

Consequences to cutting a Firefighter Position

? CHIEF WILLS
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Currently the citizens of Baker City are being asked to consider a \$5 or \$7 assessment per month termed a "Public Safety" fee to offset a budget deficit of \$504,000. Part of the reduction plan includes cutting a firefighter position at \$72,000, withholding \$20,000 from the Fire Equipment Reserve Fund and taking \$3,500 out of contracted services for a total of \$95,875.

As the interim Fire Chief, I have a sworn responsibility to ensure the safety and protection of the citizens of Baker City. It's my duty to not only provide the best Fire/EMS service possible balanced by what the citizens demand and what they can afford but also to advise them when those services will be severely compromised and may put their safety and protection in jeopardy.

As you weigh the option of cutting a firefighter position you need to be aware of the consequences of what losing one firefighter will look like. The intangibles the public doesn't see, the duties, tasks and responsibilities of our firefighters that extend beyond what is perceived. His/her inherent value to the community especially one like Baker City where staffing is already at its lowest can only be measured against what will be lost because there is nothing to be gained.

Below I've outlined some of the intangible consequences resulting from reducing staffing and our plan on how to manage the staffing reduction if it occurs so we can reduce our exposure to liability.

Intangible Consequences Resulting from Reduced Staffing:

1. Exposure to Liability will Increase

- a. BCFD may not comply with current ISO (3) rating if firefighter position is cut, a higher ISO rating equals higher insurance premiums for businesses.
- b. Baker City may be exposed to civil liability by reducing levels of fire/EMS response

2. Unable to Comply with National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) 1710 Standards

- a. BCFD will not meet NFPA 1701 Standards for "Initial Attack (IA) "2 In 2 Out"
- b. BCFD will not meet NFPA 1710 Standards for "Fire Suppression Operations"
- c. BCFD will not meet NFPA 1710 Standards "Effective Firefighting Force"
- d. BCFD will not meet NFPA 1710 Standards for Suburban Incidents 10
- e. BCFD will not meet NFPA 1701 Standards for Rural Incidents 6

3. Response Times will Increase

- a. BCFD will no longer staff 2 ambulances at the same time. Resulting in delaying the second response until adequate staffing can arrive
- b. Response times for a mutual-aid request will increase. BCFD will be forced to go back to when we waited for call back personnel to arrive to staff a unit

4. Unit Availability will Decrease

- a. BCFD will not be able to "Peak-Period" staff an ambulance and a fire engine
- b. Will be difficult for BCFD to make additional units available during lengthy inter-facility transports

5. Industrial Accident Costs will Increase

- a. BCFD personnel will be required to work around the lost firefighter position increasing physical and mental stress on the body. Increasing the workload increases stress on the body which in turns increases accidents and injuries that occur from fatigue
- b. Industrial accidents may increase, which in turn increases insurance rates, increases additional medical expense costs and significantly increases overtime costs. Limiting these liabilities makes good fiscal sense

6. Overtime Costs will Increase

- a. Cutting a position will significantly increase the need for calling back personnel
- b. Increasing call backs will significantly increase overtime costs

7. Training Obligations will be Reduced (Training continuance and regional training)

- a. BCFD will have to cancel training more often due to a shortage of personnel
- b. BCFD will have to cancel regional training more often due to reduced staffing levels
- c. Will make managing training costs including overtime, transportation, re-applying, and other class related fees increase due to staffing shortages

8. Productivity will Decrease (Decreased ability to manage all calls i.e. Boise Transfers)

- a. Reduced staffing will reduce productivity
- b. Daily duties will not get completed due to emergency responses or routine assignments

9. Firefighter Per Capita Ratio will Decrease

- a. BCFD will go from a ratio of 1 Firefighter for every 2,000 citizens per day during Peak-Periods to potentially 1 Firefighter for every 3,333 citizens per day when at minimum staffing

10. Community Involvement Programs will be Reduced

- a. Currently it is difficult to perform the simplest community services because BCFD personnel must leave to manage emergencies. Cutting a firefighter will significantly impact participation in Community Involvement Programs

Steps to Reduce Exposure to Liability and Manage Emergencies:

To manage our exposure to liability, the department would be forced to significantly review all aspects of its current response models and modify them where possible. At the least the department would return to a "CORE MISSION" status that focuses on simply managing emergencies as they occur and shedding other programs that could not be managed adequately due to the underserved staffing levels.

"CORE MISSION" steps include but are not limited to:

1. **Core Mission**, refers to the Management Model incorporated after the staffing reduction in order to better address operational readiness. Those activities include:

- a. Review of Mutual Aid Agreements
 - b. Reduction in Fire Prevention Inspections
 - c. Reduction in Community Involvement Activities
 - d. Reduction in Community Education
 - e. Reduction in Tactical Medic Operations
 - f. Reduction in Public CPR and First Aid Training
2. **Call Prioritization**, refers to the sorting and prioritization of emergency calls. In 2016 BCFD experienced 150 simultaneous emergencies involving two or more calls at the same time. These emergencies will require prioritization due to reduced staffing. Lower acuity emergencies will be placed on a waiting list and will be managed when personnel or resources become available.

Managing emergencies in this manner will require additional training from the dispatch level all the way to field personnel. As calls for service come in the dispatcher will be required to ask detailed questions as to the patient's condition to better define the nature and severity of the medical emergencies. Those citizens with lower acuity emergencies will be prioritized for a later response.

3. **Transportation Only**, refers to those patients that are requesting transportation only to the hospital. These patients are usually those who are very familiar with their medical condition and recognize when they require medical care at the hospital. Unfortunately, these patients usually do not have a means of transportation or require ambulance transport due to their medical condition.

These "Transportation Only" requests will not be filled immediately rather they will be filled after "Paid-Part-Time" personnel arrive to staff an ambulance so the patient can be transported without tying up Paramedics.

4. **Airport Transfers**, in 2016 BCFD experienced 64 emergency requests for airport transfers. These calls involve BCFD paramedics responding to the airport to pick up Life Flight medical personnel and then transport them to the hospital where the Life Flight medical staff receives a patient who must be flown to an alternate medical facility. These airport transfers may lead to the ambulance and paramedics out of service for approximately an hour.

Airport transfers may be managed in the same manner as "Transportation Only" requests and shall be filled by "Paid-Part-Time" personnel when possible. If BCFD staffing is reduced, airport transfers may not be filled when needed and may have to be scheduled several hours in advance. Unfortunately, as patients deteriorate in the hospital their conditions may require immediate airport transfers.

5. **Inter-facility Transfers**, in 2016 BCFD experienced 61 emergency requests for Inter-facility Transfers. This type of patient transfer involves a patient that needs a higher level of care than they can receive from our local hospital and requires the patient to be transported to a higher level of care in Boise. These usually involve moving a patient from St. Alphonsus in Baker to the larger St. Alphonsus in Boise.

These types of transfers may take up to 3 hours one way depending on weather and road conditions and then 3 hours to return. 90% of patients requiring these types of transfer are Baker City residents. Much like the airport transfer these requests are dependent on the patient's condition and can be emergent at times requiring immediate response.

Currently the hospital notifies BCFD first for a transfer request, if BCFD is unable to meet the request the call is assigned to Med-Trans ambulance which is a private ambulance provider in Powder River.

If BCFD is forced to cut the 40hr firefighter position it will severely impact its ability to provide this ground based life line from Baker to Boise and other means of inter-facility transfer will be required.

This may require St. Alphonsus to send up an ambulance from Boise to pick up the patient and transport them back to Boise. This would cause a significant delay in getting the patient the higher level of care they may need such as surgery.

6. Ambulance Service Area (ASA) Reduction, currently BCFD provides fire and Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulance services to 8 square miles of Baker City and ALS ambulance services to 1600 square miles of Baker County. In 2016 BCFD responded to 1933 calls for emergency service, of those total calls 1629 were ambulance related emergencies. 1341 of those were emergencies inside Baker City. 288 involved emergencies outside of city limits in Baker County.

Due to the extended travel times involved in these calls the 288 Baker County emergencies become important because of the significant time involved in managing them. These emergencies require BCFD paramedics to be out of service and unavailable to Baker City residents for a longer period than in-city emergencies.

Compounding that is Baker City residents pay to sustain the ambulance service through their property taxes while Baker County residents receive the service for free. Now Baker City residents are being asked to pay a "Public Safety" fee of \$5 residential and \$10 commercial to offset budget deficits while still losing a firefighter position.

If BCFD is forced to cut a firefighter position it will require a significant review of how emergency medical services are provided within the ASA and possibly reorganizing the size of the ASA to reduce response times and provide for better unit availability for Baker City residents.



