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City of Charleston
South Carolina

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PUBLIC INFORMATION

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FIRE REVIEW TEAM RELEASES PHASE ONE REPORT

The Post Incident Assessment and Fire Review Team has completed its Phase I Report. The report was presented first to members of the Charleston Fire Department and families of the fallen firefighters. The City requested that the Fire Review Team conduct an independent, full-scale performance management review of the Charleston Fire Department. No restrictions were placed on the Fire Review Team's review, and they have had complete access to talk to anyone and to go anywhere they wanted to go. The City has devoted many resources and City staff to ensure that the review was open and complete.

The report is not a study of the June 18, 2007 Sofa Super Store fire. The studies and reviews of the June 18th fire are in the process of being compiled by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and will be discussed in a separate report from the Fire Review Team.

This Phase I Report is a management review of the policies, procedures, equipment and organization of the Fire Department and fire safety systems of the City of Charleston. It is a set of recommendations to guide the department in becoming a national model utilizing the highest national standards and the best practices of the fire service. The report's recommendations are listed in order of priority. Priority A recommendations are proposed to be implemented as soon as possible. Many of these recommendations which were also included in the August 17, 2007 Interim Report have already been implemented. With the help of the members of the Fire Review Team, a plan will be developed to implement the others as quickly as possible. Priority B recommendations will be implemented after the Priority A recommendations, within 2 years. Priority C recommendations are proposed to be incorporated into the department's long-range strategic planning process. The ultimate goal of the recommendations is to achieve accreditation for the City of Charleston Fire Department which will take at least two to three years to accomplish.

Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. said, "I am committed to bringing the Charleston Fire Department to the highest possible national standards in the fire service. Importantly, the implementation of the Fire Review Team's recommendations will be done with the Fire Department working together - as it has in the past - as a team. Our firefighters work hard and put forth an extraordinary effort for our citizens each and every day. Their dedication to providing exemplary service to the citizens of Charleston, as well as the Fire Department's efforts to implement the recommendations in the Phase I Report, will make the Charleston Fire Department a national model."

Chief Rusty Thomas said, "Today is the beginning of a new era for the Charleston Fire Department. We are dedicated to increasing the level of training and providing new equipment and additional staffing for our firefighters. We will be working together in the Fire Department to implement these changes so we can provide the highest level of fire service to our community."

Fire Review Team Recommendations already implemented:

Administration

- Created two new positions: Assistant to the Chief and Safety Officer to create immediate staff support and assist with implementation process
- Formed 3 committees including Apparatus and Equipment; Uniforms and Protective Gear; Safety and Health. With a 4th committee (training) slated for near future
- In process of hiring 6 new dispatchers
- Increased number of personnel on duty at all times in all companies to 3 (increase to 4 in future)
- In process of hiring additional administrative support
- Selected PIO for the Fire Department

Training

- In process of scheduling ICS training for entire dept
- Majority of command staff (two Chiefs scheduled for next week) attended ICS training overview in Montgomery County Maryland
- Incident Safety Officer class conducted for chief officers on Oct 10-11
- Health and Safety Officer training class for Safety Officer scheduled
- Safety Officer attended safety training overview in Worcester, MA
- Disseminated new training manuals in all stations on building construction, HAZ-Mat and CPR; follow-up training being scheduled

- CFD, in conjunction with surrounding fire departments, developed monthly multi-jurisdictional training exercises which started on Oct 16, 2007

Command

- Restructured current incident command practices to include size-ups; established exterior commands; and official transfer of command process
- Assignment of safety officer at all incidents
- Initial implementation of new accountability system under way (hardware purchased, and training outlined)
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Safety

- Reinforced use of protective clothing, SCBAs, seatbelts, and off-duty firefighter response procedures
- Implemented 2 in 2 out procedure
- Disseminated new policy on keeping air cylinders filled to 2000psi
- Secured funds from private donation for new uniforms; Uniform Committee to make final selection within 30 days
- Created a new policy to address hazards associated with metal truss roof system construction; follow up training being scheduled
- Contacted manufacturer and awaiting proposal for complete upgrade of SCBA (Equipment Committee to make final recommendation)
- Thermal imaging camera is on each ladder truck and is to be used at every fire by the captain.

Communications/Response

- Increased initial incident response from 2 engines/1 ladder to 3 engines/1 ladder
- Implemented sending 4th engine and 2nd battalion chief on all working fires and EMS
- Implemented use of plain talk in place of 10 codes
- Implemented utilizing 3rd engine as RIT
- Periodic meetings with staff and senior firefighter

Water Supply

- Discontinued use of booster lines on structure and vehicle fires
- Increased gallons per minute flow for all hose lines

Phase One Report - Recommendations of the Fire Review Team:

Include recommendations on the following:

- Additional Training
- New equipment
- New personal protective clothing, including upgraded bunker gear
- Additional staffing
- Additional administrative support
- Establishment of Uniform and Protective Clothing Committee
- Establishment of Apparatus and Equipment Committee
- Establishment of Health and Safety Committee
- Exchange of information and meeting with organizations that represent firefighters' interests
- Review of overtime and compensatory time policy

Implementation of the Fire Review Team's Recommendations:

- Training – The City has accepted all recommendations of the Fire Review Team in regard to training. The Fire Department's Training Division will be expanded in early 2008 from one battalion chief and one captain to a battalion chief, three captains and one administrative support person. The Fire Department will institute a Training Committee made up of a cross section of departmental volunteers. This Committee will work with Chief Thomas, Chief O'Donald, Chief Kleskie and the Departmental Training Officer to prioritize and execute a prioritized and detailed initial training plan and a sustaining training plan. All training requirements recommended will be budgeted in 2008.
- Equipment - The recently appointed Apparatus and Equipment Committee, made up of fire fighters from throughout the ranks, will act upon the recommendations of the Task Force to implement its recommendations regarding large diameter hoses and breathing apparatus. The hoses will be ordered in 2007 or as soon as recommended by the Committee and approved by Chief Thomas. The breathing apparatus recommendations will be reviewed by the Committee and acted upon within the Fire Review Team's recommended six months to two year period.
- Protective Clothing - The newly established Uniform and Protective Clothing Committee, consisting of volunteer from all ranks of the department, are presently determining their recommendation on daily uniforms that will meet NFPA best practice standards and should make a recommendation to Chief Thomas by November 1, 2007. Mayor Riley had previously recommended this expenditure (approximately \$240,000) and it has been approved by City Council. Mr. Gene

Reed, a local business executive, gave the City the full amount of the cost of the uniforms, an unbelievably generous gift. After its work on daily uniforms, the Committee will next take on review of the issue of determining a recommendation for NFPA best practices protective clothing (i.e., bunker gear). It is expected their recommendation will be available to Chief Thomas in early 2008. The City will budget for this purchase in early 2008 (approximately \$600,000).

- Additional Staffing and Administrative Support – The Task Force’s August 17, 2007 interim report covered many staffing recommendations and the Phase 1 Report expands on the Interim Report’s recommendations. The City is proactively reacting to the recommendations as follows:
 - The assignment of senior personnel to Assistant to the Chief and Safety Officer positions has been made and Chief O’Donald and Chief Kleskie are currently filling these positions.
 - Five additional fire fighters are in training and will soon join the force. These additional fire fighters will bring all City Fire Companies to a full compliment of four fire fighters assigned per shift. The Task Force recommends that the City add additional fire fighters to try to ensure all trucks leave for a fire with four fire fighters onboard (i.e., additional firefighter to cover leave, sick leave and attrition). The Task Force calculated the need for 15% additional manning. The City has accepted this additional manning recommendation and intends to implement it over the next three budget cycles. The 2008 budget will support a minimum of an additional twelve firefighters above the four per shift per company, but our goal in 2008 is to add fifteen additional fire fighters. With strong fiscal management we believe this goal is achievable. Additionally, the 2008 budget contains significantly more overtime dollars than prior years to cover the cost of ensuring actual staffing no less than three fire fighters per company per shift.
 - The recommended Fire Department PIO has been hired and will start work before November 1, 2007.
 - An additional administrative support position within the Fire Department administrative offices has been authorized and the job has been internally and externally advertised. A selection of a candidate is expected before November 1, 2007.
 - The Task Force report recommends a battalion chief and three captains in the Training Division. It also recommends a Departmental Logistics Officer. The Training Division presently has a battalion chief and a captain assigned. Three additional captains are budgeted in 2008, which will allow for recommended staffing in the Training Division and the Logistics Officer position. The administrative staff position is also budgeted for the Training Division as previously indicated above.
 - A Fire Inspections Supervisor, additional fire inspectors, a Fire Liaison position working for the Chief Building Official having matrixed reporting responsibility to the Fire Chief, a dedicated management/budget analyst

and dedicated human resources support are all recommended by the Phase I report. Several of these positions are now in place or advertised and all are budgeted in the 2008 budget.

- Committee Establishment – The Apparatus and Equipment Committee and the Uniform and Protective Clothing Committee have been established in the last several days and both will begin important work as described above immediately. A Training Committee will also be established shortly and this Committee will work closely with Chief Thomas, Chief O’Donald, Chief Kleskie and the Department’s Training Officer to prioritize and coordinate the beginning of the additional training.
- Communication with the Organizations who represent the Firefighters’ Interests – The City accepts the need for better communication with all members of the department including organizations who represent firefighters’ interests. All of the Committees described above will help with this communication process.
- Review of Overtime and Compensation Time Policy – The present policies are the direct result of the settlement of a federal lawsuit brought against the City by a number of fire fighters several years ago. A review of any changes to these policies must be approached with an understanding of how the present policies came to exist. The City will do this review, but in a careful fashion that does not guarantee any change.

FOR MORE INFO:

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