

The Seven Deadly Sins of Fire Departments

By: Ray Crouch, Sr. – Fire Department Management Consultant UT/IPS/MTAS

Seven – If your city has a Public Protection Class (*commonly called ISO rating*) of a 7, 8, 9, or 10 this is really embarrassing. This equates to a grade “D” or “F” if you were in school. Even a small 100% volunteer staffed fire department should be able to get a PPC of 6 or above. Every city with any career staff should have a PPC of 4 or 5, and with an all career fire department expect at least a class 3.

Six – Regardless of the type of staffing your fire department uses, volunteer, career, or part-time, these individuals should be well compensated for their work. If career, pay them equal to or greater than the going rate for firefighters in your area. If volunteer, make sure that you have a volunteer compensation package that will keep them loyal to the city and the fire department.

Five – If your city does not have adequate water supplies for firefighting, then this directly reflects on the planning ability of the city. Enough water should be stored in elevated storage tanks to meet the minimum ISO requirements. As water mains are added and upgraded, they should be sized to meet current and foreseeable growth. Fire hydrants should be spaced to meet the fire flow demands of the buildings they protect.

Four – Your fire vehicle fleet should be safe and functional. The second highest factor in firefighter fatalities is in vehicle accidents. The vehicle itself contributes to this problem in many instances. The vehicle is not well-maintained, has poor brakes, the suspension system has major defects, or the vehicle is poorly marked and lighted so as not to be visible. Vehicles do not have to be new, but they should be fully functional.

Three – If your firefighters are not trained to a minimum standard, they should not be allowed to continue on the fire department as active

firefighters. Any new firefighter should have a minimum of 16 hours of safety training before being allowed to respond to an emergency. During the first year on the fire department, the new firefighter should get a total of 84 hours of training. During the first three years, their total training should be 240 hours. All active firefighters should receive no less than 40 hours of in-service training per year for as long as they remain on active status in the fire department.

T**WO** -- No fire department is perfect, therefore they should have a five year strategic plan on how to solve their most pressing problems. After brain-storming a needs assessment, the fire department should develop a written 5-year plan that should be presented each year as part of their budget request. This plan will assure the city that the fire department is not in the survival mode, but has recognized its weaknesses and has a plan to fix them.

O**ne** – The worst possible position for a city and its fire department to be in is to have a “bad” fire chief. No organization can rise above its leadership. Eagles and Turkeys can both fly, but the turkey never gets very high. So what is a bad fire chief? The fire chief must be a leader. They must have a clear vision of where the fire department is going to be in one, two, five or ten years. The chief must be able to “paint” this vision so that the firefighters, elected officials and citizens can clearly see where they are going. The fire chief should be formally educated, fully trained in fire department operations, flexible, and progressive. The fire chief must have the safety of the firefighters and the protection of the public as the two highest goals for the department.

Summary: (The Seven Virtues’ of a Fire Department in a nutshell)

1. Have a Great Fire Chief
2. Develop a 5-year strategic plan
3. Give firefighters the best possible training in great measure
4. Have a modern, well-maintained fleet of fire vehicles
5. Make sure water supplies are adequate for fire protection
6. Compensate and reward firefighters for their work
7. Lower insurance premiums and save money for your property owners by having a very good property protection class from ISO.