

Paid to Sleep?

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Discussion topic for the day, and with a provocative but perhaps deceptive posting title. [Firegeezee columnist Mike Ward yesterday](#) posed the question "Are career firefighters the next Tea Party target?" Read his posting, as even the shortest summary doesn't do it justice. Then discuss this question: how's local support for the government service of career firefighters? Are we riding high in these parts? Or is it more of a mix, between strong support and unawareness or neutrality? Where's public opinion headed, in your opinion? What say you?

We're a necessary evil, unfortunately. I think we, RFD, are a lot better off than others. We have a Chief that fights for us, and a City Manager that will listen more than those in the past.

Silver - 03/23/10 - 09:43

Hmmm, well, "they" are certainly happy we show up at their door (pretty quickly) at all hours of the day and night to answer their call. We show up highly trained and skilled to perform our jobs. We sacrifice time from our families, not to mention the fact that we might not come one night while we are out in the midst of danger, and apparently burdening the cities budget! "They" obviously are under-worked since they have time to whine and bitch about those who work in the service of complete strangers. Would "They" grab a hoseline? By the same token, would "They" grab a rifle? I doubt it. Yes, the Tea Party mentality is quite a lack thereof.

BC - 03/23/10 - 16:22

Mike,

Thanks so much for the publicity and the link. As a follow-up:

There has ALWAYS been a percent of the population that is opposed to local government, the negative 20% quote comes from International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) Fire and Rescue Services textbook, published in 2002.

Digital/social media has increased the reach of the negative 20% in influencing the 40% bystanders.

I used Saturday's DC protest and the Tea Party as a focusing point.

The us-versus-them issue goes beyond one political group or movement.

Fifteen years ago it was the Citizens fOr \$ensible Taxation (CO\$T)in my county.

How can municipal firefighters effectively respond to questions of current practices and procedures.

Mike Ward

Mike Ward ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 03/23/10 - 21:12

Okay, so I am no businessman or politician and yes I am fairly conservative but here is my point of view: As a very general overview of how a city or even government functions, I think that systems should be implemented to compensate teachers, firefighters, EMT's and police officers more. The simple fact though that all of the previously mentioned are working hard now for nearly nothing should show politicians that they are getting supreme service at a cheap cost. Compare it to an insurance policy. Now the following are extreme exaggerations but you get the point. Imagine paying \$10 a month for a 5 million dollar life insurance policy. That is basically what you are doing when you pay taxes to employ public safety personnel. And the payment (taxes) only have to be paid once a year (in most cases). Now, lets focus on a very sterotypical idea. A lot of politicians are doing their "jobs" outside of a primary job. Some mayors, senators, etc are lawyers and businessmen and get compensated, most of the time very well, for doing the political role "on the side". Now I know a lot of them are in office as a primary job, but even then the correlation of productive work and need compared to pay is way off. Compare the productive work and need of a

firefighter compared to pay and see what you get. It is just a shame that people will pay for insurance of all types every month because "you never know when something may happen" but they don't want to pay taxes for a firefighter who will be there in minutes to save their life or property when something happens. I think that will be a new slogan...firefighters: The insurance policy you forget you have. How about we take volunteers or pay people half of what politicians make, get someone in office who doesn't do it for the pay and really wants to be there... then we will get something done. Well, enough of that soapbox hope I didn't step on too many toes.

rookie - 03/24/10 - 06:39

I like that slogan – "Firefighters: the insurance policy you forget you have." We are there in minutes to save your life-not pay for it after you die-and that is just what we do. Perhaps that can be moved out into the popular media and culture to bring some thought to what we are about. Just a thought. Thanks for the thoughts rookie!

Goose - 03/26/10 - 19:22

I haven't had a chance to opine on this topic, but my thoughts on the matter have been headed in the direction of public education. Not life safety education, however. More like marketing. Educating everyone else on what you do, why you do it, why it costs what it costs, and so forth. I've seen trade magazine columns on the subject, from time to time. "Fire department marketing," or "Are you marketing your fire department." But what does that look like? What's the path to education? In the business world, success stories are coin of the realm. Would the fire service benefit from regular boasting, if you will, of its accomplishments? (And what would said accomplishments translate to? The dramatic stuff, rescuing this, mitigating that? The subtle stuff, involving prevention or code enforcement? Is it a numbers game, citing the numbers of fires extinguished quickly because of prompt response times, or sufficient numbers of stations? And so on. Marketing, that's my thought.

Legeros - 03/26/10 - 19:36

If you don't pay for people to sleep, you pay for people to be up at all times, which means you either double or triple your workforce (going to either 12 or 8 hour shifts). Do the math in your department to see what the personnel cost would be and compare that to the current cost of being paid to sleep. I think you'll find it to be a sound investment to keep the bunks. The turning point in the discussion is when the crews are too busy to realize any beneficial rest during a 24-hour shift and end up responding in a fatigued state. We've transitioned a number of EMS units in the County to 12 hour back-to-back shifts in the last few years directly based upon that individual units utilization statistics. In the last capital facility plan, we cited a scientific study out of Texas that equated fatigue rates to equivalent blood alcohol contents in one's ability to perform basic but critical functions such as driving.

The education point that we need to focus upon in our marketing (or whatever we want to call it) is that we have a service to provide and that we should use the latest technology and research to provide that service. And remember, the implementation of technology and research does not always have to come at a six figure price. Changing longstanding processes (such as allowing rest periods during the traditional workday) can be a formidable solution to doubling or tripling staffing levels. Improving safety equipment is pennies on the dollar of the cost of an employee injury or fatality. Some projects do cost a lot, such as in-vehicle navigation, but the savings on response times are priceless.

We don't need to get in the business of regular boasting, but we do need to better inform the public of why we do what we do and what the efficiencies are of doing same.

Olson - 04/01/10 - 20:52

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