On the other hand, there is also an element of selfishness and/or false pride in the mix. *"We are volunteers and will always be volunteers no matter what! That statement often misses a part two that sounds something like "regardless of whether or not the public suffers."* Sounds brutal? Yeah, it sounds brutal – and it is brutal – but we do not always do what's best for the public. And we know it.

Many years ago, one of our volunteer chiefs threatened me when I was proposing a large budget item that included hiring dozens of county career firefighters – firefighters that the stats proved were needed, as the 20+ volunteer fire rescue companies in our county were simply failing to respond. The threat sounded like this:

"Billy, if you propose hiring all those paid firefighters, we are going to surround the courthouse with all of our apparatus that day at noon in protest" to which I responded, "If you can staff all your apparatus next week at noon to protest my actions, do it every day, around the clock, and I won't have to hire any career firefighters."

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While my friend was self-focused, the fact is that if the service can be done better/faster and the public is willing to pay, we owe it to the public to provide what the local economy will support. On the other hand, if the local community is not willing to fund better service, then they will get what can be afforded – and in many communities, that's the old-timer with high school kids responding from wherever they are when the tones go off. It's a crapshoot that the public, tossing the dice, doesn't always understand until it's after the emergency.

What's the solution?

It is probably time that the NFPA take another look at this issue of age, where it is legal and appropriate. Currently, they have excellent, applicable standards that cover everything *but* age, such as physical fitness, and if those standards would just be applied, with physicals, no tobacco use, things like that would be part of the equation and age wouldn't be as applicable as we currently think.

There is also a local, personal factor where members of many decades want to stay involved. It is a love for the job of belonging. As my email buddies above suggested, there are roles in volunteer departments for people to serve but in a lower-risk manner. Consider the value of that senior member at the command post as an aide/advisor. How about managing accountability? And certainly as qualified, helping mentor newer members.

A pretty simple equation

We must also be honest with the community we serve – and ourselves. Let the community know what they will actually get (use real stats) when they dial 911 (day, night, weekends; who, how long, etc.) and the reasons for that response. Good, bad or whatever. If they don't like it, they should be encouraged to join. If they don't have the time or desire, then raise taxes. If they don't like that, then we are running out of options, and they will get what they support. Pretty simple equation.

Regardless of what is done, and how we feel emotionally about this issue, every firefighter who actively responds to emergencies should have an annual firefighter physical (NFPA) and related screenings (cancer, etc.) to evaluate their health and ability to do the job. The cost of physicals should be considered as important as fuel for the apparatus. It is non-negotiable. And that's probably a good start to the worries of age.

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This photo provided by George Hildebran Fire & Rescue Department shows the scorched car seat after it caught fire inside a vehicle in Burke County, N.C., on Sunday, Aug. 25, 2024.

George Hildebran Fire & Rescue Department via AP

Childs e-book starts car fire

BURKE COUNTY, N.C. — North Carolina officials determined the cause of a fire inside a car in Burke County was a children's book.

A child's car seat was set ablaze when a "button battery" in a children's book caught fire after being left in the vehicle on Sunday, according to the George Hildebran Fire & Rescue Department. The family had left the car before the fire started, officials said.

Destiny Williams and her daughter, Misty, had come home from church that day and went inside the house, Williams told WSOC. Then, she began to notice smoke from the car.

A neighbor eventually put the fire out with a garden hose, WSOC reported. After the fire was put out, the fire marshal's office was called to the scene, authorities said.

"My initial thought about it is: 'What if it did happen?' Because I would be without a daughter and a wife if it did happen (with them in the car)," the girl's father Pressley Williams told WBTV.

One of the several books near the scorched car seat was suspected of having a lithium battery, which are susceptible to catching fire if they overheat, according to the Burke County Fire Marshal's Office.

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Hazmat Corner



New York City Fire Department (FDNY) 

Fire Station · 96% recommend (2,633 Reviews) · Always open · 708K followers



The official Facebook page of the New York City Fire Department. For emergencies, call 911.



10+ posts in the last 2 weeks

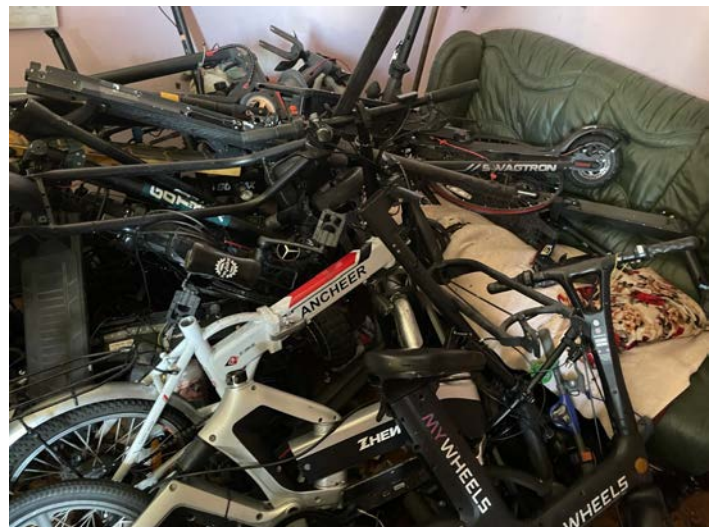
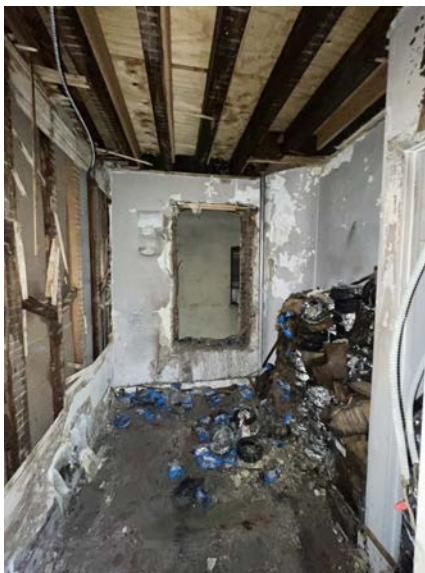
Bad actors continue to put the lives of New Yorkers in danger. On September 10, the #FDNY responded to two separate fires caused by lithium-ion batteries. One was located at 2504 7 Avenue in Manhattan, and the other at 2911 Brighton 5 Street in Brooklyn. Both fires were located in residential apartments, and both apartments contained illegal lithium-ion battery repair shops. In Brooklyn, 20 lithium-ion powered mobility devices and at least 10 lithium-ion batteries were located throughout the apartment. The batteries had been tampered with and modified.

In Manhattan, the apartment contained at least five electronic scooters and multiple boxes containing e-bike/e-scooter parts and tires, along with other combustible materials.

The Bureau of Fire Prevention issued numerous violations for these locations.

These fires occurred in a place the FDNY cannot inspect: residences. The fires could have been much worse.

New York — we need your help to stop these bad actors. Call 311 immediately if you see or suspect dangerous lithium-ion battery practices. We want to keep you safe.



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EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Be sure to visit the NYS DHSES OFPC website for additional public education resources!

<https://www.dhses.ny.gov/general-public-resources>

ALBANY COUNTY FIRE TRAINING SCHEDULE #16 is attached

LMS SYSTEM

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 #16 2024

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 IN PROGRESS	East Berne	August 20, September 3, 5, 10, 12, 17, 19, 24, 26, 28, October 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29, 31, November 5, 7, 9 Weeknights 1830-2130 Saturdays 0830-1430	Messenger	None
Firefighter II IN PROGRESS	Colonie MTB	September 10, 17 October 3, 5, 10, 15, 17, 19, 22: 1800-2100, 29: 1800-2200 Weeknights: 1830-2130 Saturdays: 0800-1400	Molesky	Firefighter I or Equivalent
Rescue Technician Basic	Colonie MTB – Upper Classroom	September 17, 24, 30, October 3, 5, 7 Weeknights 1830-2130 Saturday 0800-1700	DeGroff	None

Hazardous Materials Incident Command	Colonie MTB	September 18, 25, October 2, 8 1830-2230	Lattanzio	Hazardous Materials First Responder Operations or Equivalent
Medium Structural Collapse Operations: Tools	Albany County Sheriff's Office	September 23&24 0800-1700	Jennings	Medium Level Structural Collapse Concepts
Rescue Technician Basic	SABIC	9/24, 25, 26 0800-1700	Heinbach	None
Trench Rescue - Operations Level	Albany County Sheriff's Office	September 25&26 0800-1700	OFPC	Medium Structural Collapse Operations: Tools
Confined Space Rescue Technician	Albany County Sheriff's Office	October 21-24 0800-1700	OFPC	Rescue Technician Basic
Battery Emergencies and Electrical Storage Systems	East Berne	October 28 1900-2100	Graves	None
Fire Officer I Module Series: NYS Officer Development-Leadership and Supervision Course	Altamont FD	November 13, 16, 19, 21 Weeknights: 1830-2130 Saturday: 0800-1400	DeGross	BEFO or Equivalent
Alternate Fueled Vehicles NEW TO SCHEDULE	Onesquethaw	November 18 1800-2200	Higgins	None

Alternate Fueled Vehicles NEW TO SCHEDULE	Altamont	November 25 1830-2230	Higgins	None

Firefighter I Certification (BEFO/SCBA Interior Firefighter Operations) NEW TO SCHEDULE IFSTA Essentials of Firefighting 7th Edition Curriculum	Colonie MTB	December 10th: Orientation: 6:30 pm Chief Officer Must Attend with Student <i>BEFO (W/Hazardous Materials Operations)</i> January 2, 6, 7, 9, 14, 21, 25 February 1, 8, 13, 18, 20, 25, March 4, 8, 15, 20, 27, April 1, 3 <i>SCBA/IFO:</i> April 8, 19, 26, May 1, 8, 13, 15, 20, 27, 31, June 7, 12, 14 Weeknights 1830-2130 (3/15, 3/20, 4/1, 4/3 1800-2200) Saturdays 0800-1400 Instructor - Molesky	At Orientation: Training Authorization Letter Start of SCBA/IFO: Medical Clearance to wear SCBA,
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Unless changed by instructor or noted above: All evening classes will be held from 19:00-22:00 hours. All Saturday and Sunday classes will be held from 09:00-12:00 hours and 13:00-16:00 hours	 Fire Coordinator Gerald Paris 
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