

Wake County Needs Numbering System

08/07/07 87 W - + 16 - 14

FireNews is reporting on and editorializing about a [new numbering system in Rowan County](#), and the "ugly twenty" counties in North Carolina that lack such a system. FireNews notes "the urbanized counties of Mecklenburg (Charlotte) and Wake (Raleigh), along with rapidly developing Johnston County to Raleigh's east continue to operate without comprehensive numbering plans." The article adds that "in Wake County alone, there are a dozen units with the designation 'Engine 1.'" The story is also being [discussed in the FireNews forums](#).

Do we need to beat the hell out of this horse again???? Mike, you should just cut and paste those old discussions we had before on this topic and e-mail them to the "powers that be". Along with the editorial from FireNews, maybe something can get done.

Silver - 08/07/07 - 19:12

on that same note hearing that Wake Forest is getting ready to drop their county numbering scheme and go with Engine 1, Engine 2, etc...

CFP 7021 ([Email](#)) - 08/07/07 - 20:32

Yes we need this. Wake Forest is getting ready to renumber their apparatus to Engine 1, Engine 2, Etc.... We all need to play in the same sandbox under the same rules.

Guest - 08/07/07 - 20:33

Chief Swift:

Say it isn't so!

harkey ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 08/07/07 - 22:16

If you call it "Engine", "Tanker", "Rescue", "Car" what freaking difference does it make what comes before it? Wake Forest Engine 1, Fairview Rescue 1, etc. Who cares? Just call it what it is regardless of what agency it's from. Give me a break, it's just something else to bitch about.

wcff - 08/07/07 - 23:02

Actually, the duplicate numbers cause a fair amount of confusion during emergency operations. We're having to re-number the EMS district chiefs now, because it seems that every "Engine 2" also has a person whose number is 20_ something. People on the scene and at dispatch shouldn't have to say "Was that EMS 203 or ____ 203?"

Some day, we need to deal with this issue. Do we want to have a system that works well, or one that encourages some kind of "unique identity." If you read the manuals for air traffic controllers, the desire for efficient communications is to convey the message as clearly as possible, in as few syllables as possible, as safely as possible. Try as I might, I can't see how having a bunch of "Engine 1" in the system contributes to safety or efficiency. If there are any "names" involved, it ought to be NIMS-compliant typing rather than city or private company names. Every time I hear someone say "tanker" I start looking over my head for airplanes – because NIMS says that if it rolls on the ground without wings, it's a TENDER.

What do we have to do to focus on what is important? Too much worrying about naming and numbering, when we still can't get an incident commander to stand in one place and run the incident. Now that we're NIMS-compliant, how about we get NIMS-competent?

Skip

Skip Kirkwood ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 08/08/07 - 08:37

wcff:

It does make a difference. And to answer who cares, as a Wake County FF, for your safety and those you respond with, the answer is: YOU should care.

With as many Tac and Ops channels that are now at responder's disposal, having duplicate unit names/numbers is simply not safe.

I'll give you a practical example: Apex has a Battalion 1, and Raleigh has a Battalion 1. (Of course there are others, too). When I hear "Battalion 1" on the radio, I have to physically LOOK at the screen to try and figure out if it's in Raleigh or Apex. And guess what? He's usually talking to Engine 1, Engine 2, Engine 3 or Ladder 1. All of them duplicate names/numbers, all on the same radio system.

Is it a complete "CF"? "Probably" not, because the trucks roll on calls everyday, and everybody goes home. Is it something that can be addressed, for little money, that results in a safer system. Will it lead to a safer, more efficient system? I think the answer is yes.

Travel to about an decent sized metro area in the country, and I doubt you will find any system that is "numbered" the way Wake is.

Another example: remember when each area of the county had a Rescue Squad, and ambulances were based there? Imagine if every one of those agencies decided to have their own Medic 1, or EMS 1, or Ambulance 1.

"Fuquay Rescue Medic 1 to Holly Springs Rescue Medic 1, can you back up Garner Rescue Medic 1?" Sounds pretty silly, doesn't it?

When the answer is "this is the way we've always done it....", look out.

Skip: Consider three-point harness IC vests that are fastened to the Suburban.

harkey ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 08/08/07 - 09:02

NIMS has some helpful guidelines, but some things are just silly. ie... "tankers" "tenders". I wouldn't be looking up for "tanker" aircraft in Wake County, let's be realistic.

Most agencies don't have the staffing to allow an incident commander to stand in one place and run the incident, they usually have to be involved in a hands on role because of a lack of manpower available. The old saying "too many Chiefs and not enough Indians" comes to mind.

wcff - 08/08/07 - 09:04

wcff.... why care what comes before "engine 1" well if you are on a scene with 3 or 4 engine 1's then everybody on the scene should care. the IC and accountability officer certainly will care. It takes longer to say "blah blah fd engine 1" than it does "261" and there's no room for part of the transmission being cut off. When you hear people talking about a numbering system being confusing, to me it's more of a lack of training or understanding of how the system is set up. It doesn't take long to figure out that 261 is an engine/pumper from Stony Hill station 1. or that 61 is an engine from Wake Forest Station 1. It is all about getting to know your county and becoming very familiar with it.

Now I know that there are several trains of thought on how the units should be numbered, and which is the best for the county is unknown. I would say that you would have to sit down with a list of every piece of equipment in the county (including raleigh and cary, etc) and see which type of system would work. It can work, and it should work. It's time that this county began to act like the capital county and got their act together.

CFP 7021 ([Email](#)) - 08/08/07 - 09:12

Having the Incident Commander have a hands on role.....

Watch for NIOSH to smack-down the Charleston FD for this very thing.

CFP 7021: I'm in the midst of that project now for an upcoming followup article. We'll put up a recommended numbering scheme for folks to chunk rocks at.

harkey ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 08/08/07 - 09:21

In my opinion there is a big difference between an IC having a hands on role and an IC that walks the fire scene. I too agree that your IC (when discussing the IC I am speaking of a Chief Officer not a Capt on the 1st due piece at a fire) should not be humping hose, pulling ceilings, inside looking for smoke/fire, throwing ladders or any other task such as that on the fire ground. I also do not believe that an IC has to stand in one spot during the incident and not move from that spot. To me that is just as dangerous as a hands on Chief. Your IC does not have to be doing laps around the fire building, but he does need to occasionally do 360 walk arounds to maintain a good visual on fire progression and other safety issues. We don't all have the manpower to have a Division A,B,C,D Chief or safety officer, and we don't have Chief's aides in this area to be the Chief's eyes. So on single family dwellings it is perfectly acceptable for the IC to periodically walk from the A side of the building to the C side. Hell he is often able to see something that we don't from inside. It is our jobs to update him on the interior conditions so that he can put

the 2 together so that he can maintain his game plan.

On to the original topic at hand and that being the county numbering systems. As we run more and more with each others agencies and county units into the city and city units into the county we definitely need to maintain 1 numbering system. This is a safety issue, and it definitely makes the person doing accountability at a fire scene's job that much easier.

Skip you hold more power and have the ability to affect changes in this county more than the rest of us in this forum. Even though you are on the EMS side of it, you are now running into issues with the fire side. Why don't you start dropping hints and comments to the powers that be about possibly having a county wide numbering system. Most of us on here are nothing more that FF's who have little say in their depts, but you can actually hold open discussions with Ray and Chris that the rest of us can't.

Mike - 08/08/07 - 10:48

I think the county staff in charge should form a committee and lets get this thing worked out. The entire county is running calls together alot more than we did in the past. It does get confusing having 2 Battalion 1's or Engine 1's on the scene. When Ray was Chief at Apex he Had some good ideas for county wide number system, something along the lines of first digit of number is apparatus type and last digits signify department. Some people argue that once on scene you shouldn't be calling units by engine number it should be NIMS location or vent group, search group.

Apex Batt Chief - 08/08/07 - 15:00

PG County Maryland (and others in that area) have been using a county wide numbering system up there for years. It's not brain surgery; issue each station a number (example = 15). If Station 15 has 2 engines a ladder (stick) and a rescue then you have Engine 151 (1-5-1), Engine 152, Ladder 15 and Rescue 15. If they add a brush unit, then you have Brush 15!! Amazing!!! Forget all the secret numbering styles, make it plain and simple.

Silver - 08/08/07 - 22:02

County numbering again!!!!!! I have not been affiliated with a wake county FD since 1999. But I still have had the chance to teach at some of the depts. Has something changed in the past year?! I might be wrong but doesn't some of the depts. and the county have a station, apparatus number identification system in place? Wendell station 1 is county number 11 and station 2 I cannot remember it's number but here is my example. Wendell fire apparatus was once numbered as following. Engines 111, 112, 113, 115 tanker 117, truck 11 (rescue haz mat) and ladder 116, brush trucks were 118 and 119. The first numbers are station (11) and the third is unit. Z- town does it the same way with station 9. 91,92,93,94 and so on! I thought that was the jest of it at one time!!!!!!!!!! But even if we change the apparatus numbers it goes back to the comment I made last time we beat this horse. You still have a boat load of car units or company officers on the scene with 101,102,200, 201 and so on. That was confusing back in the day on a working fire with Z-town or old Knightdale when you didn't know if it was Wendell 101 calling you or one of the other FD chiefs! But these are just my opinion like rear ends and tale boards everyone has one. Stay Safe guys!

Jason Lane - 08/08/07 - 23:58

wcff...

when you talk about tankers v. tenders and talk about not being silly, it's not about "wake county" it's about nationwide interoperability. you have to think about the bigger picture. of when you go out to the western or eastern part of the state to help with a wildfire and having all apparatus typed the same. If you are saying tanker and the IC is expecting a tender you can see where the confusion comes into play. Also I guess we all have a short term memory loss, but there were air drops in Wake County in the past couple years. Does it happen every day, no. But that's why the Federal Government has mandated these things, so that everybody, everywhere is on the same page.

Jason, yes SOME of the stations use if not at least loosly the old number system. Bay Leaf, Falls, Stony Hill, Western Wake, Zebulon, Wendell, Knightdale PS, Hopkins, Wake Forest (for another week or so), are the ones using it.

CFP 7021 ([Email](#)) - 08/09/07 - 08:50

Well since all of my other brothers have jumped on the poor horse about this (Silver, CFP, J. Lane) I may as well beat my head against the rock too.

I still think that there is an easy fix to a county numbering scheme, but it is going those in power to just let crap go!

Here's a thought on it, every station/department was given a "number" when it went into service, well maybe that's too complicated for some, so let's try something a little simpler. Since very few depts in Wake Co have only one station, this may help this along. Here's what I got for you, for a system. All Depts FIRST station opened, gets the station number, the other station numbers fall under the initial one, for example:

I will use Apex FD (County Station 4)

Apex Station 1 would have E-41, L-41,K-41, B-41, and if there is another engine in the station E-411

Apex station 2 would have E-42,B-42,K-42, and if there is a second engine E-421

Apex St 3 E-43,L-43,R-43,second engine E-431

The chief of the dept would be Chief 4, Bat. Chief would be Bat. 41

Garner FD (county st. 8)

St. 1 E-81,L-81,R-81, E-811, etc

St.2 E-82, K-82, R-82, E-821, etc

St. 3 E-83, K-83, etc

Chief would be Chief 8, their District Chief: Bat 81

Like some others have said, the better thing would be to go to a regional numbering system:

Raleigh/Wake Co 1-99, including Cary (county st 5)

Durham City 100-199

Durham Co. 200-299

Granville Co. 300-399

Franklin Co 400-499

Johnston Co 500-599

Harnett Co 600-699

Chatham Co. 700-799

Now, that will all lead to another hot topic debate: Classifying/standardizing equipment and apparatus! ie making sure that a BRUSH truck is not being called an ENGINE!!

Okay, off of my soapbox. Everyone stay safe!!

Wayne - 08/09/07 - 10:08

OK. I'll beat on this dead horse one more time. (climbing onto soap box)

7021 hits a good point about interoperability. I remember going to the big Pender County forest fire waaaay back in 1986 or so. It was a challenge to communicate back then. And everyone back then was UNIT this and UNIT that. For the most part though, at least then we could blame it on technology (or the lack of it). We had departments with low VHF, high VHF, and there was one department that was still using CB radios.

But looking at the present, we have just about licked the equipment part. If only Motorola and Erricson would just get down and devise some sort of inter-operative bridge (and they cannot convince me they cannot do it!). As to the comment about airdrops (or the lack of need) there are vast areas of Wake County (still) that could warrant an airdrop (Umstead Park, areas around Falls Lake or Harris Lake). And it is just a short hop to Chatham County where there are also still vast areas of woods. The key work is interoperability. Everyone has to be on the same page. That means radio equipment HAS to be compatible and terminology HAS to be the same. Period.

And yes, wcff, it does matter what comes before "engine 1" or whatever. It is a whole lot easier to say "ENGINE 46" than it is to say "(insert department name here) ENGINE 1". If you are the incident commander, with today's technology, you know what is coming to you (that's what the CAD terminal in the unit is for. Oh, don't have one? Then catch up to the 21st century. There's no excuse for there not being a CAD terminal/MDT in every piece of fire apparatus in this county. We are, after all, the capital county). You know that you have ENGINE 2, ENGINE 41, LADDER 16, and RESCUE 14 coming to you. If you are a good IC, then you know what the capabilities are of the units around you. It ain't hard. Reducing the air time it takes to say all of those names cannot help but make things easier. And having been an incident commander on more than one occasion, it is easier to keep track of units if you can leave off the names of the communities, and just keep up with 4-5 engines, 2-3 ladders, 4-5 ambulances, etc.

It's amazing, though, I remember when the rescue squads here in Wake County MADE it work (a numbering system). From the EMS side, if I had an '81 unit coming, whether it was 481, 581, or 1181, I KNEW it was a CRASH truck (the terminology we used back then). If it was a '72

or '71, then I knew it was an ambulance. And if I heard '61, it was a chief. '62 was an assistant chief. Simplicity.

When I ran in Anne Arundel County, MD, we knew everyone by station numbers. And I managed to learn all of the station numbers as related to their location/ communities in about a month. If I heard ENGINE 131, it was Riveria Beach's (station 13) engine (but all I had to keep up with was E-131). Truck 28 was Odenton's ladder. Squad 12 was Earleigh Heights' squad. Chief 20 was the chief at Lake Shore. ENGINE 331 was from Glen Burnie, ENGINE 351 was from ANNAPOLIS, and so on. Simplicity. (and we also knew who the neighboring stations numbers were in Howard, PG, and Baltimore City/County)

The power is in place to make it happen, although there would be fall-out. But that power is pretty persuasive.

It can work, even with Cary and Raleigh and RDU taking part. Even WCEMS could take part. But it would mean that there would only be ONE unit in Wake County called ENGINE 1. There would only be ONE unit called LADDER 1. But is there anything wrong with being known as ENGINE 39 or LADDER 72? Is there any difference between MEDIC 2 or MEDIC 41? Or how about CHIEF 56 or BATTALION 16? No. IT'S ONLY A NUMBER! It does not change who or what you are. It does not change your capabilities. Simply put, there are too many fire chiefs hung up on being CAR 1 or So-and-so 100. It's time to move into the 21st century guys! Wake up! It's not just about your little corner of Wake County anymore. We are a REGIONAL profession with REGIONAL assets. The times have changed. We may be called at ANYTIME to go ANYWHERE! Think back to Hurricane Fran, Floyd, or even Katrina. Do we have major terrorist targets around here? Most certainly, and not just Shearon Harris. If you know anything about terrorism and the tactics, we have thousands of potential targets, from shopping centers and high-rise buildings to schools and churches. How bout industrial targets? Or bridges?

Do we have the possibility of going to a major incident, like a Charleston type fire, or maybe a full blown, wide open, hazardous materials or industrial incident? We just had 'The Big Fire' a few months ago, and that could have gotten way out of hand, given the right circumstances.

So, as my example, let the EMS agencies establish the precedent, again.

WAKE COUNTY #1- EMS units in Raleigh that are INSIDE of I-440 (165, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177)

WAKE COUNTY #2- EMS units in Raleigh that are OUTSIDE of I-440 (271, 272, 273, 274, 275)

RDU #3- Six Forks unit based at RDU (373)

APEX #4- 471, 472, 473. 204 becomes 465 (or 765).

CARY #5- 571, 572

WAKE FOREST #6- Would include EMS 10, EMS 12, and EMS 33 as 671, 672, and 673. 205 becomes 665.

FUQUAY-VARINA #7- Would include EMS 9 and EMS 14 as 771 and 772

GARNER #8- 871, 872, 873

ZEBULON #9- Eastern Wake units BASED in Zebulon

WENDELL #11- Eastern Wake units BASED in Wendell

SIX FORKS #12- 1271, 1272, 1273, 1274

KNIGHTDALE #13- Eastern Wake units BASED in Knightdale

HOLLY SPRINGS #14- 1471

ROLESVILLE #15- 1571, 1572

MORRISVILLE #16- Cary unit based in Morrisville (1671)

-65 is the district chief assigned to an area. Central district chief would be EMS 165. Northern district chief would be EMS 665. Cary district chief would be 565.

Or, if FDs wake up and come on board, have a lottery for station numbers. EMS units would get numbered according to the nearest fire station. For example, EMS 4 would be numbered according to whatever Western Wake's #1 station got. This does not have to change what is on the front of the station. Raleigh's fire station on Lake Boone Trail would still be 'RFD station 14'. Cary's fire station on North Harrison Avenue would still be 'CFD #1'.

Or a lottery could be held for the engine numbers, then the ladder numbers, etc. There is nothing wrong with having ENGINE 3 and LADDER 15 in the same station, either. It's only a number.

What would be wrong in establishing Wake County as the leader in emergency preparedness on the part of EMS, fire, and law enforcement in our area? In our state? Heck, why stop there? Why can't we be the leaders of the country? What has FDNY got on us? More stations. It for

sure isn't their EMS system. Or what about Chicago, Detroit, or Los Angeles? They are not doing ANYTHING that we cannot do BETTER!. We already provide the best in EMS care anywhere. All of those magazines and groups keep talking about how this is THE PLACE to live and work. And this would be something that would not cost a lot of money. The only argument against it would be "I just don't want to" or "We've always done it this way". If Harnett County can do it, why can't we?

My opinions, and mine only. Take a shot or two if you must. Maybe more suitable for The Watch Desk, but the string is here. Mike, if you feel the need, move the whole thing to The Watch Desk.

(climbing down from soap box)

(poking at the dead horse..."Nope...it's not dead quite yet." Still breathing.)

DJ ([Email](#)) - 08/09/07 - 11:42

DJ-

Way to go man!!! Preach on brother, preach on!!!

Wayne - 08/09/07 - 12:12

i cannot agree more.... heck start numbering at 1 and end where you end... no matter the jurisdictional boundries

CFP 7021 ([Email](#)) - 08/09/07 - 12:32

The way Wayne described it is along the lines as to what Ray had in mind when he was at Apex

Apex Batt Chief - 08/09/07 - 14:06

I think I might shed a tear from happiness.....

Can I buy some folks a few cold ones?

The above posts are so good, a few items bear repeating:

"It's just a number...."

"It is a whole lot easier to say "ENGINE 46" than it is to say "(insert department name here) ENGINE 1"."

"Reducing the air time it takes to say all of those names cannot help but make things easier."

"Simply put, there are too many fire chiefs hung up on being CAR 1 or So-and-so 100."

"It's not just about your little corner of Wake County anymore."

This is great. This is not just change for change sake, but for "improvements and more "safety." And it's not expensive, unless ego has some intrinsic value that can be traded on an open market.

We've got at least two more articles coming out on this subject: How the process was handled in other locations, and a proposed numbering scheme for Wake (maybe even Mecklenburg).

I also got an email this morning from someone in Wilkes County who corrected me and let me know they DO operate with a specific numbering scheme. Instead of the "Ugly Twenty" it is at least down to the "Unattractive 19."

harkey ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 08/09/07 - 14:21

I remember that system. I was at Yrac then (we were 29). That would work, but to get everyone on the same sheet, RFD, CFD, and RDU have to come into the mix as well, along with all of the EMS agencies. But the same system would work. There would just be 65 or so stations. Not everyone could be ENGINE 1, LADDER 1, MEDIC 1, or CAR 1. All it takes is leadership.

DJ ([Email](#)) - 08/09/07 - 14:27

Regarding comments and opinions, civility is the only requirement for this forum. Continue as desired.

Legeros - 08/09/07 - 18:30


Thanks Mike. Besides, it's already started at The Watchdesk, as well.

DJ

DJ ([Email](#)) - 08/09/07 - 18:35

Here is the Watch Desk thread that has started: <http://www.thewatchdesk.com/forum/showth..>

Legeros - 08/09/07 - 18:38

Numbers DO matter. If they didn't, then why did Raleigh C-2 keep that designation when he moved to services instead of becoming C-3 but yet C-4 became C-10 when he moved to training? 

Henry P. - 08/09/07 - 18:43

Despite what some might think, they're ALL Assistant Chiefs, none has more power than the other.

Guest - 08/09/07 - 20:41

Dale Johnson for County Commissioner

Olson - 08/11/07 - 22:27

I saw somewhere that Eastern wake fire and Knightdale fire department have the same station numbers, which one would take "13"?

Tommy - 08/13/07 - 17:45

Tough one. '13' sort of signifies Knightdale, not Eastern Wake. In sticking with the municipal number system divided many years ago, I would say KPS would be '13', and EW would be whatever the next two numbers were. But then again, that would be just my idea. That and \$1.39 + tax will get you a soda at a convenience store.

DJ ([Email](#)) - 08/13/07 - 21:17

KPS.... it goes with the municipality

CFP 7021 - 08/13/07 - 22:18

.....Biting lip at order of brass.....

But we did get a good 5 o'clock chuckle out of this.....

Jason Boggs - 08/14/07 - 00:16

ps: dj, I'll take a diet Mt.Dew....

JB - 08/14/07 - 00:17

Dt Mt Dew it is....\$1.39 plus tax, please.

DJ - 08/14/07 - 08:09

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To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?

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