Administrative Functions

Chapter Contents

NFPA® Job Performance Requirements

This chapter provides information that addresses the following job performance requirements of NFPA® 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* (2014).

4.4.1	**4.4.5**
4.4.2	**4.6.3**
4.4.3	**5.6.2**

Administrative Functions

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, students will be able to:

1. Explain the customer service concept in relation to the fire service. [NFPA® 1021, 5.6.2]
2. Describe the function of policies and procedures in administrative duties. [NFPA® 1021, 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.3, 4.6.3]
3. Identify the budget process. [NFPA® 1021, 4.4.3]
4. Define the role of records management in administrative duties. [NFPA® 1021, 4.4.2, 4.4.5]
5. Propose a revision to existing departmental procedures. [NFPA® 1021, 4.4.1; Learning Activity 6-1]
6. Develop a budget request for a specific departmental need. [NFPA® 1021, 4.4.3; Learning Activity 6-2]
7. Maintain a log of routine, unit-level administrative functions. [NFPA® 1021, 4.4.2, 4.4.5; Learning Activity 6-3]

Chapter 6
Administrative Functions

Case History

A group of assistant chiefs and company officers of a large fire and emergency services organization was assigned to review and update the organization's policies and procedures manual. The task proved difficult due to the size of the organization and its extensive geographic area. It was difficult for personnel to attend meetings due to their routine and emergency response duties and responsibilities. Suggested changes were made and discussed only during the occasional meetings. These and other impediments put the project behind schedule.

While attending a fire and emergency services conference, one young company officer from the group learned of online programs that might be of assistance. Upon returning to work, he suggested using two online collaborative programs. One program allows the sharing of the documents digitally with the team, and the other program provides online meetings to allow team members to attend the meetings more often. The team's collaborative process improved dramatically, major improvements were made to the organization's policies and procedures, and the project was soon ahead of schedule. Use of these and other online programs became part of the organization's policies and procedures. The young company officer was rewarded with a new role in the organization's administration section with additional authority and responsibilities.

Company officers may often be assigned a number of administrative functions. These functions may include but are not limited to:

- Providing customer service
- Preparing and administering policies and procedures
- Preparing or assisting in the preparation of the organization's budget

Over the last couple of decades, the fire and emergency services organizations have had to adopt a customer service focus. Company officers and their personnel play a vital role in their organization's customer service concept. These personnel are often the first to meet with the public who rely on the organization's services, both non-emergency and emergency.

Company officers must deal with written policies and procedures on a daily basis. They must comply, enforce, and educate their personnel on the policies and procedures in effect and may participate in the revision of these or the development of new ones. Company officers should be thoroughly familiar with their organization's policies and procedures and with the methodologies their organizations use to revise and develop them.

Company officers should know the types of records that they are required to develop, maintain, and store and how to access these records. They should be familiar with electronic data storage and recovery and the computer system and programs their organization uses.

This chapter describes the customer service concept, policies and procedures, the budget process, and records management. While these topics could each fill numerous books, this book will focus on how the company officer manages these topics.

Customer Service Concept

The groups of people the fire and emergency service organizations serve are often referred to as customers. Fire and emergency services organizations provide services to internal employees, external beneficiaries, and stakeholders **(Figure 6.1)**.

The customer service concept is valuable to any organization. In the private sector, the bottom line is the profit or loss of the business. In emergency services organizations, customer satisfaction and the value you bring to the community is the bottom line.

The public must believe that they are getting quality service for the taxes and fees they pay. A dissatisfied public can demand change in leadership or how the service is provided.

In order to ensure that the proper level of customer service is being provided, company officers should strive to meet the following objectives:

- Generate productive professional relationships with the customers and implement organizational strategic plans.
- Form individualized relationships with stakeholders within organizational policies and procedures.
- Educate their personnel about the community's expectations.

Figure 6.1 Examples of a fire and emergency services organization's customer base.

Customer Base

It is important to define who the customers are and monitor their changing attitudes. All fire and emergency services organizations have the following types of customers:

- **Internal customers** — Employees and members of the organization, including emergency personnel, administrative staff, and officers. Each group will have its own wants and needs.
- **External customers** — Members of the general population within the service area who are beneficiaries of the services provided and people responsible for providing the majority of the funds needed to operate the organization. They are not a homogeneous group of people who have the same needs, wants, and desires.

Needs, Wants, and Desires

Humans have basic needs, general wants, and very specific desires. These three terms are often confused with one another. A comparison of needs, wants, and desires is as follows:

- I need transportation.
- I want a car.
- I desire a luxury sport utility vehicle (SUV).

The needs, wants, and desires of people are not constant or static. They vary with the individual customer from day to day and even moment to moment. Many organizations or municipalities have suffered revenue shortfalls, limiting the amount and method for raising funds while still being expected to maintain or increase the previous levels of service. It is beneficial to company officers to identify the customers, monitor their changing expectations, and communicate this information to their organization.

Internal Customers

Internal customers are those within the organization. Their wants include but are not limited to:

- Fair compensation
- Reasonable benefits
- Position security
- Rewarding experiences
- Safe working environments
- Ethical leadership
- Dignity that comes from respectful management
- Feeling of being an integral part of an organization

In career and combination organizations, the labor/management agreement and/or civil service process where one exists satisfies most of the tangible needs. Chief officers, company officers, and members who compose the workgroup supply the intangible needs.

External Customers

While the specific needs of external customers vary, the basic needs are generally protection of their lives and property from the effects of fires and other hazards and access to competent emergency medical care. As the demographics of the service area change, services need to keep pace with them.

Information-Gathering Methods

Information on the needs, wants, and desires of customers can be gathered through a passive method where the organization simply waits for a customer to express a specific need, want, or desire. This approach takes very little effort in terms of time or money. The problem with this approach is that it is reactive, is crisis-oriented, and can be biased. When a customer has finally expressed an opinion, the problem may already exist and will require an immediate change.

A second, more active approach takes the initiative and seeks information on a regular basis from internal and external customers and stakeholders. This approach may be accomplished through periodic meetings, surveys, and informal interviews **(Figure 6.2)**. Each of these ways is based on the concept of feedback. Listening to feedback is a primary method for determining the needs, wants, and desires of any of the three groups of customers. The company officer may be involved in the collection of information using the feedback approach.

Meetings

Allowing customers to be involved in the decision-making process at meetings benefits the organization. Internal customers view this involvement as empowerment that can improve their morale and productivity. Examples of meetings include:

- Supervisor and an employee
- Division manager and subordinates
- Administration and labor organization representatives

Surveys

Company officers may provide or conduct surveys, which are another method for gathering information from customers. These surveys may be conducted following an emergency response (for example, a fire or an EMS response) to determine the customer's satisfaction with the service provided. Customer surveys also identify the services that external customers believe should be provided.

Informal Interviews

Company officers may conduct informal interviews with their subordinates. The interviews are opportunities to determine if changes are needed in the work environment, policies, or other work-related issues. These interviews may identify the first indicators of potential trends that may affect others in the workgroup.

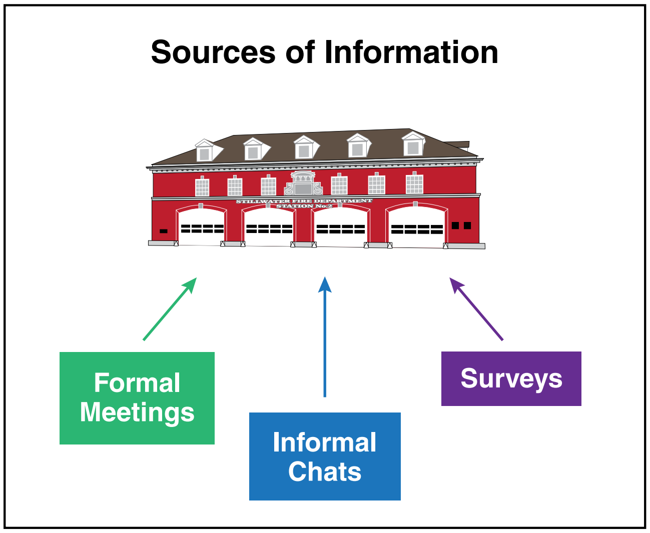

Figure 6.2 Information can be gathered through formal meetings, informal interviews or chats, and surveys.

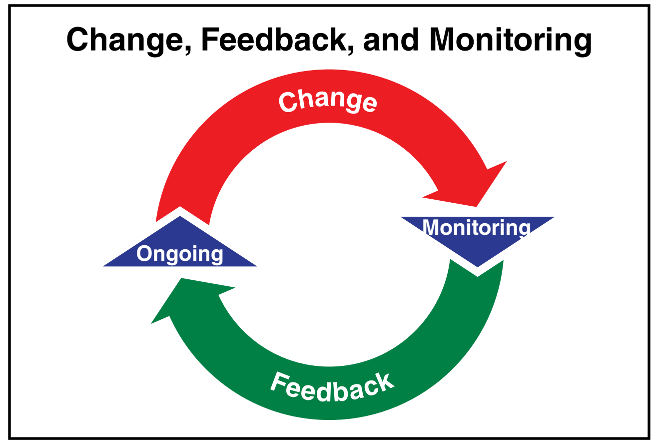

Figure 6.3 An example of a change-feedback loop.

Information Interpretation

Gathering information on customers and their needs/wants/desires is only the beginning of the customer service process. Those needs/wants/desires must then be analyzed to determine operational change suggestions, fiscal requirements, and priorities.

Service-Delivery Monitoring

To determine the success or failure of any change in service, the organization monitors the outcome of the change. This monitoring occurs over the life of the change, usually at specified periods, such as monthly, semiannually, or annually. Meetings, interviews, and surveys are used to monitor the change. When feedback indicates that needs are being adequately and efficiently met, monitoring will then be used to determine whether they change over time, requiring an alteration in the service level in the future **(Figure 6.3)**.

Policies and Procedures

Written policies and procedures are essential for the effective and efficient operation of any fire and emergency services organization. They document the organization's expectations based on its organizational model and strategic and operational plans. An organization may use the following methods to ensure that policies and procedures are fully understood and complied with:

- Distribute in written or electronic format.
- Post in a conspicuous place in all facilities.
- Verify that personnel have received the communication.

Policies and procedures are also known as:

- Standard operating procedure (SOP)
- Standard operating guideline (SOG)
- Administrative policies and procedures
- Policies and procedures

Policies and procedures must contain information that is current and appropriate. The organization should have an established process to evaluate the need for creating new policies and procedures and revising existing ones. Policies and procedures are continually monitored for effectiveness.

Company officers must explain organizational policies and procedures to subordinates and new employees as part of their training. Whenever company officers learn of a new relevant law or regulation from any level of government, they have an obligation to inform their superiors about it. This information helps determine if new organizational policies and procedures are needed to comply with the new legislation. In some jurisdictions, accepted practices that deviate from written policies or procedures may legally become a policy or procedure.

Policies

As previously stated, a policy is a guide to organizational decision-making. Organizational policies originate with top management and are disseminated to lower levels for implementation. Policies not only aid in decision-making, but they also define the boundaries and standards that the administration expects company officers and members to use.

Policies are created when formal written guidelines or criteria are needed for the operation of the organization. Policies are placed and maintained in physical (manuals) or electronic forms (organization's intranet). Some policies are the result of government regulations. A policy analysis is performed when changes in operations require changes in policies.

Some policies result from an appeal to management for guidance in making decisions about exceptional situations. This appeal is moved upward in the organization's hierarchy until it reaches someone who has the authority to make the decision. The decision-maker may write a policy for handling similar cases in the future. A company officer may make a decision in order to resolve a problem, and this decision serves as a precedent that evolves into organizational policy.

The company officer's duty regarding policies is to understand and apply them fairly and consistently. Correct interpretation and application of organizational policies may require consultation (through the chain of command) with the administration. Formal instruction in organizational policies and their interpretations is necessary for all members of the organization **(Figure 6.4)**.

Policy Analysis

A policy analysis determines if current policies are effective and enforceable, or if the lack of policies caused problems. This analysis often occurs when an organization is experiencing internal difficulty. The analysis process takes time and effort and may require the assistance of an outside agency such as the authority's legal department or human resources department. If the problems are not severe, the organization can form an internal committee or task force to provide the analysis.

Figure 6.4 Senior officers need to ensure their subordinates fully understand organizational policies and procedures.

Government Laws or Ordinances

Federal mandates, state/provincial regulations, local government laws, codes, and ordinances sometimes impose policies upon fire and service organizations. For example, the federal government imposed equal employment opportunity practices.

Policy Manual

Policies must be communicated throughout the organization to make the administration's intent clear. Written policies give members of the organization a reference point for decision-making. Collectively, these policies form the organization's policy manual. Organized, well-drafted policies promote consistent, uniform practices throughout the organization and more predictable outcomes in the field.

Procedures

A procedure details in writing the steps to follow in conducting organizational policy for some specific, recurring problem or situation. Procedures may be developed with input from the company level because these individuals will be responsible for following and implementing procedures to meet corresponding policies.

Most organizations provide personnel with detailed information for handling specific situations. SOPs provide a consistent point of reference that helps all members of the organization perform to a measurable standard. They can reduce misunderstandings about techniques, responsibilities, and procedures. SOPs are the basis for company-level skills training, such as initial fire attack, use of the Incident Command System (ICS), rapid intervention crew (RIC) procedures, fire ground search and rescue and more. It should be noted that in emergency services it is impossible to create an SOP for every situation that may be encountered.

Revision and Monitoring Process

The organization should establish a process for revising policies and procedures. The company officers should be familiar with the process. A decision-making model described earlier in this manual may be applied to this process. Examples of when policies and procedures should be revised include:

- Is there a specific timetable for revision?
- Do conditions or circumstances cause a policy or procedure to need revision?
- Do the policies or procedures require any revisions?

Indications that a policy or procedure needs to be revised may include the following:

- Internal/external customer complaints
- Increase in policy or procedure infractions
- Injuries or property loss due to a failure of the policy or procedure
- Change in the resources used to accomplish the task
- Change in the problem that the policy or procedure was intended to solve
- New technology
- Legal mandates

Company officers must communicate any concerns or problems with the policies and procedures to their supervisors. As the first level of supervision within the organization, company officers are responsible for administering policies and procedures and reporting any problems that occur when using or enforcing them.

Figure 6.5 Company officers assign tasks at an emergency by issuing orders.

Orders and Directives

Orders and directives can be used interchangeably depending upon the organization and are based upon the authority delegated to the company officer. Company officers may issue many verbal or written orders and directives. At an emergency incident, they are both considered mandatory because of the situation.

Issuing orders at an emergency incident is an important company officer supervisory duty **(Figure 6.5)**. Orders also aid in training and developing cooperation. Properly given orders result in the need for less supervision in the future as members learn what is expected of them.

Company officers must control their emotions when issuing orders at emergencies. Detection of any anxiety, uneasiness, or extreme excitement in company officers can influence the emotions and performance of firefighters in their companies. Emergency incident orders must be issued calmly, clearly, concisely, and completely. This duty requires strong leadership abilities and a command presence on the part of the company officer.

Another supervisory duty of company officers involves issuing and enforcing unpopular orders. Sometimes the administration establishes policies and procedures that may adversely affect firefighters. It falls to company officers to implement and enforce these orders.

To develop support for an unpopular order, company officers should find out why the order was issued. Chief officers do not issue orders frivolously, so they must have good reasons for issuing a controversial one. Company officers should make every effort to find out what those reasons are so they can explain the necessity for the order and answer any questions that their subordinates might have.

Budget Process

Every fire and emergency services organization must have a budget with which to operate. In this manual, budgets refer to the narrow financial budget that lists both proposed expenditures (personnel pay, benefits, facilities, apparatus, materials, utilities, and insurance) and expected revenue sources.

The revenues that fund the organization's budget may come from a variety of sources. Common revenue sources include but are not limited to:

- Taxes
- Fees
- Fundraising events
- Private and corporate donations
- Government subsidies and grants

Company officers must be able to prepare budget requests to obtain the items needed to operate their particular companies or sections. They must understand the types of budgets normally used in their organization, types of revenue sources available, and the steps of the budget process itself. While local laws and ordinances vary, basic budgetary theory remains the same among jurisdictions.

Historically, company officers have not had direct control over the budget allotted at the company level. More recently, an increasing number of jurisdictions have assigned budget responsibilities to the company officer. The benefits to the organization include the reduction of delays in performing general maintenance and obtaining disposable items. It also provides some experience for company officers to work with a budget and make decisions accordingly.

Budget Types

Company officers may be responsible for preparing budget requests to obtain the items needed to operate their unit, station, or section. Public organizations use two types of budgets: capital budgets (projected major purchases) and operating budgets (recurring expenses of day-to-day operation). It's important to understand that in most cases funds cannot be transferred between capital and operating budgets based on governing authorities.

Capital

A capital budget includes projected major purchases — items that cost more than a certain specified amount of money and are expected to last more than 1 year (usually 3 or more years). Fire apparatus and vehicles, equipment, and facilities are typical capital items for fire and emergency services organizations.

Operating

An organization's operating budget is used to pay for the recurring expenses of day-to-day operations. The largest single item in the operating budget of most career organizations is personnel costs — salaries and benefits. Personnel costs (sometimes called personnel services) may represent as much as 90 percent of the operating budget. Considering that noncash (fringe) benefits cost some jurisdictions an amount equal to 50 percent of a person's base salary, it is easy to understand why the personnel-services category represents such a high percentage of the budget. Operating budgets also pay for the following:

- Utilities
- Office supplies
- Apparatus and vehicle fuel
- Janitorial supplies
- Contract services for the maintenance of apparatus and facilities
- Other items needed on a daily basis

Process Steps

Budget development is an involved and ongoing process. The steps involved in the budget process are planning, preparing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating, and revising **(Figure 6.6)**.

Planning

The budget planning process continues throughout the current fiscal year. Budgets are planned for the next fiscal year using:

- Tax projections
- Expected grants and subsidies
- Expected fees for services
- Bond sales
- Funds from other sources

Preparation

Estimated revenues from all sources are translated into preliminary budget priorities. Organizations may be informed of general fiscal conditions and what parameters to work within during department budget planning and preparation sessions. Preparation sessions will take into account the types of spending (fixed cost, discretionary, and emergency). Other considerations in preparation include:

- **Justifications** — Justifying a budget request requires documentation and supporting evidence that proves the request is valid. Thorough research and internal records are the basis for this documentation. This information is not only used to justify the budget request, it is also used to prepare the budget.
- **Internal reviews** — The organization's administrator, the chief/manager of the department/organization, or staffs of both organizations thoroughly review the fire and emergency services budget request. After the internal review, the budget is incorporated into the combined budget request for the entire parent organization and submitted to the jurisdiction's governing body for an external review.

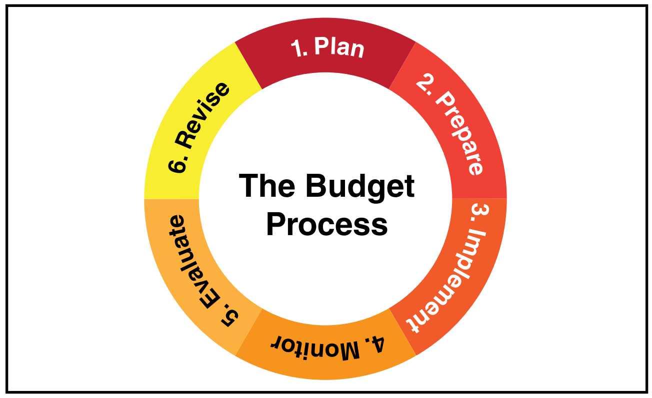

Figure 6.6 Illustrating the steps in the budget process.

- **External reviews** — The external review is the final review that the budget-request document receives. The governing body of the jurisdiction schedules one or more public hearings so that citizens of the jurisdiction can have input on the budget. The budget may be revised in light of citizen interests or concerns.

Implementation

The approved and adopted budget represents a plan for the organization's operation for the fiscal year. Once approved and adopted, the administrator, department heads, managers, and supervisors will have the funds to turn budgets into reality. The budget identifies whether new personnel can be hired, staff cuts will be necessary, vacant positions can be filled, and new equipment can be purchased. Company officers can explain the adopted budget to subordinates and clarify any misconceptions that may exist.

Monitoring and Evaluating

The budget process does not end with the implementation of the budget. The budget must be monitored and evaluated in order to determine its effectiveness and prevent a budgetary crisis in the event of a change in the economic environment. The processes for monitoring and evaluating a budget are often identified in the organization's policies and procedures.

Revision

A budget may have to be revised during the budget cycle. Causes may include:

- Decrease in revenue
- Increase in operating costs
- Underestimation of actual costs
- Increase in service requirements
- Change in labor/management agreement
- Unforeseen or catastrophic occurrence

Records Management

Company officers must also be familiar with *records management*, which is the systematic control of an organization's records to ensure quick access to information. Records management programs need to allow personnel to input and extract information effectively. Supervisors must understand the records management process of an organization. An organization's records management system may perform the following actions:

- Operate efficiently and effectively.
- Prepare short-, medium-, and long-range plans.
- Meet legal and AHJ obligations and requirements.
- Meet the expectations of internal and external customers and stakeholders.
- Identify and safeguard historically important records.
- Assign tasks and identify responsible individuals.

Systematic management of records assists the organization in performing the following actions:

- Know what records the organization has and how to locate them easily.
- Save administrative costs, both in staff time and storage capacity.
- Support decision-making processes.
- Be accountable.
- Monitor the accomplishment of strategic goals and objectives.
- Provide administrative continuity in the event of a disaster.
- Protect the interests of internal and external customers and stakeholders.

Company officers generate raw data and create reports that become part of the system. They may also be responsible for analyzing information for the purpose of assisting in decision-making, establishing, or monitoring trends. Company officers must follow their organization's record management system and strive for accuracy in the collection of data used in records and reports.

Record Types

Fire and emergency services organizations primarily maintain budget, inventory, maintenance (preventive and corrective), activity, and personnel records. Personnel records include categories such as:

- Training
- Performance
- Attendance
- Hazardous materials or biological/medical exposures
- Medical

Budget

Budget records may include all information used to create them, budget status reports, past budgets, and budget requests that were not funded. Purchasing records, contracts, surplus sales, and other similar records should also be retained with this information.

Company officers should maintain the data they used to create their budget requests, justifications for requests, and processes used to generate requests. They should also maintain all records relating to purchases or purchase requests that they make and what has been spent on each item. This information is necessary when federal grants are reviewed.

Inventory

The administration or logistics branch of the organization generally maintain inventory and fixed-assets records. These records should be accurate and include information on all materials, equipment, facilities, land, and apparatus in the possession of the organization.

A copy of all inventory records for the unit's apparatus, personnel, and facility should be maintained. Company officers may be responsible for performing periodic inventories of their areas of responsibility. Any changes in inventory must be noted, reported, and, in some cases, justified.

Company officers may need to establish and maintain an inventory of necessary supplies at each station. The facility may be stocked with disaster preparedness supplies in the event of a natural disaster or other uncontrollable circumstances. Each station should be prepared to operate for a number of hours without the ability to procure certain items.

Officers can often order supplies through an on-line program arranged through the organization or they may work with local vendors and companies to maintain the supplies in the station. The organization may already have certain vendors of choice that officers can utilize. Supplies can be obtained with a purchase order or with an organizational credit card. Some organizations (based on their size) place the responsibility of operating a department purchasing program to company officers under the direction of a chief officer.

Maintenance

Fire and emergency services organizations keep maintenance records on stations, other facilities, vehicles, tools, and equipment. These records are usually kept in two distinct categories: preventive and corrective **(Figure 6.7)**. Both sets of records hold significant legal value when an organization has to go to court over an incident involving a piece of its equipment. The logistics chief/manager usually maintains and analyzes records.

Preventive maintenance is performed to prevent damage, reduce wear, and extend the useful life of an item, vehicle, or facility. Records that are compiled during the preventive maintenance of apparatus, facilities, or pieces of equipment can provide the information necessary to predict a trend or justify a replacement so it is usually performed according to a predetermined schedule. Past experience, industry standards, and manufacturers' recommendations combine to form the basis for a schedule of periodic inspection and maintenance. Frequent

Figure 6.7 Drivers/operators complete daily checkout forms to identify damage, problems, or discrepancies for maintenance personnel to correct.

inspection and cleaning often reveal incipient problems that are relatively easy and inexpensive to correct. Examples of preventive maintenance include but are not limited to:

- Periodic inspection, cleaning, and maintenance of fire station floor coverings, heating and air-conditioning systems, fire extinguishers, appliances, and septic systems.
- Apparatus engine oil changes and chassis lubrication.
- Annual fire pump tests.
- Periodic tests and calibrations of electronic meters (pump panel gauges, monitoring devices, and air-quality testing instruments).
- Fire hose inspections and annual testing.
- Annual and after-each use inspections of ground ladders, respiratory breathing equipment, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Corrective maintenance (repairs) is always possible due to an unforeseen event. Damage may occur because of an accident, overuse, operator error, or even abuse. When an item is damaged or ceases to function, it must be repaired or replaced as soon as possible.

Deciding to repair or replace an item is often based on its maintenance record and life expectancy. The corrective maintenance record is a critically important part of the decision-making process in the following ways:

1. Showing that an item is relatively new would probably indicate that the item should be repaired
2. Showing that an item is old and has a history of increasingly frequent failures or breakdowns may indicate the need to replace the item with something newer and more reliable

Activity (Incident Reports)

Activity records are the basis for planning and justifying budget requests. These records provide historical documentation of all events, incidents, and projects that members of the organization participated in during a specific time period. They are maintained at the company, district/battalion, and administrative levels of an organization. Each level supplies the next higher level with an accumulation of information until the records become part of the organization's information management section. Activity records are contained in the company/station logbook and on forms provided for each type of activity. Records include information about:

- Emergency and nonemergency responses
- Inspections
- Investigations
- Training
- Communications

Personnel

Personnel records include training, performance, attendance, hazardous materials or biological/medical exposures, and medical **(Figure 6.8)**. Personnel information must be kept current as it may be needed in an emergency or a line-of-duty death (LODD).

Personnel records are confidential with the exception of attendance records (daily personnel roster) and similar documents. Company officers must be careful to protect confidentiality and keep all personnel records secure. Personnel records may be maintained at the company, district, or battalion level, in the administrative office, in the medical or safety officer's office, or in the jurisdiction's human resources office.

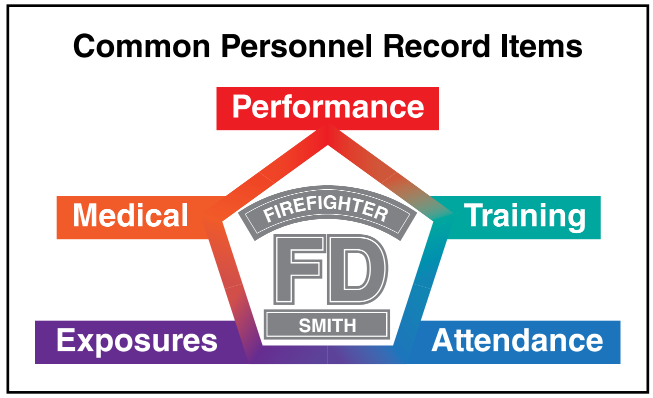

Figure 6.8 Fire and emergency services personnel records should contain, at a minimum, a variety of information relating to each individual's performance, medical conditions, training, exposures, and attendance.

Training records are essential components of a successful training program. Accurate records give an organization long-term inventories of its training activities. Insurance Services Office (ISO), International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC), National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications (Pro Board), and International Association of Fire Chiefs/International City/County Management Association (IAFC/ICMA) accreditation programs may be important and necessary in legal proceedings and management reviews. The company officer must document company level training and should include:

- Topic of training session
- Time designated for training
- Date of training
- Location
- Participants
- Outcomes

Performance is documented and measured through personal job-performance evaluations. These are part of an individual's personnel file, which are maintained by the organization for each employee. The supervisor may also retain a copy for future job-performance evaluations. These records (like medical records) are confidential. Performance evaluations are an important part of an officer's ability to help steer a subordinate's career in a successful direction. Evaluations can help individuals:

- Spot trends and habits in personal performance and behavior.
- Help reinforce good skills and discipline.
- Correct unfavorable behaviors.
- Help individuals improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Attendance records for all personnel are maintained to provide data for payroll and benefit distribution. Depending on an employee's classification, a formal time card may be required as evidence of actual hours on duty. Other attendance records may be included in the company or unit logbook. Overtime, vacation leave, compensatory (comp) time, duty exchanges (exchange of work shifts between members), and sick-leave benefits are based on the information that is included in daily attendance records.

Attendance records that support training requirements are also maintained. These records document that an individual or unit has completed a specified number of hours of training in a specific topic. Volunteer and combination personnel should maintain accurate attendance records for both training and emergency operations. This practice ensures that participants receive credit for their participation in the activities. It can also establish a trend for nonparticipation that may result in changing training or activity schedules or termination from the department if applicable.

Hazardous materials or biological/medical exposure records document significant individual exposures to hazardous materials such as smoke, chemicals, and biological, radiological, and nuclear materials are part of an individual's medical record. Exposure to patients with communicable diseases must also be reported. Because of the delayed effects of some of these hazards and the compounding effect of others, the organization must retain accurate records for 30 years following the end of an individual's employment. Attendance records may also be used to support exposure records when a facility is determined to contain a toxic atmosphere, such as a carbon monoxide leak from a gas-powered water heater.

Medical records are kept on all employees for the duration of their employment plus 30 years. This record includes the individual's pre-employment medical examination, periodic medical evaluations and examinations, post-medical-leave examination, exposure reports, and the postemployment or termination medical examination. Company officers must record:

- All job-related injuries or illnesses that affect personnel assigned to them
- Non job-related illnesses when they result in the use of sick or injury leave
- Trends that might indicate the abuse of sick leave

Electronic Data Storage/Retrieval

Many organizations maintain all types of records using some form of electronic data collection, analysis, organization, distribution, and storage/retrieval system. They are also using computer-based word processors for writing reports and completing forms. Company officers must learn to use the computer-based system in their organizations if they are to stay current and function at maximum efficiency.

Figure 6.9 Computers serve many valuable functions in the modern fire and emergency services.

Computer-Based Systems

The variety of hardware and software available for electronic records management is almost overwhelming. In terms of hardware, company officers must learn to operate the components that are required to make any computer function **(Figure 6.9)**. In terms of software, they must learn to use programs designed for their organization's particular operating system. Countless software programs are available for these systems, and many of them are cross-platformed and able to function on different operating systems.

Company officers must understand the local as well as state/provincial and federal laws regarding the proper use of computer systems, access to the Internet, and various issues that are specific to the use of computers.

Computer-Use Concerns

Company officers must be aware of certain situations that can result from using computers the jurisdiction owns. They must also communicate these concerns to their subordinates to prevent any potential problems. The following list gives computer-specific concerns that company personnel must be aware of when using the organization's computer system:

- ***Copyright*** — Material found on the Internet may be copyright-protected. If a member wishes to use the material for training purposes or providing information in reports, it is important to gain permission from the original author or the agency that owns the web site.
- ***Password Protection*** — Members may be assigned a password that allows access to either a computer or the Internet/intranet. Passwords are created to prevent the unauthorized use of a computer or access to records that are not public. Members must not provide their passwords to anyone else.
- ***Viruses*** — Computer systems are the target of viruses (infection/disruption programs) and spyware (private information access programs). Viruses and spyware disrupt computer systems or access information that is not normally available to the public. Company officers must ensure that the organization's computer security and protection programs (firewalls and antivirus and antispyware programs) are not compromised and must report any evidence that a virus or spyware is present on a computer.
- ***Unauthorized use*** — Company officers must adhere to all policies that define the appropriate use of an organization's computers and limit access to the Internet. Generally, only software that is licensed to an organization can be installed on its computers. Company officers should track personnel computer usage to ensure that they are not accessing unauthorized sites. There may be restrictions placed on the use of organization-provided equipment for personal use.
- ***Public Information*** — Any information created on a computer or other electronic device can be the basis of a public information request.

Internet and Intranet

Most organizations provide access to the Internet through their computer systems. Some organizations have intranets (internal networks) that link all the organization's computers together to improve communication and share software and files. The Internet and intranet allow company officers or their personnel the ability to manage information electronically. The Internet is a worldwide network, while the intranet is generally an organizational network. Company officers should be familiar with, understand, and enforce their organization's policies concerning the use of both.

Internet-Specific Concerns

Company officers must be aware of four areas where caution is advised when using the Internet:

- The Internet contains sites that are inappropriate for access from work-related computers. In many jurisdictions, such access is illegal and can result in an employee's termination.
- The accuracy of some of the information found on the Internet is questionable. Always authenticate the information before using it to support or justify a recommendation.
- Data and e-mail messages live forever on computers and in cyberspace. Trained computer personnel can recover an erased document. Never put into writing anything that is inappropriate or illegal.
- There may be agency specific restrictions regarding the use of social media sites.

Privacy Versus Public Access

What people write in e-mails, text messages, and blogs is sometimes viewed as personal and private. However, personnel should not have any expectations of their information remaining private when they use organizational equipment or any personal devices connected to the organization's systems. The company officer must be familiar with local, state/provincial, and federal laws that regulate both privacy and public access to data, reports, and records.

Privacy

Records that must be kept confidential (with limited access) include personnel files, individual training records, and medical files. Training records may also be considered part of an individual's personal, private employment file, requiring an organization to limit access to them. Organizations should develop and adopt policies that limit access to confidential records to only those personnel with a legal right to know.

Public Access

While individual personnel records are confidential, other organizational records are not. Generally, open-meeting laws and open-records acts define the type of records that are available to the public and news media.

Some records, such as incident reports or fire investigations, are available to individuals who own the involved properties or are involved in the incidents unless statute exempted. The state/province defines the exact definition and list of records.

Chapter Summary

As the first level of supervision, the company officer serves as a representative of the organization to the public so the concept of customer service needs to be a dominant principle in daily operations. Proper customer service will help to ensure that department is held in high regard throughout the community.

To provide a high level of customer service, the company officer should have an understanding of the needs of both internal personnel and external groups and being able to win and maintain their goodwill and support.

Internal personnel and the organization's customers influence the creation and implementation of policies and procedures and budget development. The company officer may play a part in these administrative functions and so it is important to become familiar with the policies and procedures and the process used for budget creation.

Tracking activities and being able to ensure that the raw data collected illustrates accurate, complete, and legible records can also be a large part of the company officers' routine operations. An understanding of the information management systems and processes within the organizations helps ensure that the correct data is collected in the proper form. An important thing to remember is that privacy requirements and the public's right to know may determine which of the documents or data collected may become public record. The public can then access them.

Review Questions

1. How does the concept of customer service relate to the fire service? (p. 144)
2. In what ways do company officers interact with policies and procedures? (pp. 147-152)
3. What are the steps in the budget process? (pp. 152-153)
4. How are the different types of confidential records used in the fire service? (p. 157)

Learning Activities

Learning Activity 6-1

Objective 5: Propose a revision to existing departmental procedures.

When given a situation that requires revision to policies and procedures, company officers must be able to clearly communicate a proposal for changes, as well as justification for those changes.

For this activity, you will need access to the follow resources:

- A computer with a word processing program

Create a short proposal in the form of a memo or e-mail (see Chapter 5) addressed to your superior officer that suggests a revision to a specific departmental SOP. You may choose any SOP you wish, or you can use the following scenario:

Scenario:

Weekly washing and cleaning of the department's vehicles is scheduled to be done every Thursday. With the addition of the new apparatus, however, cleaning all the vehicles on the same day has become more challenging. You've noticed that Fridays have traditionally been slow days and some cleaning could easily get done on that day.

Answer Key:

Answers for this activity will vary; however, your document should include the following:

- A clear identification of the SOPs being discussed
- A description of the proposed change in the SOP
- A justification for that change
- A polished, professional appearance to the document, including:
  - — Clear purpose and organization
  - — A formal and professional tone
  - — Proper grammar, and error-free punctuation and spelling

Learning Activity 6-2

Objective 6: Develop a budget request for a specific departmental need.

Using the correct forms and supporting data, company officers must be able to prepare budget request forms accurately and completely.

Complete the following budget request form using the information in the scenario provided below.

Scenario:

The department has just hired two new firefighters, both of whom are very tall. The department is going to need to special order their PPE. Looking through your department's product information, it appears the price will be about \$2,000 a person. There is currently \$15,000 left in the budget for PPE, and is found in account number 678055. You will need to prepare a purchase request made out to the company, Larson Protective Equipment, Inc. Once the order is placed, delivery is expected in one week.

Expenditure Request Form

Prior to initiating any purchase or expenditure in excess of $1,000 but less than $10,000 the following form shall be completed and approved. Upon approval of the appropriate Administrative Team member, the department may proceed with the purchasing process for the requested item. A copy will be distributed to the City Manager and to the Finance Department. All expenditures of $10,000 or more must be approved in advance by the City Council.

Please complete all sections of the form.

Department: ______________________________

Division: ______________________________

Description of requested item: ______________________________

Explanation of Need/Purpose: ______________________________

Budget Account Number: ______________________________

Amount Approved in Current Budget: ______________________________

Estimated Cost: ______________________________

Expected Date of Delivery of equipment or materials/supplies: ______________

Expected payment schedule for service: ______________________________

Projected completion date: ______________________________

Employee making request: ______________________ Date: ____________

Recommended by: ______________________ Date: ____________
Department Manager or Designee

Approved by: ______________________ Date: ____________
Administrative Team

Routing: Please submit the completed form by email to the appropriate Administrative Team member. Approved requests will be returned to the department head or designee, forwarded to the staff accountant in the Finance Department and the City Manager.

Learning Activity 6-3

Objective 6: Maintain a log of routine, unit-level administrative functions.

Company officers must be able to keep clear records and logs so that all pertinent actions are recorded and maintained.

Fill out the log sheet provided by recording the series of events listed in the scenario below.

Scenario:

- At 1:30 p.m., you sent Firefighter Jackson to fill up Rescue 5, reminding him to get a receipt. He came back a half-hour later having put $43 worth of fuel in the tank.
- At 2:17 p.m., Driver/Operator O'Reilly complained of severe stomach pains and went to the doctor. He called two hours later having been told by the doctor to go home and get some rest.
- At 3:49 p.m., Firefighter Ramirez reported finding a flaw in the Rope #14. Rope #14 was removed from service. Rope #72 was placed in service.
- At 6:49 p.m., you responded to an alarm at a commercial building at 654 Center St. Engine 8, Rescue 5, and Chief 2 responded, cleared the building, and found it to be a false alarm.
- By 7:13 p.m., all units returned to station from 654 Center St.

Answer Key:

Answers for this activity will vary; however, the log should include:

- All information given in the scenario
- A time in and time out
- Any remarks necessary that should be communicated to the next shift

Time out	Time in	Activity	Remarks