



FIRE POLITICS

By Dennis Compton

Better Data Can Result in Better Policy and Operational Decisions

Data Collection May Not Be Exciting, But the Issue Is Critical to the Fire Service

It's been interesting to read about the recent publicity major fire departments from the East Coast to the West Coast have been receiving concerning the reliability of their response data. There have been accusations that fire department data may have been manipulated to support policy decisions related to reductions in force, such as staffing levels and response times.

In some cases, fire chiefs and other officials have had a great deal of difficulty publicly explaining their data-collection and data-management systems. They have been accused of intentionally providing confusing data to elected officials who then used that data to make significant budget decisions. Once again in the American fire service, the issue of quality data management moves to the forefront. Perhaps this time we should finally pay attention and seize the opportunity to improve in this critical area.

I've been fortunate over the years to moderate many summits and planning sessions. One of those opportunities involved the National Fire Service Data Summit conducted in Tempe, AZ, in January 2011. The Data Summit was an output of the Multiphase Study on Firefighter Safety and Deployment Team. This study has been a joint effort between the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) from the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Commission on Fire Accreditation International-RISK, the International Association of Fire Chiefs

(IAFC), the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), the Urban Institute and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. For several years, the study team has been working to provide science-based tools to assist decision-makers in matching resources to risk.

Obviously, a major element of the decision-making process is the availability of quality data at the local and national levels. The Data Summit was an opportunity to share the findings of the study team and get input from stakeholders concerning the need for more and improved data.

It can be difficult to make the subject of data collection and use exciting, but this issue is critical to the fire service and deserves a lot more attention than it has traditionally gotten. Fire department leaders (management and labor) are constantly scrutinized by elected officials and other policy-makers concerning decisions related to expenditures, performance measures and outcomes. Defending the fire department's resource needs using accurate and pertinent data is a critical part of determining staffing levels, crew sizes and the deployment of those crews. Data also drives decisions related to evaluating and predicting the likely type of emergency events encountered, appropriate asset configuration, response timeframes, necessary training levels, the effectiveness of fire prevention programs and others.

A National Fire Service Data Summit

proceedings document (NIST Technical Note 1698) was published in May 2011. This document goes into great detail concerning the content of the summit and is a must read for decision-makers. The objectives of the Data Summit were as follows:

Good data helps us identify, use and measure the effectiveness of fire department resources.

1. Gather information on data needs from a broad range of participants.

2. Share the research experience of the Multiphase Study on Firefighter Safety and Deployment Project, with particular focus on availability, collection and interpretation of basic resource deployment data.

3. Discuss the need for, and the potential utility of, a national fire service data-collection reporting system, with a focus on the stakeholders.

4. Develop recommendations for data-collection processes, as well as data elements that can be consistently collected and analyzed by a fire department to enable measurement of its availability, capability and operational effectiveness.

To meet these objectives, the Data Summit was designed around the following five sessions:

1. Identification of obstacles to fire service data collection, performance measures and data elements.

2. Presentation by the Multi-Phase Study Team covering the results of its work completed to date, including findings from scientific literature, firefighting experiments and an ongoing survey.

3. Discussion of the gaps and defi-

For more news and training on fire service politics, visit: <http://www.firehouse.com/topics/politics-law>.

DENNIS COMPTON, a *Firehouse*® contributing editor, is a speaker and the author of *Progressive Leadership Principles, Concepts and Tools*, the *When in Doubt, Lead!* books, the book *Mental Aspects of Performance for Firefighters and Fire Officers*, and many articles, chapters and other publications. He was the fire chief in Mesa, AZ, for five years and assistant fire chief in Phoenix, where he served for 27 years. Compton

is past chairman of the Executive Board of the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) and past chairman of the Congressional Fire Services Institute's National Advisory Committee. He is currently chairman of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Board of Directors.

FIRE POLITICS

ciencies in existing data-collection efforts, including the usefulness of the data, the motivation for entering quality data and the accuracy of the data.

4. Participants were divided into three work groups. A group was assigned to each of the following activities – the development of candidate data elements or metrics; the identification of research needs; and recommendations going forward. Each group completed its work independently and then reported back to the full summit.

5. Identification of the key steps along the path toward a national fire service data set. Nine action-oriented steps were identified during this session.

We must continue to emphasize the importance of quality data and create better systems for managing it.

The importance of data cannot be overstated in the decision-making process. Good data helps leaders do a better job of identifying, using and measuring the effectiveness of fire department resources in all areas of performance, but especially firefighter injury and death, civilian injury and death and property loss. We must be able to more accurately predict, and later measure, the effectiveness of decisions that impact these critical outcomes. Bottom line, we want fire chiefs, union officials, city managers and elected officials to have the accurate data and information they need to drive good decisions. With that said, it's incumbent on the fire service to have quality data available to provide to decision-makers at the appropriate level and at the appropriate time. The ability to do so might have avoided some of the embarrassing public attention fire department data management has recently received.

We must continue to emphasize the importance of quality data and create better systems for managing it. The report published from the National Data Summit would be a great platform to work from. ■

Dennis Compton will present "Creating and Inspiring Exceptional Fire Department Leaders" and moderate the "Chiefs/Commissioners Panel" at Firehouse Expo 2012, July 17-21 in Baltimore, MD.

THE WORLD'S FOREMOST AUTHORITY

ATR Advanced Tech RESCUE

NOW HIRING REPS IN ALL 50 STATES

Deployment Bag

by Talon Rescue



- Web Carrying Handle
- Modular Attachment Strap
- 6" X 12" X 5.5" (HxWxD)
- Available in Black, O.D., Coyote Tan, ACU, OD Digital

List Price
\$24.95

Sale Price
\$21.95

P/N: 127

Large Flashlight Retractor

by Gear Keeper



Simply extend the tether for easy use and eliminate the risk of loss or the need to re-clip flashlight. Ideal when using your flashlight and you need to let go to use both hands!

- 80 lbs. Breaking Strength
- Stainless Steel Spring & Hardware

List Price
\$29.99

Sale Price
\$ 25.95

P/N: RT3-4493

Lightweight Rope Gloves

by PMI



Lightweight, pliable goatskin provides excellent finger dexterity while two extra layers of cowhide across the palm maximize protection where you need it most.

List Price
\$32.75

Sale Price
\$29.99

P/N: GL22001

Sabretooth Carbide Tipped Chain

by Carbide Chain of America



- Longer-Lasting Carbide
- Stronger Chassis
- Anti-Kickback, Safety-Raker
- Higher Heat Silver Solder, Keeps Teeth From Moving
- Chip Resistant Design

List Price
\$183.00

Sale Price
\$175.95

P/N: 555B

Voyager Harness

by Yates



The standard of the rescue professional who needs a versatile rescue harness with multiple attachment points. 5 inch waist pad provides extreme comfort.

List Price
\$339.00

Sale Price
\$311.88

P/N: 380

US&R Communications

by Con-Space



The best overall choice for reliable communication is a Hardline intercom system. CON-SPACES full duplex USAR Taskforce Kit allows hands-free, private communication that is rugged, reliable and Intrinsically Safe Approved so it will never act as the igniting source for an explosion.

List Price
\$17,185.00

Sale Price
\$15,036.88

P/N: 0103-04-055

ADVANCEDTECHRESCUE.COM

Indicate 111 on Reader Service Card

May 2012 | Firehouse | 25