

Hazing

07/14/09 91 W - + 12 - 12

The Big H has been called on the Big H. The headlines are easy enough to find. Video Shows Apparent Hazing Inside Fire Stations, etc. Be they pranks or regular firehouse fun, if (a.) recorded on camera and (b.) viewed by the public, the behaviors are likely to be labeled hazing. What do you think? Join the discussion that's commenced around the 'net and blogosphere. Dave Statter's [talking about it](#). FireCritic's [weighed in](#). There's a thread on the [Firehouse forums](#). We've even started discussing same on the [Raleigh-Durham Watch Desk](#).

Saw this story that made the Houston news. Big damn deal, a new guy got water on him via a pole hole. Go upstairs and change your clothes, you didn't get hurt and everyone else pulled their time as a rookie. Give me a break! What has the fire service become? A world full of selfish babies? To make matters worse, a FIREMAN was the one who went to the media. One that we trust our own lives with stabbed his own in the back. Congrats on making a name for yourself, and forever being black-balled from the fire service. Then, a representative from the Houston Black Professional Firefighters has to step in....

Seriously, does it have to be made into a race thing? It seems we're breeding and encouraging a world of big babies, and quite frankly it makes me want to vomit!

What does everyone think? Does part of it have to do with those people that want the fire service as a job/paycheck, and don't understand the history that goes along with "ribbing the rookie"?

Silver - 07/14/09 - 08:57

Does this mean I can sue the Garner captain when he says he doesn't want a "Raleigh Brat" Rolling his hose?

[ExplorerRickels] ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 07/14/09 - 16:31

Here's the thing about "rites of passage." If everyone's in on the joke, then the joke is just a joke. But if they're not, then, um, Houston, we may have a problem.

White FFs prank white FFs. Will somebody see, say, racism here? Probably not.

But what about...

White FFs prank black FFs?
Black FFs prank white FFs?
Male FFs prank female FFs?
Southern FFs prank northern FFs?
etc.

Increase the differences between pranker and prankee, and you probably increase the chances that "other reasons" are suspected.

In a perfect world, everyone entering the fire service would understand "rites of passage" and that they serve a greater purpose.

But here in the imperfect universe? Some people call foul.

Whaddya do then?

You tell me.

Kick the heat intolerant people out of the kitchen?
Give everyone asbestos gloves, so they play less rough?
Hire only people who understand or have experienced "rough play?"

Hire only people from homogenous groups, with fewer differences to be potentially sensitive about?

You tell me.

Legeros - 07/14/09 - 17:23

To me, there is a difference between hazing and practical jokes. I have been around and been a lot of places and have never seen what I consider to be hazing going on in a firehouse. I did get a chance to see hazing up close and personal while in college and trust me, there is a difference. The problem is that everyone is sooooo PC that it is killing everything and everyone. Practical jokes and "Probie" or "Rookie" initiations are part of the rich history of the fire service and provide an invaluable experience to the "Rookie" and crew. I have been on the receiving end and giving end of MANY practical jokes/playing/picking or whatever you call and it all taught me great lessons about myself and the folks I've worked with over the years. Ah, but we are in a different world now. I think it is more a product of the PC "Everyone is a winner" society that we live in today. Many of the people coming out of recruit schools feel that they have already paid their dues, therefore should not have to endure earning their way in the firehouse. It's sad but it's true! Just another example of the folks in the "me" generation!

Wayne - 07/14/09 - 19:03

Well put Wayne. Eleven years on the job and I've NEVER seen hazing. Plenty of good-hearted ribbing of the rookie and practical jokes, but never hazing. You hit the nail on the head too about some of the rooks feeling like they've already paid their dues.

What's the solution? I know of a firehouse (not necessarily RFD) that makes the rookies sit at a little plastic table and chair set away from the main dinner table. They need to earn the right to sit at the "big table". Right or wrong? Hazing or joking? Where is the line drawn between the two? Is it when someone could actually get seriously injured when it's considered hazing? I shouldn't have to worry about whether or not to play a joke on the rookie if they're Black, Female, Asian or Russian. Just know that it's in love, and on our day off, I'll go drink a beer with that rookie, regardless of race or sex. It's when you're a rookie and they don't pick and play is when you should worry, if you ask me!!

Silver - 07/14/09 - 23:13

If you can't take a good joke or maybe some hurt feelings then the fire house is not the place for you. I think there should be a limit, you don't want any of the rookies going home, putting on lipstick and writing your name down on a list. But the fire house wouldn't be "the firehouse" without playing around. You can only preach and talk about pride and love for the job so much in an academy; people have it or they don't.

Kermit - 07/15/09 - 01:35

Big table, little table. Cute.

Wonder how that would play on a local newscast, if presented to the public?

Is the "camera factor" an easy litmus test for "too far?"

Legeros - 07/15/09 - 17:00

Knowing the media, they'd make it known that there's a severe psychological impact on said rookies...yada, yada, yada. Yeah, so is seeing a child burned up in a house fire, where's their story on that?

Silver - 07/15/09 - 18:01

Where does being spray painted and covered in lithium grease fall? The two different tables is fun, even as the guy sitting at the little table. Atleast they like you enough to play a trick on you. If nobody said a word to you or didn't mess with you, you've probably got bigger problems.

The rest, all fun and games. Buckets of water, being covered in flour after the water, wearing someone else's uniform and getting drenched, slip n' slide across the bay floor, HOT sauce in the food, hiding someone's towel and clothes while they're in the shower, cutting lights out while someone's showering, putting a trash bag full of water in someone's locker if they leave it open off shift, shutting it, and waiting til the next day they come back. Fun times! Everybody has fun, mostly.

The ones I've seen so far in my career that don't take it well, are the same ones that I've heard say they wouldn't risk their life for anybody, and that if another firefighter went down, they were on their own since that sorry person was going to get themselves out first.

In the end, if you can put up with the crazy stuff we see, a little practical joke shouldn't be a problem at all. If you can't take the joke, can you take the kid burned in a fire?

Rides An Engine - 07/15/09 - 23:55

Yep, y'all are right. However, nowadays I would be a little more careful when you are designing a prank. Many may not realize it, but look at it from a broader perspective. It may seem innocent and customary at the "applicaiton level" but hard to dismiss at an administrative level when the person offended speaks out. Yes, it sucks that we sometimes have to worry about crap like this. Hey, just size-up your prey before you strike!!

A.Rich - 07/16/09 - 23:07

Little practical jokes are good most of the time. I bet Silver could tell us some good one he used to pull up at FDNY.

Joker - 07/17/09 - 13:42

Do LEOs get razzed when they join the force? Or is everyone a bit nicer to each other when they're armed?

Legeros - 07/17/09 - 20:17

Name: (real name
preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

Yes

No

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/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

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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Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

Small print: All html tags except and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.