

## Charlotte House Fire Video

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Here's a short but effective video clip from the Charlotte Fire Department of a house fire on East 15th Street on March 16. It's been featured in blogs by both [Statter911](#) and the [Fire Critic](#). Both of those bloggers are presenting at Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC) this week, and in fact opposite of each other. Literally, their sessions were at the same time. Both are quick to praise the Charlotte Fire Department for their social media efforts.

Sounds like a good second posting here, a summary of CFD and their social media channels. And/or channels in general in use around our state. What works, what's being used, what's being ignored, etc. We'll work on that. Just got back in town. Not going to FDIC. In fact, have never been. Hafta take a plane to that one, unlike the easy road to Baltimore each summer. Though any excuse to visit a Midwestern city is certainly a good one. Maybe in a future year.

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Nice video, love the Rescue boys stepping off all carrying hooks, ready to go to work.

**Silver** - 03/24/11 - 22:50

CFD has an nationally award winning PIO and social media program in their organization. Oddly, many fire departments have yet to realize the sheer power of social media and the web for the education of the masses. Hey Mike – FDIC is a good one. I had the opportunity to attend 4 times in the late 90's-early 2000's. You should go at least once... but take your wallet! :)

**A.C. Rich** - 03/24/11 - 23:01

Here is the CFD PIO webpage (blogspot). Nice site! <http://www.charlottefiredept.blogspot.co..>

**A.C. Rich** - 03/24/11 - 23:07

We (the fire service) really do ourselves a disservice by not being more public with our profession. We tend to view the media as a nuisance rather than an ally. We censor our members on a fairly regular basis and advise them to steer clear of the media at all costs. I actually dodge cameras myself when they arrive on scene... always have for some reason.

In this current setting of economic downturn, it is hard to justify our existence to the public. (See the WRAL RFD/ volunteer comment.) It is also hard to allot money to publicity when we can barely keep operations going with current budgets. We tend to be viewed as a "necessary evil," rather than something that people actually need and will use. The fact is, most people go through their entire lives without ever having

any direct involvement with our service on the receiving end of things. Other than watching a truck whizz by or seeing us at the grocery store, most people never see our real benefit to the community.

By utilizing websites and videos on public access, we show people the need, and remind them of what their hard earned money goes to. Many people think that we sit around, play poker, and watch TV all day, and just "wait on a call" (I was asked that last week by a citizen who actually meant well by the comment). We must change the public perception and clue them in to the many hours of training that we do while on shift, and the other services and programs that we provide. We must advise them of the college educations that many in our profession are seeking, in order to better serve them. An image of firefighters sitting around, being lazy, must be replaced in our taxpayers' minds with a proactive, fire prevention, and education vision. We need to embrace the media and market our service, so we can survive these lean times without any detriment to service delivery.

**Bob P.** - 03/25/11 - 14:47

Ditto Bob! Well said!

**A.C. Rich** - 03/25/11 - 15:53

Bob, I agree. The various social media sites that CFD uses attempts to show not only the calls that the department handles, but also some various training/deployments to the coast (see the NC HART video, Fire Boat video, or USAR video on Youtube). With that said, it still doesn't reach out to every one and there are still some ignorant remarks made on the various blogs/news websites about Public Safety. I guess that falls under the saying, "You can't please everyone all of the time." No matter what we're doing, some people still think we're doing it wrong, with too many people, and with too many trucks... all while wasting their tax dollars and retiring rich. (riiiiight)

All in all, I see absolutely no harm in having a social media presence as long as there is someone who can regulate/monitor that aspect of the Fire Department. There are several of us that are "checked off" on putting out twitter/google alert messages about incidents that we're handling, which helps to remove some of that workload from the PIOs.

**Luke** - 03/25/11 - 18:23

The "full picture" is something that I try to represent in the quarterly Raleigh Fire Department newsletter that I produce and edit, see the PDF versions at <http://www.raleighfirenews.org>. But that's a... fixed product. A collective of static content, recreated every three months. Better would be a digital channel— or channels— that published and promoted that content in a more frequent and more dynamic fashion. That's for the future. The scope of the newsletter has always seemed to me to be an ideal public message, or public information on what the fire department does. The soup to nuts perspective. Not just suppression. Not just waiting for calls.

**Legeros** - 03/25/11 - 18:37

Thank you to everyone for the kind words (statter911, The Fire Critic, A.C. Rich)... Social Media is a paradigm shift in the way the world is communicating. I often say, "the message hasn't changed, the way we communicate has." The culture and one could even say the tradition of public safety has been to engage in one-way communication. We've also assumed a posture of relying solely on the news media to communicate our message on their terms (they can edit your message, air your message at their discretion, and air your message at their convenience). A good friend of mine once said, why would any of us allow someone else to broker our message? Social media allows us to reach audiences we've never been able to reach before and we can reach them unabated and within moments. One last point I would like to make is, with the emergence of smartphones, camera, and video capabilities on just about all cell phones, every person has the ability to be a reporter. It is highly probable that someone is talking about your agency, we choose to take every opportunity to make sure we're the voice of our agency. By taking this approach, we've established our agency as a credible news source and more often than not, misinformation has corrected itself because of this leverage. <http://www.markbasnightcfdpio.blogspot.c>.

**Mark Basnight** ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 03/26/11 - 16:42

Thanks for chiming in, Mark! One challenge of social media is being conveniently exemplified in this very blog, in an active thread about a recent chimney fire. Most digital channels these days including functionality for comments and feedback and user responses. What happens or should happen when there's talking back? Be it from consumers (citizens) or peers (other firefighters)? Just as public presentation of a department's actions requires a certain comfort zone, so does public discussion. Heck, the latter— not only "hanging it out there" but "letting people talk about it, in plain view"— might require the greatest courage or conviction yet, for departments embracing social media.

**Legeros** - 03/26/11 - 17:37

Courage, one of the fire service's strongest and notable character traits :0) Change and the fear of the unknown are obstacles we all seem to overcome when we run into the burning structure everyone else is running out of... Embracing and engaging our respective populations by the means of social media may require a measure of courage and overcoming the fear of the unknown.

**Mark Basnight** ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 03/26/11 - 20:28

Captain Basnight, very impressive work your crew has done down there in the Queen City. We educated a few members of our community today at a local eatery we patronize regularly; they had no idea that we buy our food/meals to cook at the firehouse!!

Let me pick your brain for a sec if you don't mind; what's your opinion on "helmet cams" and their roles with educating the public? While I know footage should be screened before being posted to the social media outlets, would you consider them a great tool or a crutch?

Thanks!!

**Silver** - 03/26/11 - 20:40

Two points would like to make; Social media has to often been viewed as a means for external communication, but has been overlooked as a viable means for internal communications (ex. training, crisis communications for employees and family members). With that being said, a good policy should be in place for how any video or photos taken while employees are acting in an official member of an organization. Employees should understand this policy is in place not only to protect the organization, but also to protect the employee. If an employee posts inappropriate video on a personal site, they no longer have the protection of the organization, nor is organization obligated to represent/defend the employee. Helmet cams can be a useful tool for internal training and public education, but it should be noted that all photos and video taken by members of the organization acting in an official capacity are public record. All video and photos should be vetted before releasing for external use.

**Mark Basnight** ([Email](#)) - 03/26/11 - 21:22

Please excuse the typo's

**Mark Basnight** ([Email](#)) - 03/26/11 - 21:24

Thanks for your feedback; does CFD allow helmet cams, and if so, do you mind sharing the policy?

**Silver** ([Email](#)) - 03/26/11 - 22:10

Peer-to-peer is a gray zone, perhaps, for social media. But it interests me, and partly because this blog ([www.legeros.com/blog](http://www.legeros.com/blog)) and my photo site ([www.legeros.com/firepics](http://www.legeros.com/firepics)) serve in such a fashion. That's what people tell me, at least. (Departments and agencies that tell of how they read and learn from and utilize the content on both sites.)

The audience for these sites isn't really the general public, though Joe and Jane Six Pack do come a-calling from time to time. That's ranged from people seeking additional information about incidents to homeowners expressing praise for responders after fires. (Plus untold numbers of lurkers.)

Both sites are probably closer to internal communication sites, though they don't live behind a firewall. Perhaps in a perfect world, they'd live on an extranet, with secure access only for members or validated interested parties.

Since the sites are wide open, and can be consumed by everyone, there are filters applied. In our photos, for example, Lee and myself don't show victim faces, nor much in the way of blood or guts. The images are still perhaps disturbing in their context, but not gratuitously so.

In the case of blog topics, they've been picked and chosen using criteria developed over the last few years. That's probably its own topic, the criteria for choosing what to post or not. In short, it's a combination of "most interesting" plus "least harmful" and hopefully "some value."

**Legeros** - 03/27/11 - 19:06

Name: (real name preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

Web Site: (optional)

Comment:

Remember personal info?

Yes

No

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