

Clause embodied in Report No. 1 of the Community Services Committee, which was before the Council of the City of Toronto at its meeting held on February 13, 14 and 15, 2002.

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Toronto Fire Services - Fireground Incident Technicians

(City Council on February 13, 14 and 15, 2002, deferred consideration of this Clause to the next regular meeting of City Council scheduled to be held on April 16, 2002.)

The Community Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations of the Fire Services Task Force contained in the following communication (December 20, 2001) from the Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services:

The Fire Services Task Force, at its meeting on December 10, 2001, considered a joint report (November 29, 2001) from the Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services and the Fire Chief on Fireground Incident Technicians. As a result of the meeting attended by all six councillors who are members of the Task Force, as well as by Councillor Brad Duguid, the Task Force made the following recommendations to be forwarded to Community Services Committee and thereon to Council.

The Fire Services Task Force recommended that:

- (1) the use of dedicated Fire Services Fireground Incident Technicians (FITs) be endorsed, subject to the stipulation that the Fire Chief develop statistics for monitoring the performance of FITs and report thereon to Community Services Committee and to Budget Advisory Committee as part of the 2003 Operating Budget process; and
- (2) Council acknowledge that the Fire Services Task Force has completed its mandate and authorize that it be disbanded.

The Task Force further requested that:

- (1) Councillors Altobello, Chow, Kelly, Lindsay-Luby, Ootes and Pitfield be notified in advance when the staff report on monitoring the performance of FITs is scheduled to be considered by the Community Services Committee.
- (2) these recommendations and the joint report dated November 29, 2001, from the Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services and the Fire Chief be placed on the Community Services Committee agenda.

(Joint report dated November 29, 2001, addressed to the
Fire Services Task Force from the
Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services and the Fire Chief)

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the value of Toronto Fire Services Fireground Incident Technicians.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications associated with the approval of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Council Background:

The Fire Services Task Force, during its review of the continued need and value of the Fireground Incident Technicians on June 18, 2001, recommended the following:

“That the Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services and the Fire Chief develop criteria to measure the performance of Fireground Incident Technicians and report back to the Fire Services Task Force by December 2001.

It is further recommended that the Chief Administrative Officer, the Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services and the Fire Chief submit a joint report to the Fire Services Task Force and the Budget Advisory Committee, through the Community Services Committee, in time for the 2002 budget process, providing their assessment of the continued need and value of the 64 Fireground Incident Technicians.”

Comments:

There are several factors that have led to increased demands on firefighting and risks to citizens and firefighters in recent years. The danger is increased because of the use of new technologies, and increased use of plastics/synthetics which burn hotter and release more hazardous toxins. Trends in building construction replace solid wood products with “engineered” materials that are lighter and will collapse more readily under fire conditions. Fires burn hotter (8,000-16,000 plus BTU) due to materials, and emit more hazardous toxins which, combined with more tightly sealed buildings, can lead to more hostile fires.

There is a greater risk for flashover, collapse and exposure, creating a greater need for incident safety. There is an increasing trend for lawsuits and the Fire Chief and Councillors must realistically determine acceptable level of risk.

Standards for Fire Services:

The National Fire Academy states strongly that Fireground Incident Technicians (FITs)/Incident Safety Officers (ISOs) should be experienced and trained for needs of construction and communications. The lack of FITs for command level staff contributed to four firefighter deaths in Seattle. Several surveyed departments that have eliminated FITs later reinstated them for safety reasons. The National Fire Academy supports dedicated FITs due to the Chief's responsibilities for incident command preparation while responding to the scene.

The National Fire Academy states it is not practical or efficient to obtain a trained FIT after arrival at the scene. Drafting an on-scene firefighter would provide an untrained and perhaps more importantly, inexperienced person serving as a FIT.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) states that FITs are an essential part of the Incident Management System and must continue to be deployed at each emergency incident. Preparation and discussion time during travel is a significant factor in the initial seconds and minutes of an emergency incident which mandates that the team respond together.

In developing a criteria to measure the performance of FITs, we reference the known standards benchmarked by the National Fire Protection Association:

- NFPA 1561, 1500, 1521, and 1201 outlining the function of FITs as described in emergency duties and non-emergency duties on page 3;
- strategic duties performed by a FIT that are mandatory to the Incident Management System (Appendix III); and
- Performance as described by the statements from District Chief's (Appendix III).

NFPA 1561 describes selected Incident Commander duties. They include:

- resource management;
- span of control;
- rapid evaluation of the incident;
- initiate, maintain, and control incident communications;
- maintain running log of command decisions;
- develop strategy;
- assign companies and personnel as needed;
- identify tactical objectives;
- ensure safety measures/accountability and Rapid Intervention Teams are implemented; and
- review, re-evaluate and revise the incident action plan, as incident changes require action.

NFPA 1500 and 1521 identify the need for a risk management plan and requires the use of an Incident Management System. NFPA 1201 states FITs or aides are to be provided with specialized and/or advanced training. Appendix I provides an example of the interaction and value of a District Chief and FIT working together to adhere to Fire Services standards and to provide a safe and effective firefighting force.

FIT/ISO Emergency Duties:

The following delineates important responsibilities of FITs during Emergency Duties:

- Drives to incident allowing Chief to monitor radio traffic, assess available information and develop strategy.
- Assists with radio communications, tactical communications and logs command decisions.
- Establishes initial command post and announces location to Communications Centre and on-scene apparatus.
- Tracks apparatus, reviews fire safety plans, maintains tactical boards, logs command decisions, assigns incoming units, co-ordinates information flow.
- Monitors conditions, activities and operations, reports hazards in terms of risk management plan.
- Ensures personnel accountability system is used, rehabilitation is established, collapse zones are communicated, Rapid Intervention Team is available.
- Advises Incident Commander of collapse potential, hazards or possible fire extension, hostile events, means of egress.
- Responsibility for all elements identified on Tactical Control Sheet (Appendix II).

FIT/ISO Non Emergency Duties:

The following delineates important non-emergency duties after the Fire:

- Assist the District Chief in gathering all information required to complete pertinent documentation.
- Provide an overview for post incident analysis from a safety perspective.
- Participate in safety briefings, incident action plans and investigation of accidents.
- Assist District Chief with high risk pre-planning, information gathering and documentation.

- Allows District Chief to devote more time for personnel development, training, supervision and attention to Attendance Management.
- Prepare reports, record and maintain files including fire reports, monthly runs, apparatus reports, etc.
- Maintain Command vehicle and equipment.
- Assist District Chief with staffing functions, vacation leave and other administrative duties.
- Provides specific knowledge and continuity for acting District Chiefs (from City-wide), including awareness of building stock, street closures, construction work, and high risk response locations.
- Maintains certification standards and all other training requirements for fire fighting.

The Need for Dedicated FITs:

The use of dedicated FITs is seen in Toronto, London, Windsor, Regina, Calgary, and Winnipeg. United States Fire Departments comparable to Toronto, such as New York, Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Washington D.C., San Francisco, Indianapolis, Phoenix, Los Angeles and Houston use dedicated FITs.

The Incident Commander must actively listen to all radio communications, which provide a basis for strategic decisions. The Incident Commander must communicate with dispatch regarding incident updates, agencies contacted, etc. An Incident Commander is unable to read maps safely and concentrate on emergency driving (Police blitz, re: safety violation).

During an emergency, the Incident Commander does not have time to find a qualified FIT after arriving at an incident, and will not know everyone. The Incident Commander can be overwhelmed at an incident; decisions made in the first five minutes can affect the outcome in dealing with life and death issues. As the Incident Commander and FIT work and train together as a team, efficiency and effectiveness will improve.

The FIT requires specialized training and should know and communicate with the Incident Commander and log command decisions. The FIT develops rapport and teamwork/communications with the Incident Commander which increases effectiveness. The use of FITs means that on-scene staffing levels are not decreased, and they can help guide new or Acting District Chiefs.

The following provides further evidence for the need of dedicated FITs:

- FIT allows the Incident Commander to concentrate on radio/resource information, and to formulate an action plan while responding;
- decreases response time while increasing safety during emergency response;
- increases effectiveness, efficiency and consistency at an emergency;

- maintains the integrity of committed resources at the scene;
- greatly assists “Acting” Incident Commanders; and
- protects the City against liability.

The Standard for the Incident Management Systems used by Fire Services:

The Incident Management System implemented by Toronto Fire Services (TFS) is in line with NFPA standards and identifies the Fireground Incident Technician/Incident Safety Officer role. Staff must be provided with the tools/resources to comply with our Incident Management System. It cannot be overstated that the first few minutes in an emergency are critical to the outcome of that incident.

TFS needs to be arriving with 14 staff for an optimum response to a residential structure fire. TFS arrives at a typical first alarm response one firefighter short of the staff required to operate efficiently. The majority of the time we do not have available staffing and consequently operate aerial ladder vehicles with 3 personnel, rather than the required crew of 4 personnel.

In the current staffing environment we are experiencing a maximum utilization of assembled staff at a first alarm emergency. Consequently, if the responding Chief Officer did not have a dedicated FIT/ISO, there would be a delay in reassigning a firefighter from a designated task.

Performance of FITs / ISOs:

The recommendations from the 2 Forest Laneway Inquest and Queen Street Inquest acknowledged and reinforced the need to have a developed Incident Management System and adequate staffing. The indiscriminate secondment of a firefighter from an aerial crew at the incident was unacceptable and can very easily lead to liability and safety issues.

Standards (and compliance to them) determine the “standard of care” expected and failure to meet applicable standards exposed department/corporation to potentially severe loss. Utilizing FITs protects the health and welfare of the staff. Failing to provide the Incident Commander with the trained FITs can jeopardize safety and efficiency.

The following examples show the performance of FITs that are crucial to the incident and the value of FITs to the District Chiefs (see Appendix III). Without dedicated FITs the Incident Management System is compromised.

FITs improve effectiveness (well-managed incidents are safer), efficiency and customer service. Having designated FITs is more efficient and effective than providing FIT training for all firefighters on an ongoing basis. More importantly, firefighters who have not used their skills as FITs would not be effective (if not used, skills would be lost) and jeopardize the integrity of the Incident Management System.

Having an effective Incident Management System in place protects against liability. Protecting workers in a dangerous job is the right thing to do. We must always ask, “What is the cost of not doing it?”

Command restructuring is on track in accordance with our 1999 report to Council. By June 11, 2001, we had realigned the four Commands and reduced from 18 to 16 districts allowing us to reduce from 76 to 64 operational District Chiefs. We have implemented the first phase of the Rescue Pumper program, decommissioned three vehicles, and redeployed staff to fill vacancies and FIT positions. FITs continue to be trained as Incident Safety Officers, Fireground Incident Technicians, with additional familiarization in Building Construction, Strategy and Tactics and job-specific needs.

Conclusions:

Coroner's inquests, the National Fire Protection Association and the National Fire Academy have all concluded the need for fire departments to recognize and establish the position of FITs. "It is clearly in the best interest of accountability and safety for the amalgamated City of Toronto Fire Services to fully implement this model."

The complexity of incidents in Toronto warrants the assignment of dedicated FITs/ISOs on a full-time basis for reasons of firefighter and public safety and operational efficiency. We believe the application of FITs/ISOs is legally, financially, and morally the right thing to do.

As requested, the staff report that has been reviewed by the Fire Services Task Force will be sent to the January 16, 2002, Community Services Committee.

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(A copy of each of the appendices referred to in the foregoing report was forwarded to all Members of Council with the agenda of the Community Services Committee for its meeting on January 16 and 23, 2002, and a copy thereof is on file in the office of the City Clerk, City Hall.)