You asked for it, and we delivered it! Customers asked IFSTA for a validated Hazardous Materials Technician manual for many years. We listened and released the first edition of the IFSTA Hazardous Materials Technician manual and its suite of support materials a few months ago. Its acceptance and adoption by fire departments, training agencies, and major fire service organizations was swift and far-reaching. If you are a current hazardous materials technician or someone responsible for training personnel to this level, you need to get a copy of this new manual and check it out. It is what you have always dreamed about but feared would never happen. We make things happen.

Later this spring, IFSTA will release two new editions of fire officer manuals that will cover all four levels of NFPA® 1021, Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications. First out of the box will be the fifth edition of our Fire and Emergency Services Company Officer manual. This manual covers all of the information needed to meet the requirements of NFPA® 1021 Fire Officer I and II levels. The manual will be available in print and eBook formats, and it is separated into specific sections for Levels I and II. The extensive suite of instructional support materials accompanying this manual will allow easy delivery of training courses for these two levels.

Shortly following the release of the Fire and Emergency Services Company Officer manual, IFSTA will release the third edition of its Chief Officer manual. This manual covers all of the information needed to meet the requirements of NFPA® 1021 Fire Officer III and IV levels. This manual has separate sections for each of the two levels. We designed this manual to support training courses at these levels, in use in academic programs, and for promotional testing purposes above the level of a company officer.

The final thought for this edition of My Ramblings is to encourage each of you to consider attending the Congressional Fire Service Institute’s (CFSI) 26th Annual National Fire & Emergency Services Dinner in Washington, DC, on April 30 and May 1. IFSTA is a major supporter of this event. CFSI does a tremendous amount of work every year to support fire and emergency services in the halls of Congress. Supporting its cause through attending this supporter of this event. CFSI does a tremendous amount of work every year to support fire and emergency services in the halls of Congress. Supporting its cause through attending this supporter of this event.

Slow down and keep all of your wheels on the road!

Mike Wieder
Associate Director, FPP
Executive Director, IFSTA
Education? Certification? Experience? Yes!

Allan Rice, Executive Director

There are certain topics that are guaranteed to spark a lively debate in any fire station in America, and one of them is the role that education, training, and experience should play in determining fire service hiring and promotions. We can be rather certain that this was among the first arguments to break out after Ben Franklin founded the Union Hose Company. This is one of those red-in-the-face, intensely personal debates that can rage on for years within a fire department. I’m sure that most of us have heard this argument many times, but are we missing some key points about this issue?

Years ago, formal education was uncommon and arguably not required for effective performance as a firefighter. There was no EMS, hazmat, technical rescue, or emergency management to consider, and the job was centered solely on the extinguishment of fires. Cognitive ability (“book smarts”) was not really valued because it just wasn’t essential to doing the job.

As the fire service matured, we found that it was important to document capability in certain areas. We began to develop formal training programs that led to certification. These were technical courses that provided applied information about the basics of fire fighting tactics, equipment operation, and some management/supervision topics. This began our journey down the pathway to what we now consider to be our professional status.

As the whirlwind of new responsibilities engulfed us, we started to realize that a formal education could be a valuable tool, but typically only for fire chiefs. It was many more years until completing a college degree became a common goal for rank-and-file firefighters. Now, we see a much higher number of fire service professionals completing degrees, and we have started to see an influx of young people who have completed college prior to starting their careers.

So, this brings us full circle: Which of the three is the best to possess? Is it education, training, or experience? The answer is “yes.” All of these are really just different ways to accomplish the same thing, which can best be described as “knowledge gain.” Although we usually argue vehemently in favor of the characteristic(s) that we personally possess, the truth is that all three are valuable preparation for firefighters.

We like to say things like “You can’t learn this job from a book,” but my question has always been “Who wrote the book?” In other words, when we read a fire service textbook, aren’t we really just receiving the benefit of someone else’s experience? All the books I ever saw on a promotional test list were written by a veteran chief who possessed decades of experience from some huge metropolitan fire department, and nobody would dispute the author’s expertise. If we could have had these old fire warriors come by our station to tell their stories around the dayroom, we would have agreed that this was a fantastic way to learn about our job. But let them write these same lessons onto paper and put them between two covers, and some of us immediately dismiss the information as irrelevant and artificial. Education is really just a set of planned experiences, and it certainly has its place in today’s fire service.

What about training classes? Isn’t there good stuff that we can learn without attending college? Of course, there is. With so many options for training available, it is important that we spend our time pursuing legitimate courses that will truly enhance our skill set. These can come from a variety of sources, but the good ones will share certain benchmarks of quality. The safest bet is to pursue training that leads to certification from an accredited entity, such as your state/provincial fire training agency.

Lastly, how important is experience? Some people will tell you that nothing else matters, but this depends on the quality of the experience. We all know that ten years in one department, or at one fire station, is not the same experience as ten years at another. However, don’t be fooled by the “fallacy of being busy.” A firefighter who has done things incorrectly, and done them a lot, does not possess high-quality experience. While it is true that nothing replaces actually “doing it,” the problem with experience is that it is accumulated randomly and is beyond the control of the firefighter in terms of quality and quantity.

So, if you are in the early stages of your career and are wondering which of these will help you the most, the answer is “all of them.” The best-prepared firefighter will pursue education and training and will make the most of experience as it comes his or her way. Rather than making an artificial choice, we should seek a balance of all of these factors to prepare us for the challenges of the job.

About the Author
Allan Rice has been the Executive Director of the Alabama Fire College and Personnel Standards Commission since August 2007. His public safety career spans twenty-four years, including fifteen years of service with the City of Hoover Fire Department. He has previously served as the Program Coordinator for Fire Science and Emergency Medical Services at Jefferson State Community College, as a consultant to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Center for Domestic Preparedness, and as a trauma and flight nurse.

Allan currently serves as the president of the North American Fire Training Directors, which is the professional organization of all fire-training agencies in the U.S. and Canada.

He received a paramedic certificate and Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a Master’s degree of Public and Private Management from Birmingham-Southern College. He and his wife, Kelly, live in Hoover with their two sons, Henry and Cooper.
GUEST EDITORIAL

Building Meaningful Community Relationships

By Tom Jenkins

Mandy is our customer. She works for a large firm in our city and, prior to 2013, probably never thought about where her tax dollars went or how her local fire department used them to safeguard her family. Her family, which included a young daughter and a husband, was excited to welcome a second daughter into the world last year. However, they never suspected that Mandy would give birth suddenly at 34 weeks in her bedroom. Luckily for her, the fire department was just a mile or so away. The baby was born with some complications, but is healthy and happy today. As if the year couldn’t get any more challenging, Mandy saw her marriage dissolve. A few months after that, Mandy was alarmed by a call from her nanny that a brush fire was approaching her home in the hilly wooded area of her subdivision. She was relieved to come home and find her residence unharmed, with firefighters from the same station that delivered her baby a year earlier protecting it.

After having so much exposure to the local fire department, Mandy decided to stop by the firehouse to visit with me. I had never met her before, and although I remember hearing about the firefighters who delivered her daughter, the specifics escaped me. As she visited with me, I was captivated to hear about her stressful year. She told me how many of her friends thought she had an “unlucky” year. I was flattered to listen to her explain to me how she corrected them and helped them understand how “lucky she was because the fire department is just around the corner!” She went on to describe that although the year had been challenging, she was surrounded by a great support network. “I’m blessed to have people that are there for me when I need them. My mom and dad, brother, the firefighters, my friends…” and the list went on. For a few seconds, I thought maybe I didn’t hear her correctly. “Did she just say that WE, the firefighters, were part of her support network?” I thought to myself.

Indeed, Mandy had learned that her taxes went to more than shiny fire trucks or pothole-free roads. In this case, Mandy had paid taxes and gained people that would treat her with respect, competence, and uncompromisingly high standards. The day that Mandy came and visited with me, I learned that sometimes we become more than just public servants to people. We become their guardians.

In my conversations with colleagues, I believe we forget what this business is all about from time to time. I frequently find myself frustrated and blindly focused on projects that involve complicated budgets, challenging technical details, and ever-changing requirements. All of these projects and processes that we manage, lead, and implement within our fire departments, stations, and individual companies are important. However, it is more important that we don’t lose focus on the desired intent of our efforts: to be our community’s support network. Mandy’s story is real and her decision to share her thoughts with our department invigorated me to go back to my office and work harder to ensure that our firefighters are prepared any time our citizens need us to be their support network. While some of our jobs involve a lot of office work, while others get to perform the heroics, we’re all important elements in our municipal jurisdictions. Lives depend on our function as a team.

Training and education are the backbones of our organizations. In the near future, the updated Company Officer and Chief Officer manuals will allow for us to train firefighters with the latest and greatest information available. We use these manuals as the industry standard because of the validation process used to develop and integrate real-world information with the requirements of performance standards. However, Mandy’s story should remind us all that content and development of our responder training is only a piece of the puzzle. Training and education alone are useless without an understanding that we must take the information and convert it into meaningful community interactions. Although none of us feels like a hero, we are seen that way by many. We are watched with pride and comfort from young and old alike. It only takes a few minutes to visit with one of our “raving fans” to remind us why we chose this career.

About the Author:

Tom Jenkins serves as the fire chief for the City of Rogers, Arkansas Fire Department. Previously Tom served as Deputy Chief for the City of Sand Springs (Oklahoma) Fire Department. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Fire Protection and Safety Engineering Technology from Oklahoma State University, and a Master’s degree in Public Administration from the University of Oklahoma. He is a 2006 graduate of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland and is also recognized as a Chief Fire Officer and Chief EMS Officer designee from the Commission on Professional Credentialing in 2010. He serves on the Industrial Advisory Board for Oklahoma State University’s Fire Protection and Safety Technology Program and also serves as an adjunct professor for Oklahoma State University and Northwest Arkansas Community College.

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Advocating for Increased Fire Prevention - Online Resources

Vision 20/20 offers free materials and guidance in its online Advocating for Fire Prevention Toolkit. These resources were developed specifically to help the fire service gain advocates who can help increase needed resources and encourage broader participation in their fire prevention efforts.

One of the most important and challenging aspects of community risk reduction is the ability to convey the value of investing in public safety and fire prevention to a broad audience. With increased demand for services and with fewer resources, it is more important than ever to help decision makers and the public understand the value of prevention and to gain their support for programs that can prevent and reduce losses from fire and other risks.

Content in the Toolkit is organized according to these basic steps: 1) demonstrate need, 2) demonstrate results, and 3) develop relationships.

The many resources within the Toolkit help make the case for investing in prevention, including:

- Links to reliable national data sources to describe risk in real numbers
- Sample templates for using local data to focus attention on the need and the benefits of prevention
- Case studies from programs that document how prevention has saved lives, property, and the community
- Tools and guidelines for making effective presentations and for working with the media
- Evidence of how partnerships can increase reach and save resources
- Two short videos for download:
  - Advocating for Prevention illustrates the need for advocacy and encourages those individuals within the fire service to get started with an advocacy strategy.
  - Prevention Saves demonstrates to the community how investment in prevention saves the things most important to them.

The Advocacy toolkit, produced and updated with AFG funding, is an online resource available at www.strategicfire.org.
National Effort to Update Smoke Alarm Messaging

Salter>Mitchell, a leading behavior change marketing firm, is working with Vision 20/20 to craft effective smoke alarm messages for the public. Effective messages communicate about smoke alarms and cause adults to change their behavior relating to smoke alarms in their homes.

Earlier, Salter>Mitchell research established the overall message for home fire prevention – “Fire is Everyone’s Fight” – along with effective messaging for kitchen fire safety – “Keep an Eye on What You Fry.” Now, the firm has completed a study to test three smoke alarm concepts based on best practice social marketing recommendations.

A research manager and the Vision 20/20 team presented the results in a webinar in February. You can read the outcomes of their work, which included interviews with people in “at risk” neighborhoods and with fire chiefs. Messages and images were included in the work with consumers. You can access the information at http://strategicfire.org/page.cfm/go/Webinars/.

The Smoke Alarm Problem

This study was generated from a desire to better understand the scope and nature of smoke alarm use in the United States. It is influenced by national reports on the topic, and combined with experiences from the many field programs on community risk reduction efforts undertaken as part of the Vision 20/20 project. When two-thirds of people dying in home fires do so where smoke alarms are either not present or not working, we clearly have a problem – a problem with getting homeowners to install enough smoke alarms to adequately protect their homes and to maintain them in working order. This is a problem that was identified as a priority in the original Vision 20/20 plan in 2008.

In order to move forward with specific actions to improve the number of homes with working smoke alarms, we first needed a better understanding of the nature and scope of their use. This report considers the previous and relevant research on the issues and provides impetus for that action. It also presents an underlying call for additional studies to more fully understand why people do not have working smoke alarms.

There are several issues highlighted in the study, among them:

• Smoke alarms, while perceived as important devices, are not ones that people interact with on a regular basis and are not viewed as essential to daily living as other devices may be. This leads to a failure to install or maintain them.

• Consumers may be overwhelmed with the number of choices they face in selecting alarms.

• Consumers may have a difficult time understanding what it is they need with sometimes conflicting and confusing legislation, codes, and standards.

• Nuisance alarms may be a significant factor in understanding why people disable smoke alarms.

• Field experience of home safety visits, especially in high-risk areas, shows that the number of homes with working smoke alarms may be much lower than previously thought.

“This important topic arose out of discussions in the Vision 20/20 project about the obvious need for working smoke alarms in the United States,” said Jim Crawford, Vision 20/20 Project Manager. “Richard Taylor was asked to review this problem and spent months looking over research and literature to prepare this remarkable study. It points to gaps in our understanding of why people don’t have working smoke alarms and will hopefully lead to strategies to address these root causes.”

Read/download the report at http://strategicfire.org/page.cfm/go/Smoke-Alarm-Study.
2014 IFSTA Winter Meetings

The 2014 IFSTA Winter Meetings were held at the Renaissance Tulsa Hotel & Convention Center in Oklahoma from January 16–19. The purpose of the winter meetings is two-fold:

- The IFSTA Executive Board meets to conduct the business of the organization.
- Active manual validation committees meet to review drafts of new or revised manuals that are in development at the time of the winter meetings.

The IFSTA Executive Board conducted a full day of business on January 16 and continued meeting until noon the following day for a planning session. The main topic for the IFSTA Executive Board Planning Session was the Technology Department Overview and Updates of Fire Protection Publications (FPP). These updates included Information Technology, eProducts, Web Analytics and Social Media. The planning session concluded with a seven minute video on home fire sprinkler retrofits for people with disabilities. The title of the video is *Meet Natalea Home Fire Sprinkler Retrofit* and is available on the Internet.

There are several other events that occur during this time:

- Nominations and Election Procedures Committee Meeting
- Delegate Selection Committee Meeting
- New Attendee Orientation
- Opening General Session

IFSTA delegates working on active validation committees met on January 18 and 19. The working committees that met were:

- Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting, 6th Edition
- Building Construction Related to the Fire Service, 4th Edition
- Fire Detection and Suppression Systems, 5th Edition
- Fire and Emergency Services Safety Officer, 2nd Edition

The 2014 Annual IFSTA Validation Conference will be held July 12–15. All conference events will be conducted at the Renaissance Tulsa Hotel & Convention Center. IFSTA is soliciting members for new committees to meet at the 2015 IFSTA Winter Meeting. Visit [http://info.ifsta.org/about/val-comm-mi/22-about/1227-winter-app](http://info.ifsta.org/about/val-comm-mi/22-about/1227-winter-app) for more information.
Welcome New FPP Staff Members

Jayne Ann Williamson
Jayne Ann Williamson, the new Instructional Developer, received her Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education from Oklahoma State University. She is a National Board Certified Teacher with 21 years of experience in the classroom. In addition to her classroom experience, she is also a consultant with TERC, a non-profit research and development organization committed to improving teaching and learning. Before joining FPP in January, she served as the Assistant Director of the Reading and Mathematics Center for Oklahoma State as well as an adjunct faculty member for the College of Education.

Brett Rostykus
Brett Rostykus is the new Computer Specialist at FPP. One of Brett’s favorite things to do outside of work is shoot and edit video. He has been doing so since 2004. He has a degree in video and film production, which he uses in his spare time to shoot weddings, sports, events, etc. He loves spending time with his beautiful wife and their two dogs.