

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET

DATE ISSUED: February 16, 2006
ATTENTION: PS&NS Committee Meeting of February 22, 2006
ORIGINATING DEPT: San Diego Fire-Rescue Department
SUBJECT: Committee on Fire Accreditation International

REQUESTED ACTION:

This is an informational summary explaining the process of accreditation under the Committee on Fire Accreditation International.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Accept the Report.

SUMMARY:

The events of September, 2001, have focused national attention on the vital relationship between local public safety agencies and the overall preparedness, security and safety of our country. Such preparation requires equipment, training, personnel, and ultimately, financial support. The firestorms of October, 2003, further emphasized the unfortunate fact that the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department was not sufficiently staffed, equipped or trained to manage a large scale incident.

In response these events and based on his own assessment of the organization, Fire Chief Jeff Bowman recognized the need to evaluate the department's overall performance using the National Fire Service Accreditation model. The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) was created in cooperation with the International Association of Fire Chiefs. The CFAI employs national standards, such as the National Fire Protection Association, international standards, and historical benchmarking to create a model. This model can be employed by an authority having jurisdiction and a responsibility to provide structural fire protection along with an all risk emergency management capability to evaluate the efficacy of those efforts. The goal of this evaluative process is to develop a means to improve quality and performance, ensure community needs are met, and provide San Diego's leadership with the data to make informed decisions relative to service delivery levels. The CFAI accreditation system includes three elements: strategic plan, self-assessment and a risk assessment/standard of response coverage.

The CFAI Accreditation Model is employed as a self-assessment tool. The CFAI ensures that the model was followed and the evaluation was carried out correctly. What accreditation does is compare our City against a quantifiable national model. This model will also serve as an objective basis for comparison between our City and other jurisdictions and allows for historical comparisons as well. That San Diego is not accredited means that we are substandard in several quantifiable areas when compared to the model as applied to our community. However, there is no official sanction or penalty for not being accredited.

To initiate the accreditation process, the department completed its Five-Year Strategic Plan in June, 2004. The Strategic Plan was developed not only as a requirement for Fire Accreditation

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but also based on the need to establish strong leadership, vision and core values, as well as to create a road map to help guide the department into the future. The plan was used to define roles and responsibilities; improve accountability; create a shared vision; develop key strategic initiatives; and, build unity within the organization.

The self assessment focused on the evaluation of internal activities and services along with services the department provides to the community. This self evaluation covered a broad spectrum of services such as governance and administration; planning; financial resources; physical assets; human resources; training and competency; and essential resources to include water supply and communication systems.

The Risk Assessment/Standard of Response Coverage is the final element and ultimate product of the accreditation process. The Risk Assessment evaluated the department's ability to provide adequate policies, management, and resources to respond to an all-risk environment, including fire and non-fire incidents such as emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous materials response (HazMat), disaster management, weapons of mass destruction, aviation rescue and firefighting, marine and shipboard firefighting and rescue, and technical and swift water rescue.

All of the foregoing material, along with all the references used to compile the information, was submitted to the CFAI in February of 2005. The findings of this study resulted in San Diego not receiving accreditation and indicated that the department had significant gaps in service and exceeded nationally accepted standards in a number of areas. Some of these service gaps include square miles covered per station, response times for first-in units and full first alarm assignments, and incidents per engine district and population per firefighter. Building density was also found to be excessively high in comparison to available fire protection in a number of areas of the City, particularly in the downtown and mid-city areas.

The significance of the deficiencies that were identified in the accreditation process potentially manifest themselves in terms of a decreased ability to arrive at the scene of EMS and fires in a timely enough fashion to be most effective. In EMS incidents, irreversible brain death occurs in non breathers after 4 to 6 minutes and an early aggressive and offensive primary interior attack on a fire, where feasible, is the most effective strategy to reduce loss of lives and property damage. The lack of resources also limit the City's ability to respond to, resolve, manage, and mitigate significant natural or man made incidents and may result it increased dollar loss and increased business disruption.

Since a fire department may be thought of somewhat as an insurance policy premium, it is important to recognize the potential risks that flow from being unable to adequately equip, train, and staff its various functions.

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FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS:

None

PREVIOUS COUNCIL COMMITTEE ACTION:

None

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS:

None

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:

San Diego citizens, business community and visitors

John Jondall
Assistant Fire Chief

Jeff Bowman
Fire Chief