

Closest Station Response?

08/09/06 145 W - + 19 - 10

Exactly what are the issues with enabling closet station response in both Raleigh and Wake County. It appears that CAD can dispatch the closest units with no problem. And Joe/Jane Taxpayer certainly doesn't care whose name is on the unit that arrives the fastest when they call 911. So there must be political, operational, and/or jurisdictional considerations. For starters, are there liability issues? If, say, a county unit is the only-arriving unit at a municipal incident, is the town or city more liable to legal actions from dissatisfied residents or taxpayers? On the reverse side, repeat runs of municipal units outside of their town or city is probably very prickly to some. Especially if the city or town is large, with many different municipal units potentially affected. For county units staying within the county, but between districts, are there ISO issues?

The city is already running in to areas of the county where they are closer. Why the county units are not running into the city I don't know. What legal implications will there be if Joe Taxpayer has a heart attack near a county Fire Station but the unit being dispatched is a city unit 3 miles away?

Rauer ([Email](#)) - 08/09/06 - 07:38

Closest station response is a great idea. Too many chiefs in the county are worried about "their" district or whatever ISO has to do with it.

The city is already running in the county, supplying 3-4 man (trained) companies. If the city received a closer engine from the county station with a 2 man company (trained or maybe not trained) would the citizens of the city be receiving the same quality service?

The city doesn't know what they are getting when receiving aid from the county.

If the county departments would staff their companies with at least 3-4 men, 24/7, and set some minimum standards to ride these companies, there would not be a decrease in service. Until the county departments starts staffing and setting minimum standards to meet NFPA, they won't go into the city.

Makes sense to me.

E Mohn ([Email](#)) - 08/09/06 - 10:49

I agree with Erick, but would like to add a few thoughts on the subject. A real lack of standardization throughout the county (staffing, equipment, training) EGOS, and a lack of a countywide or regional operational plan are the biggest barriers facing this county and its municipalities today. Right now everyone has their own set of rules and methods for handling emergencies. Having come from an area where SIX DIFFERENT jurisdictions all followed one operational plan, I can assure you that it can work. It just takes those in power to remember what we are here for: Protect life and property. John Q. Taxpayer does not care what name is on the side of the fire truck, as long as one showed up when he needed it (remember EVERYONE pays county taxes).

Wayne - 08/09/06 - 11:37

Closest unit dispatch will work. The barriers here in Wake are, as I see it-

1. Too many dispatch points that cannot (or will not) talk to one another. That is why RFD is not dispatched to a call less than a mile away from one of their stations, rather the CFD unit 8 miles away is dispatched.
2. We cannot standardize our radios. What Cary has is not really compatible with the rest of the county. And if you think about it, there are times when out of county units are closer than in county units (the area near Angier comes to mind). But how is that going to work when Harnett and Johnston County's radios are not compatible, except on some obscure 'patch channel'?
3. We cannot standardize staffing levels, either on the fire side or the EMS side.
4. We cannot standardize our radio identifiers. Is it a RESCUE, SQUAD, or a TRUCK? Or is it a LADDER, a TOWER, or a TRUCK? Is it an EMS or

a MEDIC? And then the first responder units are CAR or SQUAD...

5. We have a few fire departments in the county that adopted a station numbering system, still others remained with the old way. We have EMS stations that adopted (or stayed with) the old station ID numbers, but then Cary and Eastern Wake went of with MEDIC such and such.

Someone at the top has to take a stand. Maybe the county commissioners need to step in and say 'get it together, people'.

JD - 08/09/06 - 17:37

Well i agree that the closest rig should be dispatched to the call, and yes some county (non-municipality) departments don't run 3-4 man crews 24/7 that are trained the same as city firefighters but there are some that do, so why cant the county/city have those departments that are "qualified" run as the closest rig?

if a county rig is closest to a city call send the county rig first due but also send the next closest city rig.

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Guest - 08/09/06 - 18:22

I'll address some of JD's points and then add some of my own thoughts.

1: The dispatch centers are a problem, but somehow day in and day out they talk to each other on Tri-Comm. I listen to it all day and it's a very, very busy channel, typically based on getting EMS coverage. The real problem isn't having too many centers but rather too many CAD systems. Municipal boundaries are a whole other topic. It is my understanding that once an area falls within the city limits, then that city is responsible for providing fire protection (and police, public works, etc). Now that's not to say that both cannot be dispatched (Morrisville comes into Cary auto-aid already for certain call types). But I think that a multi-agency response would be appropriate to automatic alarms, and other structural related calls especially in areas like Globe Road, Nelson Road, etc. It's a haul for CFD to get out there as a first due truck, let alone the 2nd due truck (though it will get a little better with CFD #7 opening up, but they'll still have to pass 2 Morrisville stations and RFD is closer). The same goes for other areas that Raleigh and Cary border. It would be great to have a multi-agency dispatch to areas along the I-40 corridor that would provide for more manpower on the scene quicker than a single agency response.

2. The radios in this county are as standard as they are going to get. Every radio in the county can talk DIRECTLY to any other radio in the county— it's Bank 5 in the county fire radios, with 15 talkgroups that you can use, Mutual Aid 1-15, and this includes all of the radios in Durham County. This deal with the patches is bull and the reasons for not using it far outweigh the reasons for using it. The reasons I've heard for using it are that the status heads mounted in the trucks won't work. Okay, leave them on dispatch, and switch the handhelds to the M/A channel. Another reason I've heard is that you cannot communicate across dispatch centers. Really? I know that Cary Communications has M/A 1-15 in their consoles, so shouldn't Raleigh/Wake and Durham? The other reason I've heard is the emergency button won't work when you cross systems. Okay, I'll give you that one, but there has to be a way to make it work. The techies can figure it out. The voice quality and the delay when a patch is active is far more dangerous than any of those three put together. As for the other counties, yes, there is more of a communication problem, but we have State Fire on the 800 radios and they should have a similar setup. There are also the NPS channels that all 800 radios are required to have. There are ways, albeit not popular.

3. AMEN

4. AMEN

5. AMEN

I'll give some more items that are food for thought.

6. Protocols. We have them on the EMS side. No matter what kind of unit you are riding, you operate under Dr. Myers' rules. Why in the heck can't we have this on the fire side? Every department has their own way (right or wrong) of doing stuff, and that's the biggest issue in my mind for closest station dispatch. One step in the right direction is that CFD has gone out to the agencies that run AUTOMATIC aid on structure fires (Morrisville, Apex, Western Wake, Swift Creek, Fairview) and has trained them on what their operational plan is for structure fires. This lets these agencies know what is expected of them when they come to a fire in Cary. Then other problems come out, different hose lays, different assignments for different trucks, etc. A standard operating procedure for the whole county would be a giant step in the right direction. Lord

only knows how long that would take to develop and get enough backing behind it.

7. Different responses to different calls. Each department in the county responds differently to calls in their area. Some send only a single engine to vehicle accidents, some send an engine and a rescue, and some send an aerial on limited access roads. Whose protocol would you go by, and what would distinguish that? There would need to be a county-wide response plan to each type of call, and with some qualifiers in there such as rural vs. municipal or limited access vs. residential or commercial streets. Wouldn't it be nice if RFD had a vehicle accident with entrapment at I-40 and Cary Towne and you got Cary Rescue 2 automatically on dispatch? Or any other area where there are closer units of a needed type nearby?

8. As Wayne and Erick have said, having all firefighters in the county have to meet a minimum accepted standard would go a long way to this as well. I understand and agree with the reasons they have given. The same is to be said for staffing standards, there should be a minimum.

9. It boils down to egos, and not of the firefighters and the guys that ride the trucks, but the guys that sit in the offices and ride the cars. Volunteer, county, paid, municipal, it doesn't matter they all for the most part. They have the idea that their way is the right way, and that is because they know 100% what they're getting when the call is dispatched and that all of their guys should be on the same page. We've started going the right way within the county departments, but there is still a long way to go. Chiefs cannot get past not sending their rescue on a vehicle accident when the closer rescue is already in route. And you still have the chiefs caught up on the ISO districts, so get over it. As for municipal getting city or inter-municipal, it really gets into some legalities that I'm sure people way smarter than me have to work out. But I think, rather I know it can be and definitely should be done.

I would challenge the county commissioners, and town/city councils and managers to meet along with the fire chiefs and create a work team to at least look into the viability of going to a true county-wide system for dispatching, numbering, responding, and assigning fire and EMS units. And don't stop with only looking within the county but— as has been said before— at bringing in outside agencies when they're closer, such as RFD has done with Bethesda coming into the Brier Creek area.

Bottom line: the citizens do not care who shows up as long as the job is done professionally. I have seen multiple departments operate on scenes and it's a wonderful sight, although it isn't seen enough. We're all here to do the same job and I'm sure that 99% of folks that ride the trucks would love to see some of this take place.

I look forward to the responses in this thread and welcome comments on my ideas and thoughts as I enjoy talking about these kind of things with other responders. Maybe if we talk loud enough and educated enough, somebody who makes decisions might step up and take notice.

CFP 7021 - 08/09/06 - 18:25

Once again, agreeing with Rauer, Mohn, and Wayne, the citizens do not care about our stupid turf wars and politics. They don't care what the name is on the truck, as long as it's a fire truck. It is time the City and County go closest unit on all fronts. It is time to put aside political ideals and do what is in the best interest of the community; I mean, wow! what a concept, that's what Emergency Services are here for.

Graney - 08/09/06 - 20:47

This is really a good topic to discuss. I believe this topic has been long overdue. Everyone has had good comments. I am glad to see other departments feeling the same way that I have felt for awhile. The basics of firefighting are:

1. Life Safety
2. Incident Stabilization
3. Property Conservation

Does it really matter who comes to the call, as long as they are trained? Is this not why we do Multi-Company Training? I do not see this problem coming to an end anytime soon, unfortunately.

Boggs W. ([Email](#)) - 08/09/06 - 21:41

BTW, Cary EMS will be switching over to Wake Rescom for dispatching in the near future, something about AVL stuff that Cary communications will not purchase to be used with the new CAD system/radio upgrade in the next budget year. Since they're not getting it, Cary EMS will have to switch to Wake Rescom for dispatching! Just curious, are the county squads and the county "city" EMS units dispatched on the same alert channel now? I always found it funny that we even had 2 separate dispatch channels for EMS units coming out of the same center!

CFP 7021 - 08/09/06 - 21:57

Closest unit dispatch, man what a topic. Where do I start? The concept is an excellent one, if it's set up the right way. However, from a city

firefighters perspective, we still have areas on the south side of the city that aren't getting the proper unit(s) dispatched. For example; E-2 is still dispatched as first in to Lake Wheeler Park versus E-20. There are still flaws in the system and they need to be fixed. "Adding yourself to the call" DOES NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM. It's a temporary fix. And, it seems most don't care to send an e-mail up the chain to do something about it.

I completely agree with what Wayne and Erick said. They hit the nail on the head with staffing levels, county I.D.'s, and county unit descriptions (squad, rescue, tower, ladder). When everyone has a chance, listen to Prince George's County Fire live dispatch. Everyone has their issues, but, they have a standard system in place, and it works.

By the way, Wayne, I hear you make some mean blueberry pancakes. Can you get me the recipe, or are they just for Mohn?

Silver - 08/09/06 - 22:36

I am not a firefighter but I am a citizen of the City of Raleigh. I guess I am sort of a buff but could not see myself doing the job of a firefighter but I do like to see what's going on. Anyway, I would be furious if my house caught fire and I needed the professional services of the city, which I pay for, and some 18 year old punk who I just got done yelling at for speeding down my road in his obnoxiously loud jacked-up pickup truck showed up to my house to attempt to put out the fire while most of the time causing more damage to my house. That is my take on volunteer departments versus career departments. I have watched too many fires on the news where volunteer firefighters made a laughing stock out of themselves. Professional Public Service is one of the main reasons why I choose to live within the city limits of Raleigh and I feel like I deserve to receive the services that I pay for 100% of the time I need them. I honestly feel like I would stand a better chance of less damage being done if the City of Raleigh arrived even 5 minutes after a volunteer company could be there whether it's a fire or medical call.

citizen of Raleigh - 08/09/06 - 22:42

Dear citizen, I don't think you have ever heard of the term "mirage fire house", have you? I am a city firefighter, and proud of it. However, your city fire department is operating at minimum staffing 75% of the time. I suggest you research NFPA 1710. Then, contact your city council and find out why we are not meeting the standard for 1710. It recommends staffing levels, among other things, and Raleigh meets it by "fancy paperwork". Having 3 members assigned to a crew is understaffed, I don't care what you say. Stop by your local firehouse and see how many members are on duty. Ask questions, then with your help, maybe we can get our staffing levels up. That is what we need to provide a better level of care, not spend millions on a fountain to line Fayetteville Street Mall or beautify and landscape areas around a homeless shelter. Until the citizens realize that the fire department(s) is understaffed, just like the police department, and contact the city government, nothing will change because the "job is gettin' done".

City Fireman - 08/09/06 - 23:36

Closest unit is a great concept, but in Wake County it will only be a concept as long as there are multiple dispatch centers. The primary problem with the "concept" is that quite often the right hand doesn't know where the left hand is or what it is doing. There have been many times that a Cary unit is dispatched to a call in Cary only to arrive and find County units on the scene or vice versus. The Cary Comm center had no idea that RWCC had the call and RWCC had no idea that Cary had the call. Now is that really a good use of resources, especially if it's a BS call and someone else really needed one of those units?

Second problem is that there are no matching response areas in each Comm's CAD system. What Cary's CAD may show in the city, might still show in the County at RWCC and depending on which center the phone call goes to would determine who is dispatched.

Third and biggest problem is transferring calls between comm centers. Can we really benefit from closest unit response if we have to wait on a call to be taken and dispatched to the primary unit and then transferred to the next jurisdiction for mutual aid call processing, unit selection and dispatching? The answer is no. Quite often Cary fire units are dispatched to the city limits out by the Airport or way south at West Lake. But even with closest unit response, the Mutual Aid unit still arrives after Cary fire units because of the call processing and dispatching delay. The only time it really works is when the MA companies listen out for the call and "jump" it. This in when you see the difference in times and making a difference, but why should a system rely on the human element to be smarter than the process? The fix, which will never happen, is: One number, one comm. system, one map, one plan!

fireone - 08/10/06 - 08:35

Dear Mr. Citizen,

I feel that you have an incorrect outlook on Volunteer Fire Departments versus paid Departments. I understand that you pay for City services and expect City services. However, look at it this way; The recent apartment fire in Bedford in North Raleigh was 1.88 miles from a Volunteer County Station, while 3.22 miles away was the primary (First Due) City Engine, with the second due Engine 5.2 miles away. The Volunteer

Station, which is staffed with Paid staff during the day, and Volunteer crews at night (yes, they are in uniform and stay at the station like paid) did not get dispatched. You would think as a homeowner you would want what is best for your family and property, thus being prompt service. Just because a Department is Volunteer does not make them incompetent. They have the same certifications and training requirements both medically and fire related as paid departments such as the city. You also refer to seeing volunteer Departments on the news making fools of themselves. What you see is only what the media shows you. You have no idea the facts surrounding the scenes or what had ACTUALLY happened. I also want to touch on one other comment made, "18 year old punks." While you might see them in that aspect, they have joined the Fire Department to serve the community. Just because they are driving quickly and they drive a "jacked up" truck, does not make them incompetent. I sir am 19 years old, I am a paid full time fireman and a PROUD Volunteer Fire Captain. As I understand it sir, you have no experience in this field of work, and until you do a bit of research, you maybe should look at opening your eyes to the realities of Wake County. The city is understaffed, thus in places needing support from County Departments.

Graney - 08/10/06 - 10:14

I agree with Graney. My father was a volunteer for 20 years, and the majority of firefighters in his department were also city firefighters. In a lot of cases the volunteer departments drive newer trucks, have more equipment, and do even more hours of monthly training than city departments. True you might get the occasional hot shot who is in it to drive fast with a red light on his car, but I think that most volunteer firefighters are just as professional as city departments.

Native Charlottean - 08/10/06 - 10:26

Dear Mr. Citizen,

I started out 40 yrs. ago as a 18 yr. old Punk, in my hometown volunteer department. I served 11 yrs. as a volunteer, and 1 1/2yrs. as a paid professional until I was injured off the job. You may not have the knowledge of the Fire Service but what you see on TV, do some research. Today's volunteer departments go through accredited training, the same as their brother career firefighters do. Split departments paid/volunteer train together. My hat is off to any man whatever the age, to get up at 2 a.m. in 5 degree weather to answer the call from a neighbor. You can't stay within the city limits 24/7, at sometime you may need assistance for you or your family and it could come in the form of an 18 yr old trained volunteer. In closing may I say, my father was a proud 38 yr. member of our hometown department and no less the professional.

Former FF (Email) - 08/10/06 - 15:43

Half time report and other comments:

Are all taxpayers created equal? Do Raleigh / Cary / Apex / etc. taxpayers pay any additional taxes above those paid by residents living in unincorporated areas of Wake County? And do those additional taxes result in higher levels (or the expectation of higher levels) of service with regard to fire protection? If tax rates for fire protection are flat across the entire county, there must be other things in the mix. Do municipalities receive government subsidies for their FDs? Are they penalized or assume greater risk if they don't spend more on fire protection than is spent to protect unincorporated areas? Do they get more money simply by virtue of population density and greater numbers of taxable residents and businesses? And, if all or part of the above is ultimately true, does that entitle municipal residents to any greater level of service than non-municipal?

Raleigh is already automatically dispatched as closest unit into the county, however the reverse is not true. The latter is (or might be) because auto dispatch of county units into the city does not necessarily result in units with the same staffing levels. County units are automatically dispatched into Cary, and the Cary FD also trains with each of their auto-aid departments so everyone is playing from a level field.

Barriers to closest unit dispatch include multiple communications centers, multiple CAD systems, patches versus mutual aid channels, non-standard staff levels, non-standard unit identifiers, and non-standard operating procedures across the entire county,

Staffing issues existing in Raleigh (and in other local municipal departments?). Three-person companies are sometimes (often?) the rule instead of the exception. (How do other big departments manage the three-person problem? Five- or six-person companies? Lots of OT or call back duty?)

Some citizens perceive different and even grossly different service levels between municipal and non-municipal (volunteer) fire departments. Members of the latter are expectedly quick to both defend themselves and help educate citizens on the training and professionalism that exists within non-municipal (volunteer) departments.

Young punks can still be good firefighters.

Legeros - 08/10/06 - 16:48

So just wondering what is the standard staffing for RFD fire companies?

guest - 08/10/06 - 18:04

Regarding RFD staffing, this year's budget lists 505 positions in Fire Operations. Fifteen of those are for Station 28, so that leaves 490 to account for.

Engines – 27 companies x 4 people x 3 shifts = 324

Trucks – 7 x 4 x 3 = 84

Rescues – 3 x 2 x 3 = 18

Air Truck – 1 x 1 x 1 = 1

Bat Chiefs – 4 x 1 x 3 = 12

Division Chiefs – 1 x 1 x 3 = 3

Operations Chief – 1 x 1 x 1 = 1

Total = 445

490 minus 445 = 45 additional positions that go somewhere

45 divided by three shifts = 15 positions per shift that go somewhere

Perhaps five-person companies on 15 engines? Or some five-person truck companies as well?

Legeros - 08/10/06 - 18:48

I believe Chief McGrath likes the "5-man truck" concept. It was rumored that when he first arrived he wondered why "we did things backwards." He was referring to staffing engines with 5 (at least on paper) and ladders with 4, versus 5 man ladders and 4 man engines, like most departments do. It would be great if it happens, but it just remains to be seen I guess.

To speak on the solution for short staffing, I'll use the 2 other departments in this state that we compare ourselves to (Greensboro and Charlotte). Both departments have an overtime program that allows for existing firefighters to work on other shifts to supplement short-staffed companies. This would be welcomed with open arms in Raleigh. Many guys and girls would be able to quit their part-time gigs at volunteer departments and elsewhere and pull a little overtime here and there, making decent money.

Charlotte is 4 on engines and ladders, and 5 on the rescues. Greensboro, I'm not too sure, maybe 4 on everything?

Silver - 08/10/06 - 21:04

My guess is that with an ISO rating of 1, Greensboro must have at least 4 firefighters on each rig.

Although Charlotte runs with 4 on most all Engines and Ladders (except E9 and the Rescues w/ 5 FFs), "on paper" you would see that most all Engines and Ladders are actually assigned 5 Firefighters each. This allows for 1 guy to be sent to a different station (as needed), take time off, etc. and have no effect on the minimum of 4 per truck. The Rescues and Engine 9 are the exception; they all have at least 5.

As for the paid vs. volley debate, since most departments in Wake Co are Combination Departments and are at least staffed by Part-timers (many of which are Full-timers at a "City" department), I don't really understand the logic behind the comment about Volunteers not being "up to par" with training compared to paid firefighters. I'd bet that there are several "Volunteer" stations in the County that run more calls and see more fire than some Raleigh FD stations. Just because you belong to a county department and not a city department doesn't mean that you are any "less" of a firefighter. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, most Wake Co Fire Departments are actually staffing their stations 24 hours with paid staff or volunteers. So if a county department comes to your house, more than likely there will be at least 1 volunteer in the mix and you probably wouldn't even know it.

Prince George's County FD was brought up earlier; take a look at some of their departments. Many of them are staffed with volunteers and paid staff. Also, many other departments in No. VA and MD (Montgomery County, Ann Arundel, etc.) are staffed with volunteers, that does not make them any "less professional" or "less competent" than local full-time paid departments.

Here's a link: <http://www.horrycountyrescuesquad.com/in..> . Rescue 2 is 100% volunteer and they catch a ton of working fires and pin jobs. If I had an emergency in Horry County, I'd be more than happy to see the crew of R2 arrive to assist.

guest - 08/10/06 - 23:09

To all who took offense to my comments, I never said that volunteer departments were less trained than a career department. I have developed my opinion of volunteer departments based on my received perception. I understand that volunteers must receive a certain level of training. But how is a citizen not to think differently of a volunteer department when it is used mostly as a hangout spot for young kids. Then you have these same young kids who have been driving a vehicle legally for about 2 years and now they have a red light on the dash. From my perception, it always seems like they feel as if they are unstoppable when driving behind this red light. Yes, I have had several bad experiences from volunteers almost running me off the road. These are not the type of people I would want responding to my emergency regardless of their training level. Again, my negative views on volunteer departments are all based on what I have seen and encountered. The volunteers have given themselves a bad name in my eyes as a citizen of Raleigh.

citizen of Raleigh - 08/11/06 - 10:31

I agree with you that Volunteers should not run people off the road when responding to an emergency. We have State laws that protect the citizen against this reckless driving. However, if you got ran off the road, did you make a formal complaint? Did you contact the Police Department? If the ordinary citizen does not make a complaint, most of the time it will go unnoticed. Yes, there are good and bad drivers in the Fire, EMS, and Police Service. I can promise you that if you tell someone about this reckless driving it will well taken care of. As an Officer, I can't be in 2 places at the same time, a little help monitoring this problem from the public will help greatly!

Boggs W. ([Email](#)) - 08/11/06 - 12:44

I understand your feelings and perceptions of the volunteer fire service, but as you have said they are based on what you have experienced. What I would ask is that you educated yourself to what these departments do and who they have as members. For example, did you call the chief of the respective department to report this member? Yes you are correct in that a lot of younger, newer firefighters are a few years into driving let alone driving "emergency traffic" in their personal vehicles. What it sounds like is they need a refresher class on what rights and privileges are granted to them when they are responding in their own vehicles, which is essentially none.

As for you saying that you do not want them coming to your home, is this regardless of their training? Are you saying that if a city engine "ran you off the road" that you wouldn't want them coming to your home? How about the 19 year old that ran you off the road on Friday as a volunteer but is called to your home on Saturday as a city firefighter? Would you want them coming to your home? I hope you would answer yes, just based on the principle that these people, regardless of age, experience or whatever are coming there to help YOU, and in the case of a volunteer they are doing it essentially for free!

As for your comment: "But how is a citizen not to think differently of a volunteer department when it is used mostly as a hangout spot for young kids." Volunteer stations may be used to "hang out" among all of their members; it is part of the recruitment and retention program, to give them a place to feel included and where they belong. Then when the pager goes off they jump on the truck and go to the call, no delay, no driving down the road in their personal vehicles, thus reducing liability. Then again I guess the world would be a better place if these "young kids" hung out at other places.

I think all that the I and others are asking is that you educate yourself about the volunteer fire service in Wake County, look at the level of training that these firefighters get, the dedication that they give, the parts of their lives that they give up. Also remember that a large percentage of these "kids" are the same ones that are applying and being hired by the "city" departments in this area, and are thus the ones that have a legal obligation to respond to your home if called. Are you going to turn away a 19 or 20 or 21 year old "kid" at your front door when they show up in a "city" fire truck, or just if that exact same individual shows up in a "volunteer" fire truck, because it just may be the same person wearing different gear in a different truck from one day to another. Also think about the fact that almost 100%, I would dare say about 98% of the part-time firefighters that staff the "volunteer" stations during the daytime are career "city" firefighters, have your views changed any?

I would not let the few negative experiences that you have had forge your permanent opinion of "volunteer" stations, take a couple minutes to open up your mind and think about the larger picture, or take what you have read and use that as basis for reconsidering your view of the "volunteers" because there are good ones out there, just don't let a few sour apples ruin the orchard!

Thanks for your comments and thoughts though, as it could help to make those of us associated with "volunteer" departments try to help out our image!

CFP 7021 - 08/11/06 - 13:00

Citizen of Raleigh, the perception that you have shows the ignorance that you truly have. Most of the "19 year old punks" that I know, that are volunteer firemen, have gone on to become paid firefighters. I have been doing this 18 years, and its the people like you that will drive slowly in front of the fire truck, and then complain how long it took for them to get to your house. This nation was built on volunteer fire companies. The majority of fireman in the US are volunteer. You talk about a trained/untrained person coming to your house. The volunteer companies have standards they have to follow. It is the same standards that a "Paid" department has. The training is the same. The instructors are the same. Maybe you would like for that "19 year old punk" to hang out on the street corner, or at a club where he could get in trouble. Let's not give him an chance to hang out at a safe place, doing a job that you must know nothing about, and do it for no pay. I would hope that one day you don't drive through a "volunteer" district and have a heart attack. You are saying that you don't want treatment from a trained "PUNK". That shows nothing but pure stupid thinking. As for the issue about county units responding into the city— every county department in Wake County has paid staff covering the daytime. Most of the paid staff are career firefighters working a second job. If you are saying that you don't want a county unit responding into the city, then for the most part you are saying you don't want paid, career firemen coming to help you. As for night time, yes there are 2 or 3 departments that do not have 24 hr coverage. In this case, the departments that I know don't have 24 hr staff, I would put the firefighters up against any crew from any paid department. You might want to think about what you are saying. By the way, yes I am a volunteer fireman, I am also a career fireman. What's the difference? The MONEY.

kp209a ([Email](#)) - 08/11/06 - 17:59

After some further thought, I would like share some further thoughts on this topic:

Citizen of Raleigh- I understand why you have a negative view of the volunteer fire service, but I ask you this: Do you remember when you were 18 or 19, did you always conduct yourself in the best possible way or did you make a few mistakes then? You're absolutely right these 18 year olds have only been driving for a couple of years, that is why MOST fire department (Volunteer or Paid) require that anyone wishing to drive an EMERGENCY VEHICLE be at least 21, that way they will have a few more years of driving behind them and HOPEFULLY they are more mature by then. That "Jacked up pick up" is his personal vehicle and chances are he drives like a maniac all of the time, not just to the fire station. Now to what you might NOT see in this 18 year old "punk": He puts his life on the line EVERY DAY to possibly save another life. He is not just "hanging out" at the fire station, he is learning the tools of his trade, while gaining a second family (I'd rather have him do that then take/deal drugs drink alcohol and things of that sort). He is the future of the fire service, he just needs to be molded by the older generation. I was a volunteer firefighter for 14 years, during that time I received as much and more training (including a college degree in Fire Science) than some "City" firemen around here. (I am knocking those guys, they are all a great bunch of guys, but these are the facts) so to say that a volunteer is less capable than a paid firefighter is truly an uneducated statement.

To everyone else- There is good discussion going on here about this topic and I feel that we should try to get back on that topic. I understand that some are upset about a few of the comments made about volunteers and volunteer departments, however the facts are there. SOME fire departments in this county do not provide the best possible service to the citizens, what I mean (before I get all of the "hate mail") is that responding with only 2 people on an engine company period, or if 1 of them is a probationary member and does not even meet NFPA 1403 (interior firefighter standard) or worse yet neither of them meet 1403, is NOT PROVIDING THE BEST SERVICE TO THE CITIZENS. Even if you respond with 3 and 1 of them is not at least 1403, then you are a 2 person engine company, still not the best service possible in my opinion. Okay, I'm off of the soapbox now. I believe that some of the reasons that SOME "City" firefighters believe that the county or volunteer departments aren't up to par with their training is due to the lack of a standardized response plan through the area. If that county unit gets there and isn't told any different, then generally they will revert to how they would handle the call, instead of the way that the city would do. This doesn't make them untrained, just uninformed. But hey, that's just my 2 cents worth.

By the way Silver, I'm up to Chocolate Chip muffins now, and sure you can have the recipe!!

Wayne - 08/11/06 - 21:38

Great ongoing discussion, but please remember we are all brothers/sisters in this career should they be a volunteer or a paid career member of a fire-rescue department. We all strive to do the same thing. "Save Lives" and "Preservation of Property" That 2 or 3 man volunteer company may be able extinguish or hold in check long enough for the next in company to arrive same goes for the career departments. One thing beyond our control is the head start the fire got due to lag time in reporting same.

Hey Wayne, it is true real ladder trucks do bend in the middle? The Metro Atlanta area is full of them.

Jim - 08/12/06 - 10:42

Allow me to play the position of devil's advocate to the last couple staffing level comments, and ask this question from an administrative slash legal perspective: if a city proceeds and allows incoming closest dispatch from county departments and those incoming units consist of varying

staffing levels, what legal liabilities does either the FD or the city itself assume? For example, if a city FF is hurt, does the presence of lower-staffed county departments affect insurance or benefits compensation at some point in the subsequent investigatory process? (Mind you, the other city units might be lower-staffed, though still properly staffed "on paper." If that makes sense.) If there are no liabilities per se, or too few worth worrying about, then that answers my question.

Legeros - 08/12/06 - 10:50

...from everyone's comments, it sounds like Cary allows closest incoming unit from the county, but Raleigh does not. Or is Cary's case really just preprogrammed auto-aid versus true geographic closest unit regardless of agency?

Legeros - 08/12/06 - 11:03

I want to put this out on the table. In most of the country a first responder is 1 person. In a lot of states the PD is the first responder. On a medical call does it really make a difference if there is 1, 2, or 30 people on the truck? It shouldn't as the bottom line is that care is started on the patient that much quicker. A lot of the county units are FR or MR, and some have said that it's a lower level of care then what the city provides. However, it is still trained care. They have the tools needed to do the job. Even if it is nothing more then comforting the patient, it is performed that much quicker. The bottom line is the Patient.

Now on the fire side of things. Okay, there are some departments in the county not responding full staffed. However it is not all of them. Even if a unit is arriving with only 2 firefighters it can still accomplish those early-in-the-call type things... size-up, lay out a hand line, and so on and so forth. In the public's eyes it doesn't matter whose name is on the truck just that a truck got there as fast as possible. In the fire service we are always talking about slowing the trucks down, when does 1 min make a big difference. Well, if we went closest station, in some cases units could be there 1 or 2 minutes quicker without speeding the trucks up. I want to jump back to early call things size-up. Size-up occurring earlier can save lives. If size-up occurs a few minutes earlier, then trucks can slowed down or cut back or turned around that much quicker. That diminishes the risk to both the Firemen and the public. We can all admit that one of the most dangerous things we do is ride down the road with the lights and sirens going.

Bottom line: I am for closest station response all the way around. It's the public that we are here for.

deh4908 ([Email](#)) - 08/12/06 - 11:50

closest station response, well what makes a person in the city any more special than in the county. further more, does the person that pays city taxes only drive in the city? do they stay in "the comfort of a paid department" every min. of the day?. the answer to all of this is no. If your telling me that CPR is only done correctly by a paid city fireman, then tell me that when you are having chest pains and a volunteer is the only person who you have to help. We are taught that the rapid response and CPR is critical in order to revive a patient. Then tell me why you can have a "code blue" across the street from a county fire station and the call is in the city, and the county station never be dispatched. Are we really so caught up in the political mumbo jumbo that we don't see the big picture? HELPING THOSE WHO NEED HELP. This means that sending the closest person, station, engine, whatever would help the public. It should be all about the public. I understand that on the fire side of things it is different. However, just as deh4908 stated, the first arriving unit can establish a size up. They can deploy hose. They can determine if there is a life safety concern. All of this could be done prior to the arrival of the next in unit. For example. A county department responds into the city. They are first in on a working fire. They advise all units in the size up, what is going on. They deploy a hose line. The city unit arrives and with the 1,2, or however many volunteer fireman pick up the hose and go in to put the fire out. Well that has saved critical time. Fire doubles every 90 seconds, so we are taught. if you save 3 minutes, you could save a large part of someone's belongings. The key is training. Multi company training. That is what the key is. We all need to work together on this issue.

The one thing that has not been talked about is if the city is out on a major working fire, why should the county not be included in move up. They are on some shifts and others they are not. Also if a city unit is out in the county, who is covering their area? The county or another city unit. The same could be said about the county going into the city, who is covering their area. Well in SOME cases the advantage the county has, they can run a second dispatch out of their station. Most city departments cannot. That's where move up's should include the county units.

We are all here to help, and I think to help each other as well. I would hope this is the case. Lets not be the people that just complain and do nothing, lets do something to correct this issue. LETS DO WHAT'S RIGHT! For us and the public.

kp209a ([Email](#)) - 08/12/06 - 12:19

This question "what makes a person in the city any more special than in the county" is a very interesting one. From a responder's perspective, there is no difference. All lives and property are treated as equal. We all know that. From the administrative perspective of a responder's department, however, there are probably legal, liability, and other differences. (We've talked or asked or speculated about those.) From the

perspective of a municipality, there are probably additional differences. Any municipality undoubtedly positions its public safety services as an incentive for citizens choosing to reside in their incorporated areas. Thus, depending on who is asking the question, maybe there are things that makes a city person more special than a county person... ???

Legeros - 08/12/06 - 12:43

These comments have all been thought provoking at the least. As a volunteer for over 14 years and an officer for almost 11 of them, I am not suprised by the citizen of Raleigh comment. Simply because most people who are ignorant of the volunteer service will think this way. The reality is, as has already been stated, that volunteer firefighters are as equally trained as their paid counterparts. In my department, each firefighter will average over 100 hrs of training each year, in addition to responding to calls, working a regular job and spending time with their families. They are even more dedicated to some extent because they don't require a pay check to do the jobs required of them. I know there are some paid firefighters who volunteer also and I solute them for their service.

The staffing issue may vary by department, I know our department has minimum staffing before a truck leaves the station. A minmum of 2 personel are required on a medical call and atleast 3 on a first out fire engine call. In most cases we respond with 3 to 4 on the medical call and as many as 6 on the engine company. In a lot of cases the first out engine will have 2 officers on it also, a captain and a chief.

The issue of an injury of a volunteer at a city call, they should be covered by the volunteer departments workers comp if they are dispatched to a city call. The investigation should be the same if an injury occurs.

All in all I think the city official feel they would be falling down on their job if they allowed a county department to help them, when the only failing they have is the lack of faster service to the public they are charged to protect.

cjones ([Email](#)) - 08/12/06 - 13:56

DEH's4908 comment: I'm sorry, but I have to strongly disagree with your comment about accomplishing "early-on things" at a fire with only a crew of 2. Those that buy a house in Wakefield, or wherever else for that matter, are spending anywhere from \$200,000 to \$1,000,000+. When they shell out that much money, if they call the fire department because their house is on fire, they expect a crew to show up and go to work, attempting to save there property. What they don't expect is a crew to get there, pull a line, then sit and wait because they're understaffed.

The key is, like most of us have already stated, a county-wide standard on staffing levels. What's the solution; is it duty crews by volunteers, going to a paid county department (like Fairfax, VA or Prince Georges, MD), or something else?

I'm all for volunteers helping the city and vice-versa, but you've got to have the staffing to function appropriately.

Wayne, send that via e-mail please.

Silver - 08/12/06 - 15:39

Mike, Cary is a preprogrammed automatic aid. For fires it is based on the closest county station to the call. For a few areas (Swift Creek and Morrisville) it is an automatic response based on the fact those stations are closer and agreements have been made for them to come into the city. But there are still areas where a closest station could be beneficial, namely downtown Cary. But this would only work when there is a part-time or duty-crew in place at Western Wake Station 2. I am not sure if CAD can be programmed to only dispatch automatic aid during the hours of 7-5 M-F?

I think the keys to this working, besides removal of egos, is

- 1) Communications (to include CAD)
- 2) Staffing
- 3) Response/fireground procedures

With this being said, it is a real possibility to work this out, as the above 3 items should, and I stress should, be able to be worked out. Once again great discussion.

BTW I pay county taxes and live in an unincorporated area that is protected by a municipal department, do I deserve any less than those citizens that live within the corporate limits and pay more taxes? Should I get city services if I'm driving through Raleigh or Cary? Have I paid my share to get them? The answer is yes, as every department in the county receive money from the County-wide tax system, so as a taxpayer I do. And so does anybody that drives through or visits anywhere in our county.

CFP 7021 - 08/12/06 - 16:19

Silver,

As not only a firefighter but a homeowner looking at your comment, am I to assume that it will benefit me more for me to wait for a four person apparatus to arrive at my house within five minutes that is now fully involved, than it would have been to wait for two minutes for two personnel to arrive and to stop it or at least to begin stopping it at a room and contents fire? I have seen paid city fire trucks with 3 people, does this mean they are adequately staffed since they are paid. No, but they too can make a difference.

You actually answer your comment; the homeowner expects a fire truck to arrive quickly and to start making a difference not caring about the number of personnel. As deh4908 stated, there is a lot that can be done to begin that attack with only two firefighters. Doing a size-up is very critical, then deploying the first attack line, setting up the pump and ppv (if you use cross ventilation) can all be done by two people in a similar time frame as four. Sure it would be nice in a perfect world to have four people, but in the real world anything is better than nothing at all. Every 90 seconds a fire burns a fire doubles. This also means that was 90 more seconds a trapped person has to endure a deadly situation. Those 3 minutes could mean the difference in life and death.

I and the rest of my volunteer firefighters are here to simply make a difference. We cannot, however, make a difference if we are never dispatched. It will only make it hard to explain to a homeowner why his house, that is next too or down the street from a volunteer department, burnt down and the closest department was never dispatched. This is very possible with the finger annexations that cities and town do to increase revenue with out increasing money spent.

cjones ([Email](#)) - 08/12/06 - 17:05

Silver, I understand what you are saying about minimum staffing levels, but let's try to live in reality. You do understand that when they rose taxes last time people were very unhappy. They were raised an average of \$20 dollars per household. The last figure from the county is it would cost \$81,000,000 to replace the volunteers and bring staffing up to a level to as the county words it "do the job". A large part of this county still does not have hydrants. But yet every day you have paid staff in the county getting the job done with 2 on the engine, 1 on the tanker, and 1 on the service or second tanker. For them it doesn't matter if the house is worth \$10,000 or \$10,000,000. They get the job done.

Also realize that some stations can't get approved for additional staffing. As it is the county wants to eliminate all part-time staff in paid county department. Why, I don't know?? They say they are not needed. However they fill a valuable void when people have to take time off.

You take a combination station in the county. Let's say they have 2 engines, 2 tankers, 1 service, and also provide brush services. You are talking about staffing that station with 10-12 full time employees. It may come to that some day. But here and now in Wake County it isn't going to happen.

I have seen many engines in the city respond with a crew of 3. Does it make them less affective? No.

I do understand that in the perfect world we would have 4-6 on every truck out the door, but this is not the perfect world. We have to deal with what we have been given and do the job in front of us.

deh4908 ([Email](#)) - 08/12/06 - 17:11

You try to explain to the people that live in your community, city limits, but your community that we didn't come 5 min quicker then a city company. Why, because we might not have 4 people on the engine at that moment. You say to him sorry your house and life is destroyed. But the city doesn't want us to help them because of minimum staffing requirement. Next time it happens I'll be sure to call you and you can come talk to the homeowner yourself. You may not think it happens but it does.

deh4908 ([Email](#)) - 08/12/06 - 17:22

I'm still seeking an answer to my tax question. Does everyone in every city pay the same taxes for fire protection? Or do they pay the county-wide fire tax, plus additional taxes per municipality? If the latter is true, then those parcels of property are perhaps "more special" than those in the county. Or, more accurately, those parcels of property are perhaps "more rewarded" than those in the county, as their fire department may have more resources than their unincorporated counterparts. (There's also the whole ISO and insurance angle, which I haven't thought through. Those city property owners also pay additional taxes for a municipal water system, which is part of the fire protection system. Then they reap another "reward" of lower insurance rates. On an operational level, what does the FD gain as their ISO rating increases?)

Legeros - 08/12/06 - 18:02

mike, my understanding is city people do not pay the fire tax, also your ISO rating can be based on hydrant requirements, or not. I know some departments that have ISO ratings with no hydrant requirements. Anything below a 6 helps none on the residential side as far as insurance savings,

silver, I hope you think that just because a 2 man crew gets there first they will sit and not enter. I know...2 in 2 out.. not if there is a life safty, or the fire is in the incipient stage. Anything more that that a 4 man crew will need help. I DO AGREE WITH YOU on staffing. However it will

not happen any time soon. The county has approved 2 people per shift at each station. It would be nice having 4, maybe one day. You know and I know the cost of staffing all departments would be outrageous. The taxpayers would never go for it.

kp209a - 08/12/06 - 18:12

We are still getting off the subject however, closest station county wide. Yes I understand that staffing has a lot to do with the response. However, all stations are staffed with full time paid, or part time paid personel during the day. Most work at another "city" department. CAD is able to dispatch during this time. Why not run closest station during 7-7 monday – friday??

kp209a - 08/12/06 - 18:16

I am sorry that I have gotten into this so late, but some of me fellow firefighters just let me know that there was a discussion on this topic going on. I think that if people have so much time on their hands to sit and make uninformed comments maybe they should go visit and meet some of the volunteer firefighters in their area or do some research on what they are talking about. Sorry if this upsets any one. I have been in the VOLUNTEER fire service for more than 20 years and have found some of the comments that I have read to be some of the most uninformed comments ever. I feel very strongly about this. Closest station response will work and I don't feel that anyone would suffer a lack of service. All departments have their own SOG'S (Standard Operation Guidelines) due to their staffing, equipment, and even training. I can not speak for other departments, but I do know how the department I am associated with operates. Every member that is asked to do a job is trained for that job or is under the supervision of a trained member. On the medical side of things each member is trained to the county required level or above, and if they are not they don't go on that call. I know that we can put a full crew on the trucks when dispatched with fully trained personal. If people don't think that volunteer firefighters or rescue squad members are trained the same as paid firefighters maybe they should join a department and try it out for themselves.

Lets get back to the real topic..

The county is working on standardizing things. The radio system has been upgraded to 800 MHz, trucks and other equipment are undergoing the same thing. I don't think that you will ever see all departments working under the same SOGs because every department is different. I think what it boils down to is citizens of the city should receive the closest help if they call for it. Whether it is a county unit or a city unit and the same should go for a citizen living in the county. They should receive help from the closest unit. What I don't agree with is the duplication of resources on the same call, i.e. 2 units providing medical aid unless the call warrants it. I will have to agree that there may be some political reasons for county units not responding into the city, or it would already be happening. As far as operational, if a department can't do the job when dispatched into the city, how can they do the job in their own response area? As far a jurisdictional, I don't think that should even be an issue. If a unit from another department is responding to your so-called area, send a unit to check in with them and provide help if needed. And who really cares about ISO except once a year when you pay your insurance. I think people, whoever they may be, have lost sight of the real issue and that is to provide help to who ever needs it, when ever they need it, and where ever they are.

jkeller ([Email](#)) - 08/12/06 - 18:29

Staffing a piece of apparatus with two people is not satisfactory. Supporting two person companies is a step in the wrong direction. People who support these two person companies are the reason why the county cannot progress further and become a stronger, unified department. I know that there are departments in the county that staff their stations with four people but split them up and send two on EMS calls. Two may be minimal for EMS, but you have just reversed the benefit of having a four person company. Three person companies are not as good as four, but it's better than 2.

Somebody above stated that having two on an engine and one each on a tanker and service as adequate. WOW!!! That is INSANE!! It may be what you do everyday, but that's still insane! There have been studies done on staffing that timed the efforts of several different staffing levels to accomplish minimum fireground tasks. Two person companies were proven to be highly ineffective. If I had a fire, I would want a company to show up, don't care where from, adequately staffed, and put the fire out. Two people showing up and setting everything up for more to show up later is hardly doing anything. A three or four person company can show up, stretch the line and extinguish the fire instead of waiting for more to show up.

Just my two cents worth.

Wayne, I'll be in town next week. I'd love some of those chocolate chip muffins!!

Rides A Truck - 08/12/06 - 21:49

"Rides A Truck" put it perfectly and defended my comments above. I, as a volunteer firefighter and a paid firefighter, stand behind what I said and staffing a rig with 2 personnel is dangerous/ unsatisfactory. I can take it a step further and discuss some of the "tasks" that were

suggested to be performed while waiting for additional resources, but, I will show restraint and not go there.

Wayne and "Rides A Truck"; sounds like a party!!

Mike; can you start a blog on nozzle settings and get feedback on what those who frequent this site use (include hose size as well)?

Silver - 08/12/06 - 22:10

I have never, for the life of me, understood why any company would only respond with 2 on board. Why even pull out of the station with that many, unless you're pulling out onto the front ramp waiting for more firefighters. If you have 4 firefighters at the station, when you get a call, all 4 of those firefighters should load up and go.. NOT just 2 firefighters in something like a mini-pumper or brush truck. I never have understood why companies split crews when there are 4 perfectly capable firefighters AT the station. Look at it this way, if catch a fire, you're still going to have to wait for the other two firefighters to get there. If the truck leaves the station with 2, then they're going to have to wait at the scene rather than waiting at the station. Also, if IC calls for mutual aid I'm pretty sure they don't just want 2 guys and a truck to show up. What good is that?

Just so that I'm not guilty of carrying this discussion waaaaay off topic, I agree that the closest county unit should be allowed to respond, given that they are ADEQUATELY staffed.. and no, 2 people does not mean you're adequately staffed.

CrustyJake - 08/12/06 - 23:04

After reading all the comments on why volunteer departments can't be relied upon to go into a municipal district because of staffing issues or training issues or whatever else was said, I can know the following facts are true. I know my family and property are protected by one of the best volunteer departments; it carries a class 5 ISO without relying on hydrants. It is manned by well trained members, as an officer I help make sure. It is always adequately manned and responds accordingly. I also know the county has adopted a closest station response from any station, county or city and whoever comes will be appreciated. I also know, as an officer, I always accept any help available, 2 or 4 or 20. The egotistical mind set of "I DON'T NEED ANYONES HELP" will always bite the hardest when available help is not used. Raleigh officials or other surrounding municipal departments, who don't want my help automatically, can still know I will still respond when called upon to help them out of a difficult situation, I hope its not too late for someone or their property. God has given me a heart for service and I will always follow the lead of Jesus in serving others.

If the local municipal department heads start looking at serving the public first, they may start to see things in a new light. If utilizing my department or the other volunteer departments around them is not the first choice, then that's not because we, the volunteers, didn't offer. I know my paid counterparts who man the responding apparatus also only want help others and if they ever need our help, just have the dispatch center page us out, we are enroute.

cjones ([Email](#)) - 08/13/06 - 00:18

I would hope if a department only has a two man crew that they are counting on volunteer support, and if they are not getting that on their calls they need to address their operating procedures and hire more staffing. First off they are not NFPA compliant how does that work with two in and two out. Second a two man crew puts you behind the eight ball to start with on any type of call, you need more than that just to work a cardiac call. I know there are some departments using this two person staffing now, but I think they are in the process of changing that.

I think we need to change the topic to paid vs. volunteer

jkeller ([Email](#)) - 08/13/06 - 01:17

Excellent comments by everyone, and a host of perspectives on the issue of closest unit response with Wake County. **Closing this topic to additional comments.** I may summarize or prune a bit for clarity. Might paste the staffing levels comments into a new blog topic. Not sure yet. Kudos to the participants who were passionate but 100 percent civil. It's been said by someone wiser than myself that one way to foster creativity is to induce friendly arguments. The operators of this blog agree.

Legeros - 08/13/06 - 06:46

Blogger, Reporter, Candlestick Maker

08/10/06 29 W - + 15 - 11

On the meta-subject of blogging versus anything to do with the fire service, here's an interesting [New Yorker article](#) on the subject of Internet journalism.

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