

**Countywide Collaboration**

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Couple weeks ago and in the context of a couple apparatus deliveries, readers were passionately discussing our favorite recurring topic of collaboration among all fire departments in Wake County. Those discussions-- posted in postings about [Rolesville's new ladder truck](#) and [Wake Forest's new ladder truck](#)-- brought critical comments by the dozens. The points that people made were familiar to longtime readers of this blog: closest unit dispatch, staffing and training levels, automatic versus mutual aid, and such.

Saturday and a week ago Sunday, a pair of major incidents demonstrated the able collaboration of cross-country and intra-country fire departments. First was the [structure fire on Eaglerock Drive](#) on February 14. Second was Saturday's [major grass in Wakefield](#). Discussing those two incidents on the blog has seen praise and appreciation for the response and abilities of those departments and their crews.

For your Monday morning discussion, how should we square these opposing opinions? The system's broken, at least when viewed from the safety of our arm chairs. But the system works great, when the wind's blowing and the fire is spreading fast. Obviously, the truth is somewhere in-between, and probably (certainly?) weighted much heavier on the "things that work well" side.

In the wake of both these incidents and earlier discussions, what observations, lessons learned, further questions, or further points can be made, on the long-talked but still very-passionate subject of collaboration among all fire departments in Wake County? And keep up the good work.

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You are right Mr. Legeros, there has been a good show of collaboration out in the field lately. But that is the key, out in the field. The pencil pushing, desk jockey administrations of ALL departments involved where nowhere to be seen. When the &\*\$@ hits the fan, its boots on the ground that make a difference, not bugles on a shirt. What do I think will work? A county wide fire department for all the smaller organizations and a city fire department for the City of Raleigh. It will save in the long run for the county to be able to allocate all the resources, standardize training, and weed out those that just want to stand in the yard and run the show because they wont or are to inept to go inside. As for how to handle closest unit / city-county interface.....thats not my problem, my boots are on the ground.

**Boots on the Ground** - 02/21/11 - 12:29

I was at both and it seems that both had a strong "Command Presence". I absolutely think that that is the "glue" ,if you will, that keeps incidents like the ones we've had recently from spiraling out of control. We read about a strong Command Presence all the time in Firehouse or Fire Engineering and these 2 events have demonstrated just how important it is when you've got 5+ agencies responding with different capabilities, staffing and experience and make it all work.

A big observation that Ive noticed on both incidents was the amount of radio traffic and the delay caused by it. However, Chief Wilson did an outstanding job, in my opinion, when he separated the channels and reclassified the divisions into an almost an Area Command type fashion as opposed to the traditional ABCD we're all used to.

I think both fires (and even past "conflagrations") have highlighted the ingenuity, flexibility and rapid decision making of our service. As shown by the call to move apparatus into side streets with separate water supplies for the Eaglerock fire and the turning on of the sprinklers with the Wakefield Fire, the decision to call for a full alarm by initial Command. The assistance, shown time and again, by surrounding Departments to come and fill in so we can still provide service is never to be overlooked either.

The biggest observation that Ive noticed from both fires was the lack of ego by any Department. The old saying of "When the buzzer hits, the bulls\*\*\* quits" held very true. The spirit of Cooperation was strong on both incidents.

Sure, the individual Departments can always find areas to improve upon be it City, County, Paid or Volly. But it really came down to the fact that we're all Firemen, we all do the same job and we all come off the rigs with the mindset of doing the absolute best we can regardless of

rank or affiliation.

As far as points to be made, maybe we as a region, City and County should start looking at some of the West Coasts practices in terms of the Wildland/Urban interface strategy and tactics and adapt or adopt some of them to our areas. Its evident that we're seeing an increase in both number and severity of these incidents in the area of Wildlad/Urban interface and maybe we could learn from the lessons that have already been learned the hard way on the other side of the Country. Its really surprising to read about the statistics of Firefighter injury and death when fighting fires like these and we need to be as ready as possible. Not to say that what we're doing isnt working, but just maybe we can improve. If theres ever been one tradition in the Fire Service that spans the entirety of the profession, it change and our ability to adapt to it.

Just my rantings on the subject. Thanks for reading if you did and keep up the great work and spirit of cooperation. Be safe.

**Jake T.** - 02/21/11 - 12:35

Bringing someone aboard that has actually worked in a well-functioning county based system would be a start. Personally, I like the P.G. County, Maryland model. Reason being; you can still have your Chief Officers in place for each station, and it still utilizes Volunteers, just in a duty crew capacity. The departments that are municipal are separate. This is just a way to streamline things on the County level.

It would consist of standardized staffing, fire-ground ops, requirements and training countywide, and only staffed units are "ready for service". Looking at a Wake County map, it seems it would work easier in the Northern region versus the Southern, which is pretty chopped up.

Bring back the county numbering system EXCLUSIVELY (to pick on A.C. for a second, if Stony Hill was Station 26, he'd be Chief 26, with Chief 26A and Chief 26B as his Assistants. His house would have Engine 261, Tanker 26, Brush 26 and Rescue 26). Start off with each house getting an Engine, Tanker and Brush unit. Not every house needs a Ladder and/or Rescue., they can be strategically located. Based on the number of key pieces (Engines, Ladders, Rescues; tankers and brush units are cross-manned) in your house, determines the amount of funding you receive (and paid employees as well). Volunteer Officers and Members supplement the paid guys as duty crew members (a paid officer and a vollie officer are equal, because they have the same training). Drop the "living requirements"; if you live in Raleigh and want to be a Vollie, you can, just pull your duty time.

When Apex first switched to the duty crew concept years ago, and had a large active Volunteer roster, I had a great conversation with a Chief from Montgomery County, Maryland (they use a county F.D. concept). He said "you're going to lose members, get that in your head". "You may lose up to 60-70%, because this is a huge change from what being a volunteer used to be", and he was right. Members did drop off, not as much as 60-70%, but it did. Not everyone wanted to stay at the firehouse overnight, and I don't blame them. The younger guys loved it, because they were actually taking in fires and medicals within a few minutes of dispatch, not to come clean up, plus they were sharpening and actually using their skills/ training. The bigger picture though, was that we were providing a better service to our Town, a service they deserved and expected. When the pagers opened up for a house fire, three staffed pieces (two paid and one vollie) along with a Chief were hitting the street. The Battalion Chief on duty would review who was working on the duty crew, and could make a call to either relocate the members or leave them in place if he could entrust the crew.

Were there fumbles along the way? Absolutely, it is to be expected. Did we/they adapt and overcome? Yup.

With the talent/ knowledge base that Wake County has at its' county firehouses in the upper Administrations, I know they could make it work.

**Silver** - 02/21/11 - 15:18

Does our area need more awareness and more practice with urban/wildland tactics? Don't know, but it's worth citing that two of the largest residential fires in Raleigh's recent history (Pine Knoll Townes in 2007, Armadale Lane in 2010) started as grass/pine straw fires.

**Legeros** - 02/21/11 - 19:04

Just my two cents, Silver has a good point at looking to our service brothers (and sisters) in Md and Va for ideas on county wide departments. I lived in Charlottesville, Va for awhile. They had the Albemarle County Fire Dept (with each Vol. Dept maintaining their identity), City of Charlottesville, and Charlottesville-Albemarle Rescue. It seemed like everyone interfaced and cooperated well. Volunteer duty crews staffed the volunteer stations at night and supplemented the career guys during the day. It can work.

**Charlie3** - 02/21/11 - 19:51

How many alarms was the Armadale fire? I remember L2 and L5 being there but cant remember if it was just a 3 alarm or more.

**Jake T.** - 02/21/11 - 20:05

Armada was three alarms, or four alarms equivalent. <http://www.legeros.com/ralwake/photos/we..>

**Legeros** - 02/21/11 - 21:26

The main issue that has happened over the past two weekends is that both calls basically forced the use of extensive mutual aid. What we need is for it to be happening all the time, it shouldn't take a large catastrophic event to prompt this. Durham County is doing a great job of auto-aid for county/city, we don't have to look as far as PG (they do have a great system) to get some pointers.

**DC** - 02/21/11 - 23:08

In Durham, any structure fire dispatched for Lebanon or Redwood, automatically gets auto aid from the city of Durham. in the Parkwood portions of the city, the closest Engine is dispatched to a call whether that closest engine is Parkwood, Durham E12 or E16. in East Durham and southeast areas of Durham, when the City rolls on a call alot of the times Bethesda's ladder is second due. in southwest Durham, Chapel Hill will roll on calls into the city limits as Durham will also respond into orange county. Durham has also sent their crews to respond on 40 and near briar creek with other departments.

**Charles** - 02/22/11 - 02:47

I don't think this is necessarily a county wide problem. The West side of the county interacts very well with each other. Morrisville, Cary, Apex, Holly Springs all use automatic and mutual aid extensively. Morrisville only staffs two engines and a ladder full time (with four people assigned to each) and does NOT leave units not staffed in service in the CAD. On a structure fire they could get units from City of Durham, Durham Highway, Cary and Apex. Most of their fire calls get at least two different agencies. Cary gets an automatic aid unit on every structure fire call and has automatic aid for closes unit response with some departments on medical calls. Holly Springs and Apex gets help as well on fire calls. I know for a fact that all these departments also train together quite a lot. Just giving you some perspective from the west side.

**Spanky** - 02/22/11 - 07:58

A countywide system would be a step in the right direction. It would be a huge benefit to have a pool of capable fire fighters that could be used to fill in gaps at other depts on an as needed basis. Same with equipment. Yes these two fires do show the ability to work together when we really need to, but keep in mind, both those incidents were on a weekend. Volunteers are plentiful at each station. But to think you would have that level of response on a weekday would be crazy. A county wide system could help more resources more effectively.

To have a good working relationship requires the highest level of commitment to making it work. In my opinion Durham City, Apex and Morrisville have that. Raleigh's leadership isn't really interested in cultivating that relationship with anyone outside of the city. Again in my opinion not only is that short sighted, its not making the citizens either city/county any safer.

I hate to say it in the midst of everyone patting each other on the back, but if the county depts don't wake up combine, and present a unified front we are all doomed!

**Just my 2 cents** - 02/22/11 - 17:15

Very good points by all.

**A.C. Rich** - 02/22/11 - 21:28

A lot of good points here, but I do not here about Raliegh and Cary working together. I-40 is what seperates their district lines and then you have I-540 as well. Seems like there is a lot of opportunity for mutual aid response, but it seems like it rarely happens.

**Outside Looking In** - 02/23/11 - 11:45

Name: (real name  
preferred)  
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