

New York State Public Entities Safety Group 497

Safety Agenda

___ Chief, Fire Department
___ Site Administrators
___ Commissioners
___ Human Resources
___ Supt. Bldgs/Grounds
___ Elected Officials

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Firefighters: Take the Seat Belt Pledge!

The importance of seat belt use by firefighters has been dramatized by the recent deaths in on-duty accidents involving fire police. Fire police account for the largest percentage of on-duty deaths in the profession. Of nine firefighters killed this year nationwide, six were not wearing seat belts and were thrown from their vehicles. In 2006, 2 of 8 killed were not wearing seat belts, and in 2003, 8 of 30 were not wearing seat belts.

New York State and 36 other states do not mandate seat belt use by firefighters, apparently based on the rationale that every second counts and being held up by a seat belt could cost a life. However, the National Fire Protection Association, which is primarily concerned with fire fighter safety, recommends the following seat belt policy be adopted by all fire departments:

“All persons riding in fire apparatus shall be seated and belted securely by seat belts in approved riding positions at any time the vehicle is in motion.”

The loss of firefighters who do not wear their seat belts can be prevented by the simple step of using them. Wearing seat belts makes sense, as every firefighter who has served at a vehicle accident scene knows first hand.

According to the National Fire Administration, 25% of fire service deaths occur when firefighters and fire police are responding to or returning from incidents. And **forty-five per cent of respondents to a poll conducted by Firehouse.com said that they do not wear seat belts at all times when responding to emergencies.** Clearly, the lack of consistent use of seat belts by firefighters is a problem that needs attention.

Another way to raise the awareness of firefighters to the need to wear safety belts is to encourage all members of the department to adopt the *National Fire Service Seat Belt Pledge*. The pledge was developed by the National Fallen Firefighters Association, whose primary goal is to decrease firefighter fatalities and encourage safety practices among firefighters.

The pledge was developed after the death in 2005 of Amarillo, Texas firefighter Brian Hunton, who fell out of his fire truck when responding to an alarm. He died two days later from his injuries. He was not wearing a seat belt.

So far, 35,000 firefighters nationwide have signed the pledge The Pledge:

“I pledge to wear my seat belt whenever I am riding in a Fire Department vehicle. I further pledge to insure that all my brother and sister firefighters riding with me wear their seat belts. I am making this pledge willingly; to honor Brian Hunton my brother firefighter because wearing seat belts is the right thing to do.”

We recommend that your pledge also include the following: “I further pledge to wear my seat belt when riding in any moving vehicle.”

The pledge and a sign-up roster can be downloaded from www.trainingdivision.com/seatbeltpledge.asp.

The goal of the seat belt pledge program is to collect one million firefighter signatures by June 21, 2007. We encourage all member departments to join the program, sign the pledge and always wear a seat belt.

Visit our Website at www.nysgroup497.com

Group Manager: Professional Underwriters – 1-800-833-8822, ext. 119

A Needs Assessment for the Fire Department

In 2004, a study was conducted by the National Fire Protection Association in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Fire Administration. The purposes of the study were to (a) define the current role and activities associated with the fire services, (b) determine the adequacy of current levels of funding, and (c) provide a needs assessment to identify shortfalls. The national study was conducted as a census and included questions developed by a Technical Advisory Group of experts in the fire services. The responses were analyzed for the nation and for individual states.

The following points are based on responses from fire departments in New York State, and are presented here as a tool for evaluating your local department and developing goals and training programs.

(Generally, fire departments in rural areas had lower compliance with the standards implied in the questionnaire.)

1. The department consistently delivers 4 or more firefighters to mid-day house fires.
2. First-arriving firefighters do not have to wait until the rest of the first-alarm responders arrive.
3. All firefighters involved in structural firefighting have received formal training in these duties.
4. All emergency medical services (EMS) have received formal training in those duties.
5. The department has an active program to maintain basic firefighter fitness and health.
6. The fire station(s) have adequate backup power.
7. The fire station(s) are equipped with exhaust emission controls.
8. The number of stations in the department meets the maximum response distance guidelines from the Insurance Services Office.
9. All emergency responders on a shift are equipped with portable radios.
10. All firefighters on a shift are equipped with self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).
11. All emergency responders on a shift are equipped with personal alert system (PASS) devices.
12. All firefighters have personal protective clothing.
13. The department can handle a technical rescue with EMS at a structural collapse of a building with 50 occupants with local trained personnel.*
14. The department has a written agreement to direct use of non-local resources.
15. The department can handle a hazmat and EMS incident involving chemical/biological agents and 10 injuries with local trained personnel.*
16. The department can handle a wildland/urban interface fire affecting 500 acres with local trained personnel.*
17. The department can handle mitigation of a developing major flood with local trained personnel.*



* Some departments considered these functions to be outside the scope of their duties.

The report, "A Needs Assessment of the Fire Service: New York" can be accessed at the National Fire Service Protection Association web site.