

**DESIGNING AN OFFICER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR  
INCUMBENT OFFICERS OF THE  
FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT**

EXECUTIVE PLANNING

BY: David L. Rohr  
Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department  
Fairfax, Virginia

An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy  
As part of the Executive Fire Officer Program

October 2002

## ABSTRACT

The problem was that the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department did not have an officer development program for incumbent officers.

The purpose of this applied research project was to develop a draft proposal for the Department that defined a plan for the implementation of an officer development program for incumbent officers. Descriptive and action research methods were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What officer development programs are currently being utilized in other fire and rescue organizations?
2. What standards or documents exist that define desired curriculums, knowledge, and abilities that fire and rescue officers must possess?
3. What are the limitations that keep the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department from putting an incumbent officer development program in place?

Prior to attending the National Fire Academy (NFA) in April of 2002, preliminary research began to identify existing standards and curriculum for officer development programs. Research was conducted through the Fairfax County Public Library System, professional trade journals, and departmental documents. In April 2002, research was conducted at the National Emergency's Training Center's Learning Resource Center.

Interviews were conducted with personnel within the Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department and a survey instrument was developed. Results indicated that there are existing programs in place. Many of them are based upon National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)1021, *Standard for Professional Officer Qualifications*. Other programs identified certain educational levels that must be met and serve as a component of a career development

program. The limitations found within the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department amounted to fiscal and logistical concerns. A draft document was developed (Appendix A) that provided a proposal for the development and implementation of an incumbent officer development program.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>PROCEDURES.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>RESULTS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>APPENDIX A (Draft Proposal).....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>APPENDIX B (Survey Letter).....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>APPENDIX C (Survey Questions).....</b>	<b>40</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department is a combination department consisting of 1200 uniformed personnel, 80 civilian personnel, and approximately 150 operational volunteers. The department provides comprehensive emergency services to nearly one million residents living in 399 square miles in the western suburbs of Washington D.C. Services are provided from 35 fire station locations and four other divisions that support the operational functions of the department. The Department experienced tremendous growth in the 1970's to meet increased service demands. The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department continues to experience growth while many of the fire department's officers and personnel approach retirement eligibility. The problem is that the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department does not have an officer development program for officers once they have been promoted.

The purpose of this applied research project is to develop a draft proposal for the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department that defines a plan for the development of an officer development program for incumbent officers.

The descriptive and action research methods were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What officer development programs are currently being utilized in other fire and rescue organizations?
2. What standards or documents exist that define desired curriculums, knowledge, and abilities that fire and rescue officers must possess?
3. What are the limitations that keep the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department from putting an incumbent officer development program in place?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Fairfax County is located in the immediate western suburbs of the Nation's Capital. The Washington Metropolitan Area experienced tremendous growth during the early 1970s. The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department's career work force grew equally to meet the increased service needs.

The Fairfax County Uniformed Retirement System has evolved through several enhancements in the past 20 years. The most significant was the option for employees to select a straight 25 year retirement with full benefits in place of the traditional civil service system that combines service time with age to determine retirement age (Fairfax County Uniformed Retirement Office, 2002). While this meant increased contributions to the employee, it most often resulted in earlier retirement with improved benefits for the majority of the then young work force.

The option of a 25-year retirement instigated the problem the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department is now dealing with. Prior to the late 1990s, this issue had not created a problem for the department since large numbers of personnel had not reached their retirement eligibility service time. The significance of the problem has increased in the last several years as those personnel hired in the 1970s have reached their retirement age. The impact of the problem on the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department is that senior members of the department are now beginning to retire, and younger, less experienced personnel are being promoted into management positions.

As of September 11, 2002, 105 personnel are eligible to retire (Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, 2002a). These employees eligible to retire include the Fire Chief, both assistant chiefs, four of seven deputy chiefs, and 12 of the department's 23 battalion chiefs. In

addition to these senior staff members, 52 of the 105 personnel eligible to retire are currently officers with extensive experience and knowledge.

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department has had a career development program in place since 1993. The program has been phased in progressively through the ranks. Requirements began at the technician level and have progressed through the level of deputy chief effective in 2002 (Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, 1995). The emphasis of the program has been on preparing employees for their next position. In essence, an employee has to meet certain core educational requirements to be certified to participate in the promotional process for the associated rank.

At a glance one would think that the educational system in place in Fairfax would prepare personnel well for their next leadership role. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many instances. There is no restriction as to when an employee can certify by career development standards to sit for a promotional process. Ironically, an employee can enter the department with a bachelor's degree in a public safety discipline and take all of the other career development requirements needed and be certified to sit for a deputy chief exam with minimal years in the department. This individual would not have any further career development educational requirements. The only requirements one would not have in this case would be time in grade at certain rank levels progressing to the deputy chief rank.

While this process has served the Department well in most respects, the Department is evolving into an organization with a substantial number of officers that have little experience and broad based professional knowledge and have simply "gotten the check marks" to take a promotional exam. Personnel may not compete for a promotional exam immediately after completion of a career development requirement or they may choose to stay at a certain rank

once achieved. In both examples, leadership skills and officer development for incumbent officers does not exist outside of normal in-service training.

The future impact is that the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department will be staffed with relatively new and inexperienced officers that are dealing with a very limited skill set to deal with everyday emergency service management and leadership issues. The demands for diversified services will continue to grow for public safety organizations. Supervisors at every rank within the department must maintain leadership skills to deal with management, fiscal, and planning issues in the future. Systems must be developed to provide these tools to newly promoted and existing officers.

This research project was completed in accordance with the applied research requirements of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. The problem of not having an incumbent officer development program in the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department relates specifically to the Strategic Planning module as presented in the Executive Planning course. Strategic planning incorporates individual and organizational values, as well as operating philosophy and the organizational future. These items speak directly to an organization's leaders. Without a well designed program for officer development, an organization will not adequately meet the public safety demands of tomorrow.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A literature review was conducted to identify officer development programs currently in use by other fire and rescue departments. Additional research was conducted to identify standards or nationally recognized programs that would support an officer development program for incumbent officers in the Department. Literature searches were initiated at the National

Emergency Training Center's Learning Resource Center in April 2002. Additional research was conducted through the Information Services of the Fairfax County, Virginia Library System.

The literature review included review of internal department documents, professional journals, and Intranet resources.

### **Current Officer Development Programs in Use**

“The state of career development is getting worse” (Coleman, 2000, p. 116). Coleman explains that many existing programs serve as useful tools in providing some structure to the promotional exam process. They are often oriented towards past practices in many cases and do little to prepare officers. “Every level of the fire service is built on the knowledge of the previous level, but there's often no connection between the knowledge, skills and abilities required at the higher level and those of the one you just left” (p. 117).

Chief Thomas Hawkins (2000) wrote in Fire Chief Magazine that many departments have put sophisticated promotional processes in place to fill leadership positions. Firefighters compete for these positions and are placed in charge of operational units or administrative sections of the department. In essence he states, “Each new officer is invested with the faith and trust of the fire chief, who decided which candidates to promote” (p. 68). This can be followed in some cases by poor performance of an officer even when a candidate has done well on a promotional process. Hawkins (2000) describes this situation as “Promotional remorse”(p. 68).

Hawkins (2000) outlines the officer development program in place in the Alexandria, VA Fire Department. The program was created by representatives from across the organization at various stages of their careers. The program is the Leadership, Education and Development Institute (LEAD). The initial goal of the LEAD institute is to provide a comprehensive leadership and training program for all department managers. The program consists of

four phases.

Phase one focuses on the individual and their strengths and weaknesses. This includes the mission and values of the department, Myers-Briggs evaluation tool, and a self-directed professional development component designed to help the student put in place a professional growth program to maximize their own strengths and weaknesses.

Phase two is directed at management skills and includes the following components: Communication skills, time management, team building, leadership styles, and training techniques and responsibilities.

The third phase of the LEAD program deals with the legal aspects of being a manager, employee evaluations, and disciplinary issues. The fourth and final component addresses emergency incident management, customer service programs, the role of the fire department in local government, financial management, and citywide expectations (Hawkins, 2000).

In Olympia, Washington, several departments have teamed together to develop a fire officer program aimed at maximizing their resources and minimizing redundancy in the neighboring systems. The program is based upon a nine-week curriculum schedule and includes modules on leadership, management, and instruction. The command module places the company officer with the recruits to form fire companies for practical work (Dale, 2001).

The Chesterfield, VA Fire and EMS Department, (Chesterfield Fire Department, 2002) has a two tiered officer development program (Level I, II). The Level I program is designed for first line supervisors and consist of general orientation topics, safety practices, leadership and management, emergency services delivery, fire arson investigation, building construction, fire protection systems, fire prevention codes and ordinances, report writing and electronic information, public relations, human resource management, and total quality management.

The Level II Chesterfield program is designed to meet the needs of the upper level officer and the components of that curriculum are instruction methodology, government structure and methodology, communications, electronic information management, human resource management, community awareness and public relations, inspections, investigation, and public education, emergency services delivery, safety, leadership and management, planning, and total quality initiatives.

Chesterfield's plan defines specific courses and acceptable substitutions for every component at each level of the program. These include courses developed and presented by the NFA, Chesterfield County, VA government, community college curriculums, and the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. The Chesterfield officer development program is a career development type of program meaning that it certifies personnel to take a higher level promotional exam (Chesterfield Fire Department, 2002).

The Montgomery County, MD Fire and Rescue Service also has an officer development program in place. The Command Officer Professional Development and Improvement Program replaces an existing program that has been in place since 1994. Command level officers at the rank of District Chief/Deputy Chief or above are required to obtain 12 hours of professional development and improvement training annually to maintain certification within the department (Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service, 2002).

Six of the hours of training must be from courses offered by the Division of Fire and Rescue Services training section. Additional courses may come from training programs sponsored by other agencies that meet the requirements of NFPA 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*. These may include approved on-line programs whose training

objectives can be verified to meet the objectives of the Command Officer Professional Development and Improvement Program and NFPA 1021.

The Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD) currently has an officer certification program aimed at upper level managers. The program is a three step certification process that includes certifications as Certified Fire Officer, Certified Chief Officer, and Certified Fire Chief. At each level of the system prerequisites include time in service at certain ranks and core educational requirements. The certification of Chief Officer requires a two year or equivalent degree in any major to be accepted into the course (LAFD, 2002, Fire Officer Program).

The educational requirements for all three levels include all of the tasks and core competencies included in NFPA 1021. In addition to this, they include three levels of Incident Command System (ICS) training, Command Tactics at Major Fires, Management of Major Hazardous Materials Incidents, Highrise Fire Tactics, Planning for Large Scale Disasters, Wildland Fire Tactics, Organizational Development and Human Relations, Fire Service Financial Management, Personnel and Labor Law, Master Planning, and Contemporary Issues and Concepts. Participants must successfully complete (70%) the certification exams for all courses. The courses are open to all personnel that meet the academic requirements, but the Chief Officer Certification is only available to those holding the rank of officer and above (LAFD, 2002).

The Phoenix Arizona Fire Department has a management development program that is a requirement for all fire department managers. Each manager must obtain 48 hours of continuing education training on an annual basis. The continuing education is broken down into three categories as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Phoenix Fire Department Management Development Plan**

Emergency Incident Management	Fire Service Management	Other
Command Operations	Program Management	Teaching
Safety Management	Quality Services Management	Public Presentations
Tactical Plans	Leadership Skills	Seminars that do not apply to other categories
Standard Operating Procedures	Cultural Diversity	
Drills	Human Behavior	Membership on Department, Local, or professional organizations.
Critiques	Stress Management	
Related Conferences and College	Related Conferences and College	

Phoenix Fire Department personnel must complete an application to receive these continuing education credits. These credits do not serve as prerequisites to a promotional process, but serve simply as a professional development tool (Phoenix Fire, 2001).

This information influenced the research in that it there are officer development programs being successfully used today that meet promotional advancement needs as well as the leadership and professional development needs of a department.

### **Current Standards and Model Curriculums**

McGary (1999) writes that post promotion officer development courses must contain fire service material as well as current material on leadership and management styles. “The standards of incident command and incident scene management are evident, but developers must ensure that content addresses the concept of transformation, as the fire service continues to move to more to disciplines other than firefighting. Future leaders must understand the role that they will play in accomplishing these new missions” (p.23).

The mission of the fire service has certainly changed in the past decade and professional development needs to change to meet those needs. Grant and Hoover (1994) discuss the needs

for future leaders. They discuss the changing roles of emergency medical service provision, to fire prevention, life safety, and planning issues. “Future leaders of the fire service must find innovative approaches to managing and these must be initiated in order to provide quality service in new and dynamic ways while simultaneously cutting the cost of these services” (p.6). Grant and Hoover also revealed that “...there has been little or no review of the different skills, training, expertise, scheduling and operating procedures that are most appropriate given new responsibilities of the service” (p.7).

These findings of McGary, Hoover and Grant had a significant impact on the project because it emphasized the need for organizations to provided current up to date professional development opportunities for leadership personnel. The concepts should be based upon current and future needs instead of past practices.

NFPA 1500, *Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Programs* (1997), mandates in Chapter 3, Training and Education, Section 3-1.3 “The fire department shall provide training and education for all fire department members commensurate with the duties and functions that they are expected to perform. Members shall be provided with training and education appropriate for their duties and responsibilities before being permitted to engage in emergency operations.” Section 3-2.5 of the Standard states “All fire officers shall at least meet the requirements for Fire Officer I as specified in NFPA 1021, *Standards for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*” (1997).

This information influenced the research because it defines the role of fire departments in providing training for their members, but it stops short of making this an ongoing process for incumbent officers.

NFPA 1021 *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* is the only national standard that outlines specific professional qualifications. NFPA 1021 (1997) is designed to specify minimum job performance requirements for fire officers. Progressive degrees of performance are required at four different levels, Fire Officer I, Fire Officer II, Fire Officer III, and Fire Officer IV. Candidates must meet prerequisites outlined in this standard prior to moving to the next level.

NFPA 1021 (1997) defines each level as shown in table 2.

**Table 2**  
**NFPA 1021 Officer Levels**

<i>NFPA 1021 Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications</i>	
<b>Level</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Officer I</b>	Fire officer at the supervisory level who has met the job performance requirements in this standard for Level I
<b>Officer II</b>	Fire officer at the supervisory/managerial level who has met the job performance requirements in this standard for Level II
<b>Officer III</b>	Fire officer at the managerial/administrative level who has met the job performance requirements in this standard for Level III
<b>Officer IV</b>	Fire officer at the administrative level who has met the job performance requirements in this standard for Level IV

The Standard outlines curriculum for each level of certification. General prerequisite knowledge and skills are defined for each level within the standard. Prerequisite knowledge at the Officer I level includes items such as knowledge of the department organizational structure, department budget procedures, operating procedures for administration and operations, cultural diversity, and building safety codes and ordinances. By comparison, NFPA 1021 (1997) prerequisite knowledge requirements at the Officer III level include current international and

national trends and developments related to fire service organization, management, and administrative principles; public and private organizations that support the fire and emergency services and the functions of each.

The *Standard for Fire Officer Qualifications* defines job performance requirements in six different categories at each level. Within each job performance requirement specific knowledge and skills are defined for that performance requirement. The job performance requirements for each level are human resource management, community and government relations, administration, inspection and investigation, emergency service delivery and safety. Like the prerequisite knowledge and skills, the complexity of each category increases at the higher levels.

The *Standard for Fire Officer Qualifications* (NFPA 1021, 1997) was designed to develop clear and concise job performance requirements that can be used to measure an individual to an adopted and measurable standard. NFPA 1021 states “.....these job performance requirements can be used in any fire department in any city, town, or private organization throughout North America” (Origin and Development, paragraph 8). NFPA 1021 further states that “The authority having jurisdiction has the option to combine or group the levels to meet local needs and to use them in the development of job descriptions and specifying promotional standards (section 1-2.1). The Standard further discusses the fact that appropriate educational credentials in the areas of business, management, and other associated degree curriculums are expected to supplement the Standard (section A-1-1).

This information had an impact on the research because it defines a nationally adopted standard for officer qualifications. The components of the standard can serve as the backbone of any structured officer development program.

In June of 2001, the United States Fire Administration (USFA) hosted the third annual Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education conference in Emmittsburg, MD (USFA, 2002). This group represents colleges and universities that offer fire related two and four year degree programs and State and local fire service training agencies. During this conference, the National Fire Science Curriculum Committee was established with the responsibility to develop model course outlines for the fire science curriculum that had been previously adopted at the 2000 Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education conference.

The six core courses in the model fire science curriculum are Fundamentals of Fire Protection, Fire Protection Systems, Fire Behavior, Fire Protection Hydraulics and Water Supply, Building Construction for the Fire Protection, and Fire Prevention (USFA, 2002). In addition to the model core curriculum are model elective courses. The elective courses are Fire Administration I, Occupational Health and Safety, Legal Aspects, Hazardous Materials Chemistry, Fire Investigation, and Strategy and Tactics.

The National Fire Science Curriculum Committee developed standard titles, descriptions, and outcomes for each of the core courses and one of the elective courses. USFA (2002) states that “Eventually, other lower and upper level courses will be similarly lined up, enabling the establishment of a national curriculum of higher education for the fire and emergency services” (Lower-Level course, para. 1). “A nationally accepted model will allow for relatively problem free transfers between academic institutions” (Model Core Curriculum, para. 3).

Because there is only one truly national standard, the author also reviewed several regional models of officer development curriculums. The Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI) is a well recognized public safety training institution in the Washington Metropolitan

Area. MIFRI (2002) offers a four level approach to its officer development curriculum. The subject matter is based upon NFPA 1021 (1997) and is illustrated in table 3.

**Table 3**  
**MIFRI Officer Program Course Content**

<i>MIFRI Officer Development Program</i>	
<b>Level</b>	<b>Course Description</b>
<b>Officer I</b>	Ten day course that meets the requirements of NFPA 1021 Chapter 2, <i>Fire Officer I</i> . This includes group problem solving, scenarios with tactical simulations, and focuses on the implementation of the Incident Command System.
<b>Officer II</b>	Six day course that meets the requirements of NFPA 1021 Chapter 3, <i>Fire Officer II</i> . The program expands on the daily administrative and operational requirements of the mid-level manager. Strategic planning concepts and resource deployment at large scale incidents are addressed in detail.
<b>Officer III</b>	Ten day course based upon the requirements of NFPA 1021 Chapter 4, <i>Fire Officer III</i> . The program is designed to prepare participants to function in the capacity of an organizational chief officer or as a member of the executive staff.
<b>Officer IV</b>	Ten day course based upon the requirements of NFPA 1021 Chapter 5, <i>Fire Officer IV</i> . The program includes in-basket exercises, grievance appraisals; community relations, long range planning, disaster planning, domestic preparedness, and risk management.

McGary (1999) states that the Anne Arundel County Maryland Fire and Rescue Department and the Prince Georges County Maryland Fire Department each use the MFRI Officer Development program for their officers. Anne Arundel provides instruction through department academy instructors presenting the MIFRI course content.

Talcott (1999) writes that adult learning must have flexibility built into it to provide effective education. The need for self-improvement and the opportunity to increase job satisfaction must be realized by officers within the department. The department must build a

development program unlike they have in the past to include mentoring and self-paced learning in some instances.

Roemmelt (2002a) of “21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders,” provides a different approach to officer development programs. Roemmelt provides officer development programs that are customizable to meet the customer’s needs. Courses and programs are based upon an organizations needs. “Our true measure of learning is your performance the next time you have an opportunity to demonstrate the skill or knowledge, not the last” (Roemmelt, 2002a, Introduction to products section, para. 2). Officer development is based upon leadership and management principles. Roemmelt also discusses the role of Emotional Intelligence and its impacts on positive outcomes within an organization. His programs center around the four essential elements of Emotional Intelligence; Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management, and Relationship Management. Roemmelt’s programs include Increasing Team effectiveness, Creativity, How Do We Get from Covey to the Most Effective Emergency Organization, Simulation Based Leadership, Leading and Managing Change, and Empowerment (2002b).

This information from Roemmelt influenced the project because it provided a different concept unlike many of the other findings in that it was not solely based upon the content of NFPA 1021but provides for very useful leadership and management information to be coupled with other traditional topics.

### **What are the limitations within the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department**

The current career development program provides educational prerequisites that personnel must meet prior to taking an exam at a given management level (Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, 1995).

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department currently has 410 personnel in supervisory ranks. This includes entry level supervisors from the rank of lieutenant through deputy chief. The two assistant chiefs and the Fire Chief were not included for the purposes of the research. An incumbent officer development program would need to be included at all ranks of the organization from lieutenant through deputy chief. The cost of sending these personnel compensated on their days off would be approximately \$546,295 (Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, 2002b).

### **PROCEDURES**

The purpose of this applied research project was to develop a draft proposal for the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department that defines a plan for the development of an officer development program for incumbent officers. This was done through a systematic process to meet the needs of the project.

The descriptive and action research methods were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What officer development programs are currently being utilized in other fire and rescue organizations?
2. What standards or documents exist that define desired curriculums, knowledge, and abilities that fire and rescue officers must possess?
3. What are the limitations that keep the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department from putting an incumbent officer development program in place?

Descriptive research was used to define the current situation and identify practices in other organizations. Action research methods were used to address the goal of developing a draft

proposal for the development of an Incumbent Officer Development Program for the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department.

There are several situational forces that will determine the success of obtaining the goal. One contributing factor in obtaining the goal is a newly developed strategic plan that emphasizes professional development and succession planning at all levels of the Department. The plan is strongly supported by upper management and labor. An existing situational force likely to impede the implementation of the stated goal is the number of managers that require the training, logistics, and fiscal constraints.

Prior to attending the NFA in April of 2002, preliminary research began to identify existing standards and model curriculum for officer development programs. Research was conducted through the Fairfax County Public Library System, professional trade journals, Department documents, Internet searches of fire and rescue organizations, publications, and educational institutions.

While attending the Executive Planning course (April 2002) at the NFA, literature research was conducted at the National Emergency's Training Center's Learning Resource Center.

Upon returning from the NFA, the problem was checked for clarity and comprehensiveness. It was determined by the author that the problem had not changed and that the research questions were valid. The proposal was submitted for initial approval and accepted.

### **Interviews**

A personal interview was conducted with the Assistant Chief of Operations, Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. The purpose of the interview was to understand the reasons that a program for officer development had not been put in place prior to this date. M.S.

Wheatley (personal communication, August 22, 2002) stated that emphasis had been placed in the past on developing a comprehensive pre-test type career development program. Wheatley also stated that regularly scheduled training had met organizational expectations in the past. Additionally, fiscal concerns for overtime costs had prohibited the efforts in the past.

A personal interview was conducted with the Department's Career Development Program Manager to determine the needs of adult learning as well as any additional information regarding the lack of an existing program. S. E. Earl (personal communication, September 23, 2002) discussed the need for flexibility in course scheduling, the need for varying course delivery options, and the concept of adult methodology. Additionally, it was stated that this is an obvious extension of the existing career development program already in place.

A third interview was conducted with Battalion Chief John Caussin of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. Chief Caussin had been assigned to the Human Resources Division and was the Department's promotional exam coordinator in 1999. J.A.Caussin (personal communication September 5, 2002) stated that officer development programs should be a function of the Human Resources Division of the Department and that the Training Division needed to focus on the development and delivery of operational topics. He stated that the lack of attention to training within human resources has been a fault of the department.

### **Surveys**

In March of 2002, a survey instrument was developed. The survey was provided to three senior staff members of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department for validation. Once the survey was in its final form, a cover letter was written and provided with the survey to each selected department.

The surveys were sent to all jurisdictions that are members of the Washington Metropolitan Area Council of Governments. This included eight fire and rescue departments that represent one fully career organization and the rest are large combination departments. Input from these jurisdictions was critical due to the fact that these departments operate under mutual aid agreements with Fairfax County and share operational and staffing policies. The goal is that they would operate as one seamless entity providing fire and rescue protection to the Nation's Capital and surrounding suburban jurisdictions. Six of the eight departments returned completed surveys.

Additional surveys were sent to 28 departments across the Nation. The demographics of the respondent municipalities ranged in size from 46 personnel to over 1000 uniformed personnel. The organizations were selected based upon their metropolitan location, similarity in organizational structure and operations. Ten responded to the survey. Forty-four percent of all of the jurisdictions returned the survey.

Of the respondents, fifty percent stated that they had an officer development program in place. Twenty five percent of those that have a program in place have a continuing education program for incumbents. All of the others centered around newly promoted personnel or those certifying to sit for a promotional exam.

### **Limitations**

The information retrieved during the research was limited by the number of respondents to the survey. Internet research of professional trade journals, educational institutions, NFA, and other resources was only limited by the author's definition of what qualified as an Officer Development Program. Many departments consider a single class as an officer development program which did not meet the intent of the research. The research for a model curriculum was

limited by the fact that there is one single document that defines knowledge and skills for fire department officers (NFPA 1021).

### **Terms**

Automatic Aide. A plan developed between two or more jurisdictions for immediate response regardless of political boundaries. The closest available appropriate resources would be dispatched to a call for help.

Assistant Chief. Uniformed positions that serve directly under the Fire Chief. They are the highest civil service positions within the organization. One of them manages the Administrative functions of the department and the other manages the Operations functions.

Battalion Chief. Senior level manager that manages a section or division within administration or one of six geographic locations of the County (battalion) usually consisting of six to seven fire stations and a total of 50-65 uniformed personnel working 24 hour shifts.

Career Development Program. A structured program within the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department that defines specific educational requirements personnel must meet to be eligible to take a promotional exam. These requirements are in effect from the rank of technician through deputy chief.

Council of Governments. A regionalized organization of Washington area governments consisting of 17 local municipalities surrounding Washington D.C.

Deputy Chief. Senior management level position that supervises an entire division within the fire department administration or one of three shifts in Operations. There are seven deputy chief positions within the Department. These positions report to one of two assistant chiefs.

Incumbent. Those personnel already holding their rank.

Lieutenant. The first level of management within the Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department. These supervisors typically manage a functional unit (engine, truck, rescue, medic) within Operations.

Mutual Aide. Reciprocal assistance by emergency services under a prearranged plan.

Washington Metropolitan Area . The localities that surround the city of Washington D.C. and make up the suburbs of Washington. The area extends in all geographic directions and continues to expand as populations grow in the suburban areas. The most definitive borders are the city of Baltimore, MD to the North and the city of Richmond, VA to the South.

## RESULTS

The problem that resulted in the development of this research project was that the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department did not have an Officer Development Program for existing officers. The department is experiencing a high rate of retirements from personnel that have reached retirement age. Newly promoted officers have less experience and are facing increased challenges in public safety service delivery. Following detailed research and analysis, a draft proposal for the development of an officer development program was developed and is provided in Appendix A.

### **Research Question One – What Officer Development Programs are currently being offered in other Fire and Rescue Organizations?**

Fire departments across the nation have dealt with officer development programs in many ways. These programs range from a regional delivery format to those designed for a specific agency. Most follow a multi-tiered program offered at entry level officers and those with increased levels of responsibility.

The Chesterfield, VA and Los Angeles City, CA models defined a distinct multi-level system in place for officer development. The Alexandria Fire Department (VA) and the Montgomery County (MD) programs were not designed as progressive levels of curriculum based upon rank and responsibility. Instead they defined an all inclusive curriculum for officers and managers. In the Alexandria case, the program was designed for newly promoted officers and managers. During the initial start up period, existing senior officers were required to attend so that all managers had the training. In the Montgomery Fire and Rescue Service program, command officers at the rank of District Chief, Duty Chief, and EMS Duty Chief are required to attend the Command Officer Professional Development and Improvement Program.

Olympia, Washington departments have dealt with the issue on a regional basis. To reduce redundancy in course design and delivery several departments have come together to put a program in place that addresses their needs. Most other models dealt with personnel attending courses on their own time either at their own training facilities or local educational institutions.

A survey was conducted which involved six Washington Metropolitan fire and rescue departments and 28 other departments from across the country. Forty four percent of the departments responded to the survey. The following tables highlight information extracted from the survey responses.

**Table 4**  
**Presence of an Officer Development Program**

<b>Presence of Officer Program</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>P</b>
Currently have program in place	11	68.7
Do not have a formal program in place	5	31.3

NOTE: F=frequency; P = percent; n=16

Two of the departments that responded as not having programs stated that they had programs under development due for implementation this calendar year. Of the 11 departments that have programs in place, 80% indicated that course curriculum was based upon components of NFPA 1021 (1997).

**Table 5**  
**Incumbent Officer Development Program**

<b>Incumbent Officer Program</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>P</b>
Officer Development Program designed for incumbents	3	27.2
Program designed for new officers only	8	72.8

NOTE: F=frequency; P = percent; n=11

**Research Question Two – What Current Standards or Documents are in Place That Define Desired Knowledge and Skills for Fire Officers?**

Research indicated that there is only one “standard” that addresses officer development. NFPA 1500, *Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Programs* (1997) mandates that departments shall provide training to meet the needs and expectations of the duties one must

perform, it does not outline specific curriculum. It does reference NFPA 1021 (1997) and states “ All fire officers shall at least meet the requirements for Fire Officer I as specified in NFPA 1021, *Standards for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* (section 3-2.5).

NFPA 1021, *Standards for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* (1997) provides specific subject matter requirements for fire officers. Progressive levels of performance are required at four different levels within the standard. Knowledge and skills requirements are defined and must be mastered prior to moving on to the next level.

In an effort to address the higher educational requirements of the fire service, the National Fire Science Curriculum Committee was formed under the USFA. Core courses and some elective courses have been identified for a National Fire Science Curriculum model. Individual course curriculum development is under way. The intent of the National Fire Science Curriculum Committee is to define a nationally accepted model to allow for relatively problem free transfers between educational institutions.

Further research indicated that there are other regional models and sources for officer development programs. Regional response and mutual aide within the Washington Metropolitan Area is critical to the delivery of emergency services. MIFRI offers a four level officer development program modeled after NFPA 1021 (1997). The MIFRI program incorporates regional response issues into the upper level curriculum.

The majority of the officer development programs researched use NFPA Standard 1021 as their reference document. Exceptions to this would be programs that offer components of management and leadership training to public safety organizations. Roemmelt (2001) of “21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders” is a retired professional firefighter whose company provides officer development programs designed purely to meet the customer’s needs. His company focuses on

leadership and management issues and focuses on the four elements of Emotional Intelligence that create positive outcomes in leadership roles..

### **Question Three – What are the Limitations in the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue**

#### **Department to Putting an Incumbent Officer Development Program in Place?**

Information from departmental documentation and interviews conducted revealed that the limitations to placing an incumbent officer development program in place are fiscal concerns and logistical course development and access issues. Current budget constraints severely limit expanding personnel costs for the next two fiscal years (2004 & 2005). A program that would be developed must be one that is equally accessible to all employees and is flexible in its delivery mechanism. Additionally, there is the need for the department to evaluate course curriculum and information technology capabilities to see that it meet the needs of adult learning in content and delivery methodology.

### **DISCUSSION**

The skill sets required for today's fire service leaders are different from those of their predecessors. Chief Thomas Hawkins (2000) wrote in *Fire Chief Magazine* that many departments have put sophisticated promotional processes in place to fill leadership positions. Firefighters compete for these positions and are placed in charge of operational units or administrative sections of the department. In essence he states, "Each new officer is invested with the faith and trust of the fire chief, who decided which candidates to promote" (p. 68). This can be followed in some cases by poor performance of an officer even when a candidate has done well on a promotional process. Hawkins describes this situation as "Promotional remorse" (p.68).

The mission of the fire service has certainly changed in the past decade and professional development needs to change to meet those needs. McGary (1999) writes that post promotion officer development courses must contain fire service material as well as current material on leadership and management styles. “The standards of incident command and incident scene management are evident, but developers must ensure that content addresses the concept of transformation, as the fire service continues to move to more to disciplines other than firefighting. Future leaders must understand the role that they will play in accomplishing these new missions” (p.23).

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department has a sound career development program that has been in place since 1993. Results of the research indicate that many other departments have similar programs in place, but each of them demonstrates the pitfalls that Chiefs Hawkins and McGary reference above. There must be a continuing education component in every program. It is not good enough to finish the check sheet to take the exam and never participate in professional development again. Officer development or candidate schools need to be more than just a “gate keeping” mechanism for the promotional exam process.

Grant and Hoover (1994) discussed these needs almost a decade ago and the same holds true today. They discuss the changing roles of emergency medical service provision, to fire prevention, life safety, and planning issues. “Future leaders of the fire service must find innovative approaches to managing and these must be initiated in order to provide quality service in new and dynamic ways while simultaneously cutting the cost of these services” (p.6). Grant and Hoover (1994) state”...there has been little or no review of the different skills, training, expertise, scheduling and operating procedures that are most appropriate given new responsibilities of the service” (p.7).

The Montgomery County, MD Fire and Rescue Service has an officer development program in place that takes great strides towards meeting a continuing education model. The Command Officer Professional Development and Improvement Program replaces an existing program that has been in place since 1994 (Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service, 2002). Command level officers at the rank of District Chief/Deputy Chief and above are required to obtain 12 hours of professional development and improvement training annually to maintain certification within the department.

Fire service organizations need to realize the demand for competence as well as a certain level of measurable knowledge and abilities for leadership roles. This takes the shape of assessment centers in the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. There is a defined need to take the professional enhancement one step further and develop a continuing education program similar to that required in the paramedic field.

The research is very clear to the author that organizations are responsible for providing personnel with the needed education and professional knowledge for carrying out their respective jobs. NFPA 1500, *Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Programs* (1997), mandates in Chapter 3, Training and Education, Section 3-1.3 “The fire department shall provide training and education for all fire department members commensurate with the duties and functions that they are expected to perform. Members shall be provided with training and education appropriate for their duties and responsibilities before being permitted to engage in emergency operations.” Section 3-2.5 of the Standard states “All fire officers shall at least meet the requirements for Fire Officer I.”

Literature indicated that many departments are making every effort to be compliant with this component of NFPA 1500. Another NFPA document, *Standard for Fire Officer*

*Professional Qualifications* (NFPA 1021) is currently the only National standard that addresses the matter. The *Standard for Fire Officer Qualifications* (NFPA 1021, 1997) was designed to develop clear and concise job performance requirements that can be used to measure an individual to an adopted and measurable standard. NFPA 1021 states “.....these job performance requirements can be used in any fire department in any city, town, or private organization throughout North America” (1997, Origin and Development of NFPA 1021, para. 8).

NFPA 1021 can and should serve as the reference document for every officer development program in the country. Realizing that every jurisdiction has individual needs, NFPA 1021 would serve as a “straw man” for each program and provide guidance to be certain that the six categories of job performance requirements are met at all levels (Officer I, II, III, IV). Individual regional needs for professionals in their field should address curriculum development. Roemmelt (2001) of “21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders,” and others provide officer development programs that are purely customizable to meet the customer’s needs. Courses and programs are based upon organizational needs. This approach can fit well into any program and may address leadership styles, conflict management, ICS issues, mutual aid operations, and a host of other topics to meet ones needs.

The development of a model fire science curriculum by the National Fire Science Curriculum Committee is another encouraging move at the National level. Standardized titles, descriptions, and outcomes for each core course and its electives are being developed

(USFA, 2002). The establishment of a national curriculum of higher education for fire and emergency personnel will allow for relatively problem free transfers between academic institutions. This is a step beyond that of most officer development programs, but it serves as a

tool that can be used by senior level managers and may be a natural progression of a comprehensive program. As this program is developed by the National Fire Science Curriculum Committee it may be appropriate to include the model curriculum as a component of the NFPA 1021 document.

The limitations for the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department centered on fiscal and logistical issues such as course delivery formats and accessibility to students. Interviews conducted indicated that in fact a concentrated effort towards a continuing education officer development program has not been undertaken outside of in service training conducted on a regularly scheduled basis.

The implications of developing an officer development program for existing officers in the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department would be great. A draft proposal for putting a plan in place has been developed (appendix A). Strong support exists within the organization from the top down for a program of this type. The department has recently completed a strategic planning process and terms like “Professional Excellence, Shared Leadership, Innovation, and Effective Communications” are written throughout the plan (Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, 2002c). In order to achieve the core values of the plan, a well thought out program must be put in place with the emphasis on meeting the needs of the organization and referencing guidelines set forth at the national level.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As previously stated, the problem that prompted this research project was that the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department did not have an officer development program for incumbent officers. Based upon the findings of the research, the Department should begin the process of

designing an officer development program for incumbent officers as outlined in the attached proposal in appendix A.

Curriculum development should include the NFPA 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* as the core curriculum. Stakeholders within the organization should identify Regional, State, and Federal issues that need to be addressed at various levels.

Educational needs and delivery methodology should be explored to meet the identified goals of the organization. This would include addressing alternative methods of course delivery to adult students as well as determining the most effective means to make program available to the largest number of potential students.

Finally, fiscal and logistical impacts must be explored. Implementation guidelines must be developed and marketed to ensure a true “buy in” from the members of the department. Once completed, the program should become a permanent piece of the Department’s Career Development Program.

To be successful, an officer development program must absolutely meet the needs of the organization. There are components of successful models currently in use. As the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department moves to a more regional model of operation, it is important for managers to be proficient in core issues that are outlined within the current NFPA 1021 Standard. An officer development program should be designed to develop the skills and competencies of managers at every level within the department.

## REFERENCES

- Chesterfield Fire and EMS. (2002). *Chesterfield Fire and EMS Officer Development Program*. Chesterfield, VA: Chesterfield Fire and EMS.
- Coleman, R. J. (2000, August). Officer Development: The Winner's Circle. *FIRE CHIEF*, Vol .44, number 8, 115-119.
- Dale, P. (2001, June). Upwardly Mobile: Officer Development Hands on Style. *Health and Safety*, 1-13.
- Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. (1995). *Career Development Manual*. Fairfax, VA: Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department.
- Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. (2002a). [Personnel seniority listing by rank]. Unpublished raw data.
- Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. (2002b). [Estimated personnel costs for Officer Development Program]. Unpublished raw data.
- Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. (2002c). *Strategic Plan* [Brochure]. Fairfax County, VA: Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department.
- Fairfax County Uniformed Retirement System. (2002). *Retirement Benefits* [Brochure]. Fairfax County, VA: Fairfax County Uniformed Retirement System.
- Grant, Dr. Nancy, & Hoover, Dr. David (1994). *Fire Service Administration*. Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association.
- Hawkins, T.M. (2000, May). Officer Development: Back To School. *FIRE CHIEF*, Vol. 44, number 5, 68-71.
- Los Angeles Fire Department Fire Officer Program. (n.d). Retrieved August 24, 2002, from <http://www.lafd.org/foprogram.htm>.

Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute. (2002). *Safety and Emergency Response Program* [Brochure]. College Park, MD: Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute.

McGary, R.A. (1999). *Determining the Criteria for Post Promotional Leadership Training*. Emmittsburg, MD: National Fire Academy, Executive Fire Officer Program.

Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service. (2002). *Command Officer Professional Development and Improvement Program* (Procedure No. 23-05AM). Rockville, MD: Aoyagi, G.A.

National Fire Protection Association. (1997). NFPA 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* (1997 edition). Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association.

National Fire Protection Association. (1997). NFPA 1500, *Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Programs* (1997 edition). Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association.

Phoenix Fire Department. (2001). *Phoenix Fire Department Management Development Program* [Brochure]. Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Fire Department.

Roemmelt, B. (2002a) 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders, Retrieved August 15, 2002, <http://www.21stcenturyleaders.com/products.htm>.

Roemmelt, B. (2002b) Emotional Intelligence. *Fire Times*, Retrieved September 1, 2002, <http://www.firetimes.com/subcontent.asp?FragID=1848>.

Talcott, T.C. (1999). *Designing An Officer Development Program*. Emmittsburg, MD: National Fire Academy, Executive Fire Officer Program.

United States Fire Administration. Higher Education: Fire Science Curriculum. Retrieved September 26, 2002, from <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/dhtml/fire-service/nfa-high5.cfm>.

**APPENDIX A****Draft Proposal****FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA****MEMORANDUM****September 24, 2002**

**TO:** Chief Mark A. Smith  
Administration

**FROM:** Deputy Chief David L. Rohr  
Training Division

**SUBJECT:** Incumbent Officer Development Program Proposal

I would like to submit the following proposal for the development of an Incumbent Officer Development Program:

**Program Purpose:** To provide ongoing training at all managerial levels within the department. Training will strengthen and assist existing officers in the job performance and in their professional development. **This program will be exclusive of any current Career Development Program Requirements.**

**Objective:** To provide current course curriculum on leadership and management issues; incident command practices; local and regional government issues; professional standards, change management; regional response issues; and information as determined by curriculum development group.

The framework of the program will be centered on a program in which supervisory personnel will be required to attend 48 hours of training bi-annually. Curriculum will be developed by a curriculum development committee made up of representatives from all employee labor groups, and a member of each rank from lieutenant through deputy chief.

**Curriculum**

Course development will be based upon several factors as determined by the group. The core curriculum will be based upon NFPA 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications*. The job performance requirements for each level within the Standard are human

resource management, community and government relations, administration, inspection and investigation, emergency service delivery and safety. The complexity of each category should increase at each higher level. This format for the core classes will provide a template at each level. Additional course subject matter will be selected based upon current department needs, regional response issues, technology and information, significant event case studies and position descriptions. The curriculum group may consider the use of a survey instrument to identify priority issues to address. The curriculum for the first level supervisors shall be developed first due to the large number of personnel that are impacted and must be started in the program.

The training will target three different supervisory groups:

<b>RANK</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
Lieutenant	First level manager at the supervisory level
Captain I and Captain II	Middle level managers at the supervisory/managerial level
Battalion Chief and Deputy Chief	Senior level managers at the managerial/administrative level

### **Course Delivery**

The training will be presented in a modular format and provide students with the maximum amount of flexibility as possible to obtain the defined training. Delivery methods will include components of distance learning and self-study. Course substitutions will be identified within the curriculum so that personnel are aware up front of other classes that may be used to supplant the designated curriculum at each level. Examples of this are National Fire Academy courses, Virginia Department of Fire Programs courses, college courses, and courses provided by Fairfax County Government Human Resources. As logistical and delivery issues are identified, they must be agreed upon by representatives from the stakeholder groups.

### **Compensation**

Because the training will be required by the Department, personnel will be compensated for their time. Personnel should be expected to attend during their off hours. Cost estimates for course delivery and development must be completed by Payroll and be included in the overall package presentation.

### **Implementation Schedule**

<b>RANK</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
Lieutenant	September 1, 2003
Captain I and Captain II	March 1, 2004
Battalion Chief and Deputy Chief	July 1, 2004

Once curriculum development, course delivery, and compensation decisions are made, a presentation will be given to Senior Staff members. Department focus groups will be conducted and the program shall be marketed to the members of the Department prior to implementation. This proposal shall only serve as a starting point for a much more comprehensive program. This document should serve as a springboard for a much more comprehensive program that must be embraced by all personnel to be successful and to meet the goals of the Department's Strategic Plan.

**APPENDIX B**

March 9, 2002

Dear Fire Service Professional,

I am currently a student at the National Fire Academy enrolled in the Executive Fire Officer Program. As a part of my course work, I am completing an applied research project. The fire service exploded in growth during the mid 1970's in many metropolitan areas. Consequently, we find ourselves 20-30 years later with our experience and knowledge base ready to retire from many departments throughout the country.

I have developed a short survey instrument to capture information regarding any type of Officer Development or Officer Candidate school your department may have in place. I am asking that you please fill out the survey instrument or forward it to someone within your organization that may be able to assist me.

I will provide survey results upon request. Replies should be sent via email attachment to [david.rohr@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:david.rohr@fairfaxcounty.gov), faxed to 703-378-XXXX, or mailed to:

**Deputy Chief David Rohr**  
**4600 West Ox Road**  
**Fairfax, VA, 22030.**

I can be reached with questions at 703-803-3870 or [david.rohr@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:david.rohr@fairfaxcounty.gov) .

## APPENDIX C

## OFFICER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM SURVEY

Department name \_\_\_\_\_

Career

Volunteer

Combination

1. Number of uniformed department members \_\_\_\_\_
2. Population served by department \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you currently have an officer candidate or development school?  
Yes                      No
4. *If the answer is "No" please return survey.*
5. If you do have a program in place, is it designed for the first level supervisor only or new officers at all levels within the organization?
6. How often is the program offered?
7. What is the length of the program in hours?
8. How are students selected to attend the class?

9. Is there a formal curriculum in place?
  
10. What are the topics of instruction for the course? (Please list them or if appropriate email or mail the curriculum)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. Who instructs the course?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Please provide any additional information you believe would be pertinent to officer development programs you have in place.

Please return information to :

Email        [david.rohr@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:david.rohr@fairfaxcounty.gov)

FAX            703-XXX-XXXX Attention Deputy Chief Rohr

Mail            Deputy Chief David Rohr  
                  4600 West Ox Road  
                  Fairfax, VA 22030