CHAPTER SIX
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

This Chapter includes sections on training standards, regulations, programs, and certifications at the national, state, county, and local level—including the process by which training is conducted in the Lower Merion Fire Department (LMFD) and its volunteer fire companies.

OVERVIEW OF FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

The main objectives of the fire services are to prevent injury and the loss of life, and to protect property and the environment. All emergency response personnel providing these services must be fully qualified to safely and effectively perform a wide range of practical skills. These responders must have a broad knowledge base that allows them to adapt quickly to the many different scenarios faced by modern day emergency services providers. While on-the-job experiences are important for gaining knowledge, most all knowledge and skills must first be obtained through some type of training program. In any modern fire department, effective training is the key to successful emergency operations and service delivery effectiveness.

Training in the fire services over the past decade has undergone a revolutionary process because of the changing environment in which it exists. There have been many changes in technology that have resulted in significant improvements in equipment for emergency services use. The fire, rescue and emergency medical situations that emergency responders encounter are often more complex in the post-9/11 environment; emergency responders in all public safety agencies must now prepare for more large-scale, catastrophic type of incidents in addition to the traditional fire and rescue incidents.

The past decade has also seen society place more emphasis on environmental concerns which also poses a challenge to the emergency services and their approach to fire and hazardous situations. Personnel safety has become a primary concern and technology has evolved to provide firefighters and EMS staff with more effective protective clothing and equipment.
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OVERVIEW OF FIRE SERVICES TRAINING (continued)

Fire services line-of-duty deaths are more closely analyzed than ever before and have resulted in new, safety-directed training standards and emergency scene operating guidelines.

Nationally, the rate of firefighter injuries and fatalities remains high even with all the advances in technology, thus, the emphasis on firefighter safety and survival. Fire departments across the United States have worked on refocusing some of their training efforts to “saving their own” from life-threatening situations and on returning to the basics of fire fighting. Fire services professionals realize that a fire department’s commitment to training is an indicator of that department’s commitment to excellence—because the two values rely on each other.

Fire services personnel receive their training and education in many different ways and from many different sources. Traditionally, fire services training falls into one of three categories: training courses, company drills (in-service training), and formal education classes. Training courses normally address three areas of concern: new or entry-level employee training, skills maintenance training (refreshers and recertification), and career development training (promotion requirements).

Training courses are generally structured classes conducted by an individual skilled and certified in the adult educational process. Training courses usually cover a specific subject area either in its entirety or in a sequential format (e.g., Fire Fighter I and Fire Fighter II). Examples of subjects which are covered in training courses for fire personnel include recruit fire fighting, advanced fire fighting courses, first responder and emergency medical technician courses, pump operations, aerial ladder operations, rescue techniques, hazardous materials, emergency vehicle driver training, company officer training, and incident command courses.

The reinforcement and maintenance of critical job skills and the updating of new information or practices usually occurs through in-service training or company drills. These company drills are planned practice sessions that are usually conducted by a company officer covering
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OVERVIEW OF FIRE SERVICES TRAINING (continued)

a single, specific topic or practice of a manipulative skill. Examples of in-service drills include the practice of hose layouts, ladder raises, and knot tying.

An aggressive, well-planned company drill training program is very important to department readiness. Because so much of a firefighter's job requires the use of manipulative skills, it is necessary to regularly reinforce those skills, ensuring that they are performed effectively, efficiently and safely each and every time that they are needed.

Formal education courses are generally the responsibility of community colleges and other institutions of higher learning. Formal education is traditionally focused at the collegiate level and involves academic subject areas. These academic courses are designed to assist fire services personnel in performing their job as well as providing career development in preparation for promotion.

Fire science and emergency medical services degree programs are now available from the Associate to the Masters Degree levels; there are even a few universities in the United States that have bestowed Doctorate degrees in related areas of study.

The current trend in many career fire departments is to require the successful completion of college-level course work as pre-requisite training for promotion. Volunteer fire departments have traditionally lagged behind in the requirement and/or recognition of collegiate level course work for promotion and there has been little forward movement by the volunteer services in this area. Many volunteer fire services chief officers are still elected to office by their department membership.

NATIONAL TRAINING STANDARDS AND PROGRAMS

Over the course of the last three decades, more and more demands have been placed on emergency responders to increase their level of service, which means that the level of training has had to increase as well. Movements began back in the early 1970s to provide
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NATIONAL TRAINING STANDARDS AND PROGRAMS (continued)

structure and organization to the fire services training process. Those efforts resulted in the
development of nationally recognized standards to serve as the basis for fire services training
programs.

National Professional Qualifications System

In 1972, the Joint Council of National Fire Service Organizations founded the National
Professional Qualifications System in an effort to help guide the fire services toward training
professionalism through training accreditation and certification. Certification arose over a
concern that fire services training was becoming very imbalanced between various
jurisdictions, almost to the point of becoming inadequate in some instances. As a result, a
nine-member National Professional Qualifications Board (Pro Board) was established by the
Joint Council to direct the new accreditation and registry system.

In order to develop a system of nationalized training for firefighters, the Pro Board requested
that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) delegate, to their technical committees,
the development of clear standards for use in the certification process. As these standards
were developed, they were reviewed, edited, and updated by fire services professionals
throughout the United States.

The new NFPA standards were adopted as the basis for the Pro Board certification program.
Today, NFPA professional qualifications training standards are the foundation of most fire
services training programs found in North America and are recognized as the standards of
practice in the fire/rescue training area.

As this push to develop professionalism in the fire services continued, a National Board on
Fire Service Professional Qualifications was established in 1990 to accredit training
organizations and to certify individuals meeting the NFPA training standards. Today, the
National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications accredits 23 states (including
Pennsylvania) using 72 levels of 16 different NFPA training standards.
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NATIONAL TRAINING STANDARDS AND PROGRAMS (continued)

Fire departments with a commitment to the national certification process gain the respect, reputation, and prestige associated with an organization dedicated to professionalism. It is generally recognized in the fire services that departments that teach and certify their personnel to the professional standards will become stronger entities both in their communities and among fellow departments.

National Fire Academy

In 1975, the National Fire Academy (NFA) was established in Emmitsburg, Maryland as part of the United States Fire Administration (USFA) for the purpose of developing and delivering fire services training programs on a national basis. Much of the work done by the NFA has been in the areas of executive officer development, fire department operations planning, and organizational management. Through its courses and programs, the NFA works to enhance the abilities of fire and emergency services and allied professionals to deal more effectively with fire and related emergencies—both natural and man-made.

The NFA’s delivery systems are diverse. Courses are delivered at their resident facility in Emmitsburg and throughout the nation in cooperation with state and local fire training organizations, colleges, and universities. In an effort to make training affordable, a travel expense and lodging stipend is made available to students attending resident NFA courses in Emmitsburg.

Currently, the NFA has a four-year program for the development of senior fire officers. The Executive Fire Officer (EFO) program consists of four, two-week resident programs: Executive Development, Leading Community Risk Reduction, Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management, and Executive Leadership. Following each course, the EFO candidate must submit an original research paper before being allowed to take the next course. Upon completion of the four-year program, the EFO student is awarded a certificate and is invited to attend an annual conference which focuses on the latest trends in the fire services.
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NATIONAL TRAINING STANDARDS AND PROGRAMS (continued)

The NFA also offers courses at the college and university levels for staff and command officers, technical specialists, and executive fire officers. To reach the mass of the fire services population the NFA has developed a train-the-trainer program to “hand off” their training courses to state and local agencies.

STATE TRAINING PROGRAMS

Fire/rescue training programs in Pennsylvania are available through the Office of the State Fire Commissioner (OSFC), a stand alone agency that is responsible for providing a variety of support services to the Commonwealth’s 2,400 plus fire departments. One of the most important support services provided by the OSFC is the operation of the State Fire Academy which offers numerous residential and regional training programs for all levels of emergency responders throughout Pennsylvania.

The State Fire Academy (SFA) is located in Lewistown, Pennsylvania, and is a full-service training academy offering a wide range of training courses. The SFA offers a variety of course work including intermediate, advanced, and specialized training in firefighting, rescue, incident command, and other emergency service skills. The SFA also operates and oversees the Local Level Fire Training Program which dates back to the 1930’s.

The Local Level Fire Training Program curriculum currently includes 120 separate courses ranging from one and one-half hours to 88 hours in length. These courses are conducted by the SFA’s system of Educational Training Agencies (ETA) which is comprised of community colleges, county/regional fire training academies (Montgomery County Fire Academy is an ETA), and other similar organizations.

The SFA’s Local Level Fire Training Program provides flexibility in terms of scheduling desired or required training. The SFA prides itself on delivering this training on an “as needed, where needed” basis. The Study Team believes that there should be no fire
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STATE TRAINING PROGRAMS (continued)

department in Pennsylvania that cannot have their basic training needs met through the Local Level Fire Training Program.

PA Voluntary Fire Service Certification Program

The OSFC also operates the Pennsylvania Voluntary Fire Service Certification Program (PVFSCP) which is based on, and complies with, the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications requirements. The PVFSCP has existed since 1985 when it was first approved to issue Firefighter I certification under the national standards. Presently, certifications are available for Firefighter I and II, Fire Officer I and II, Fire Service Instructor I and II, Fire Investigator, Airport Firefighter, Pumper Driver/Operator, Hazardous Materials (Awareness, Operations, and Technician), and Rescue Technician (General, Rope, Trench, and Vehicles/Machinery).

According to a recent OSFC publication, “to date, over 6,000 Pennsylvania firefighters have certified at one or more levels” and “many fire service organizations have set the requirement that new personnel in their departments must become certified within 1 to 2 years of joining the organization.” In addition, the OSFC has also implemented a Participating Department Recognition Program to recognize and honor those fire/rescue organizations that strive to have their members achieve state certification. Those organizations that have 50 percent, 75 percent, or 100 percent of their “active” members certified receive special recognition from the PVFSCP. This recognition includes a large certificate for public display and large decals for display on the department’s apparatus.

Instructor Training

One of the most important components of any training program is instructor training and certification. In Pennsylvania, it is the SFA that provides instructor training and certification. The state offers training and certification at both the Fire Service Instructor I and Fire Service Instructor II levels following the NFPA 1041, Fire Service Instructor Professional
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STATE TRAINING PROGRAMS (continued)

Qualifications standard. The SFA requires that all of its instructors be certified in order to instruct in SFA programs.

The Study Team feels that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has a strong, state level training and certification program that is well-organized and operates with professionalism. The Commonwealth is commended for their efforts in developing, implementing, and operating such a quality program.

EMS Training

In terms of emergency medical services (EMS) training programs at the state level, courses are available through the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s Bureau of Emergency Medical Services and are delivered on a regional basis utilizing various facilities across the state, based upon the demand for training. It is the opinion of the Study Team that the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services does an excellent job of coordinating and delivering EMS training and provider certification services on a statewide basis.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY TRAINING

The Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Department of Public Safety (DPS) operates a Public Safety Training Campus at 1175 Conshohocken Road in Plymouth Township. The Montgomery County Fire Academy (MCFA) is part of that training campus and provides a variety of fire/rescue training services to both public and private sector emergency response agencies in the southeastern Pennsylvania.

The MCFA is well-known and recognized among its peer training academies in Pennsylvania for delivering quality training programs. In fact, almost every course that is offered at the SFA can be delivered at, or through the MCFA. In addition, the MCFA is partnered with Montgomery County Community College’s Division of Work Force Development and Continuing Education to deliver almost every training course that is offered by the MCFA.
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MONTGOMERY COUNTY TRAINING (continued)

Such a relationship is important in today’s environment of professionalism because the ability to earn college credits for emergency response course work only enhances the value of those training programs.

Certifications

In 2005, the MCFA delivered 819 classes which involved over 19,000 students in over 249,000 hours of instruction. The MCFA also has been delegated authority by the SFA to conduct certification examinations in accordance with the Pennsylvania Voluntary Fire Service Certification Program. In 2005, a total of 584 candidates were certified through the MCFA process:

- Firefighter I (286)
- Firefighter II (93)
- Driver Operator (Pumper) (28)
- Fire Service Instructor I (45)
- Fire Officer I (43)
- Fire Officer II (18)
- Hazardous Materials - Operations (43)
- Hazardous Materials - Technician (28)

Training Fee

The MCFA has an established fee structure for its training courses and facility use. While the Study Team finds that a fee structure for local government training of public sector responders is uncommon, the MCFA fee structure has been in-place for over 25 years and is considered nominal by the Study Team when comparing the fees often required for professional seminars and courses offered by private sector organizations.
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MONTGOMERY COUNTY TRAINING (continued)

For example, the MCFA Fire Officer I Certification Course has a student fee of $70.00 (PA residence) for the 40-hour course where as a recent flyer from NFPA lists a one-day, 7-hour seminar on Fire Pumps at $345.00 per student—if the student is an NFPA member. It is important to note that in Pennsylvania relief association monies can be used to pay for most training activities and, therefore, there generally is no cost to the student and no direct cost to the departments for fire, rescue, or EMS training.

Customized Training Program

Finally, perhaps the most convenient training offered by the MCFA is their Customized Training Program where a fire/rescue department can purchase a customized training plan that delivers various training topics at their individual fire department. Since many fire/rescue departments have established dedicated training nights (e.g., first Monday of the month, every Wednesday), this training program service allows a department to arrange quality training and drills that are led by certified instructors who provide the course materials needed for the program.

For $1400.00, a department can contract for 42 hours of training and for $2100.00, they can contract for 96 hours of training—both prices are considered inexpensive when considering the growing costs of adult education. The Study Team recognizes the MCFA’s Customized Training Program as an excellent offering which all fire/rescue/EMS organizations in Montgomery County should take advantage of and use on a consistent basis for at least some part of their organization’s training program.

The Study Team commends the Department of Public Safety and the Montgomery County Fire Academy for their commitment to excellence in training and in the certification process. It is clear to the Study Team that the MCFA is a well-run training academy that delivers excellent courses and training opportunities—opportunities of which all emergency response agencies in Montgomery County should take advantage.
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MONTGOMERY COUNTY TRAINING (continued)

EMS Training

In terms of EMS training, the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety’s Division of Emergency Medical Services operates the EMS Training Institute which is also located at the Public Safety Training Complex in Plymouth Township. The EMS Training Institute, like the MCFA, delivers state and national level certification courses at their training facility.

Unlike fire services training, compliance with EMS training standards is not voluntary and all volunteer and career providers must attain the required certifications in order to participate in the delivery of emergency medical services. Because of these mandates, EMS training programs and certifying agencies are normally well run and respected organizations, otherwise they would not remain in operation very long. The Study Team commends the County’s EMS Training Institute for its commitment to excellence in training and certification.

LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING

Based on interviews and documentation there appears to be considerable inconsistencies in training and certification within the LMFD. The Study Team considers these inconsistencies very concerning because, as stated previously, a fire department’s training function is one of its most critical internal functions.

Training impacts nearly every aspect of emergency response operations. Without well-planned and executed training programs, an emergency response organization will most likely struggle to be successful in its endeavors and may impact the safety of customers and service providers. The items presented in this Chapter reflect issues of concern. The Study Team encourages the LMFD and the leadership of the individual fire companies to ensure that action is taken on each item.
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

Training Records

For the purpose of comparison and analysis of training course completion and certifications, the Study Team utilized data from the LMFD’s Firehouse Software training record database. The Study Team was told that the information in the database accurately reflected the training records and activities of the LMFD. The Study Team received confirmation on the database’s accuracy from several of the LMFD’s fire chiefs and chief officers.

A review of the information found in the training record database showed significant differences between fire companies in terms of training course completion. The training records for the Belmont Hills Fire Company were the most sparse, while the training records for the Penn Wynne Fire Company were the most complete. Hopefully, this variance is due to some of the fire companies failing to complete their data entry. Otherwise, there are serious deficiencies in training course completion within the LMFD.

The Study Team supports the LMFD’s use of Firehouse Software for maintaining individual and company training records. Because training course completion documentation is very important, the Study Team suggests that the LMFD immediately implement a process by which all individual members’ training records are reviewed at the fire company level for accuracy. Any corrections should be made in the Firehouse Software training record database. Any individual LMFD member wishing to dispute a training course record entry should help resolve that dispute by producing a copy of a course completion certificate or a copy of a training institution transcript.

The Study Team recommends that the review of individual training records and the subsequent updating of the LMFD training record database should be completed within six months of the release of the Study Team’s final report.
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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

Training Certifications

The training certifications and course work of all LMFD officers were reviewed as means to compare the training aspects of the various LMFD fire companies. An organization’s leadership sets the standard for the professionalism of the organization. By today’s fire services standards, leaders are expected to be well-trained and in compliance with national and state training standards.

Officer Training and Certification Findings

The training records (contained within the Firehouse Software database) of 41 LMFD officers were reviewed to assess the level of completion of the following training courses and/or certifications:

- Firefighter I and II
- Fire Officer I and II
- Basic Vehicle Rescue Course and/or Basic Vehicle Rescue Technician
- Hazardous Materials Operations and/or Hazardous Materials Technician
- Instructor I
- Emergency Vehicle Operators Course
- Incident Command System
- NIMS (National Incident Management System) IS700, ICS100, ICS200, ICS300, and ICS400

Of the 41 volunteer fire company officer training files reviewed, the following results were found:
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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

1. 56 percent of the officers had completed a Firefighter I course and only 27 percent had achieved Firefighter I professional qualifications certification;
2. 37 percent had completed a Firefighter II course and only 22 percent had achieved Firefighter II professional qualifications certification;
3. 22 percent had completed a Fire Officer I course and only 5 percent had achieved Fire Officer I professional qualifications certification;
4. None of the officers had completed a Fire officer II course;
5. Of the three companies that provide vehicle extrication services (Belmont Hills, Bryn Mawr, and Penn Wynne); 56 percent of the officers had competed a Basic Vehicle Rescue Course or a Basic Vehicle Rescue Technician Course;
6. 63 percent had completed a Hazardous Materials Operations or Hazardous Materials Technician Course;
7. 17 percent had completed an Instructor I course and only 5 percent had achieved Instructor I professional qualifications certification;
8. 27 percent had completed an Emergency Vehicle Operators Course;
9. 39 percent had completed an Incident Command System course;
10. 29 percent had completed the NIMS ICS700 course;
11. 12 percent had completed the NIMS ICS100 course;
12. 9 percent had completed the NIMS ICS200 course; and,
13. None of the officers had completed the NIMS ICS300 or ICS400.

Based on this review, there appears to be a problem involving the lack of training course completion and profession certification at the officer ranks in the LMFD. These findings indicate that emergency incidents may be currently commanded by officers not having any incident command training and/or basic firefighter training.

In addition, the Study Team noted that many of the officers within the LMFD do NOT comply with LMFD Standard Operating Procedure No. 22, Minimum Officer Qualification -Bylaws. This SOP was established in 1997 to ensure that all companies operated with a leadership base that met the same department-wide training and experience standards. It
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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

appears that this matter was brought to the attention of the Presidents and Chiefs in January 2007, however, no action has been taken.

While this apparent lack of training course and certification documentation at the officer ranks in the LMFD may be simply an error or oversight in the training record database, the Study Team believes this may indicate a serious deficiency and therefore, the Study Team urges the LMFD to do the following:

A. Immediately enforce the existing LMFD SOP No. 22. Allow a 45-day grace period for current officers who are out of compliance to submit training course completion documentation. Failure to comply with the current SOP No. 22 after the 45-day grace period should result in the removal of operational authority of those officers and/or the withholding of Township funding from those officers’ fire companies until such time compliance is achieved.

B. Immediately create a workgroup to revise and reissue SOP No. 22 so that the officer requirements are more consistent with today’s professional standards. The Study Team recommends the following minimum officer training requirements:

1. Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief: Fire Officer II, Hazmat Operations, Instructor I, EVOC, and NIMS ICS300. (Fire Chiefs and Deputies at companies running Rescue Units or Squads should also complete the Basic Vehicle Rescue Technician Course.)

2. Assistant Chiefs: Fire Officer I, Hazmat Operations, Instructor I, EVOC, and NIMS ICS200. (Assistant Chiefs at companies running Rescue Units or Squads should also complete the Basic Vehicle Rescue Technician Course.)

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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

companies running Rescue Units or Squads should also complete the
Basic Vehicle Rescue Technician Course.)
4. The workgroup may certainly establish additional requirements such as
other course work and experience, but they cannot reduce the minimum
requirements stated above.

C. Develop a program and plan by which to deliver any training courses needed
for the existing LMFD officers so that they have an opportunity to comply with
the revised SOP No. 22.

The Study Team realizes that the analysis shown above may be a sensitive issue. The
members of the LMFD fire companies seem to be dedicated individuals who want to help
their community. The Study Team does not wish to diminish the desires of those members.
However, training and professional certifications are vital to the entire operation of a
fire/rescue organization. Without much effort to achieve those certifications, there is often
a lack of respect, dependability, and most likely performance.

Certification Recognition

In contrast to the seemingly poor picture presented concerning training, the efforts of the
Penn Wynne Fire Company’s membership in being recognized by the OSFC as part of the
Participating Department Recognition Program is noteworthy. According to information
provided to the Study Team by the OSFC, there are over 300 participating departments in the
Commonwealth (out of 2400 total) in the recognition program statewide and 38 of those
departments are within Montgomery County.

The Penn Wynne Fire Company is recognized for its 50 percent certification – meaning that
50 percent or more of their active members have attained PVFSCP certification. That
recognition is quite an achievement. The Penn Wynne members and their leadership are
commended for their efforts and are encouraged to continue in the certification process.
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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

The Study Team also wishes to acknowledge the Gladwyne Fire Company for their level of training in the officer ranks. When combined with the officers from the Penn Wynne Fire Company, both officer corps represented the majority of course completion and certifications in the officer training record analysis. The Study Team suggests that the Gladwyne Fire Company pursue participation in the Participating Department Recognition Program.

Firefighter Training

In the traditional fire department setting, firefighter training begins with the introduction of new personnel to the basics of fire and rescue operations through the recruit training process. Recruit training differs from state to state and from jurisdiction to jurisdiction depending upon local standards and requirements. In most career fire/rescue systems, the recruit training process depends on the size of the department and the proximity to a formal training center.

In volunteer fire/rescue systems, recruit (or new member) training can vary greatly based upon the department’s rules and regulations, any county or state regulations, and the level of access to entry-level training programs. Some volunteer departments have stringent training requirements for new members; other departments may require little to no training.

As was the case with the officers’ training and certifications, there exists a significant difference between the seven LMFD fire companies in terms of how new members receive training and how they are “checked off” to ride emergency apparatus. Basically, all companies have some form of check-off program or packet that must be completed by the new member before they can be eligible for active member status. The problem is that each company’s requirements vary and therefore new members can receive different training depending upon the fire company they join.

The Study Team’s primary concern is that some new members may be permitted to operate at emergency incidents before they receive any formal courses of instruction. In some cases, new members appear to be able to progress at the will of the company training officer or the
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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

fire chief instead of having to demonstrate that they have met recognized performance standards such as those contained in an academy training program.

The Study Team recommends that the LMFD develop and implement a minimum training standards policy/program that clearly identifies the training requirements for probationary (new) members and applies equally and equitably to all new members of the LMFD fire companies. At a minimum, these standards should include the successful completion of:

1. Modules 1 and 2 of the Pennsylvania Essentials of Firefighting course and the Hazardous Materials-Operations course before the member can ride beyond an “observer/helper” status;

2. Modules 3 and 4 of the Pennsylvania Essentials of Firefighting course before the member can ride as minimum staffing on a fire incident; and,

3. Basic Vehicle Rescue and First Responder (EMS) courses before the member can ride as minimum staffing on a rescue incident.

Incident Management Training

The Study Team is not aware of any state or local regulation requiring that fire service chief officers be trained in the practice of incident management (command). Although, reportedly, the Township adopted NIMS recently. However, Presidential Directive 5, issued in February 2003, requires all emergency response agencies across the nation to be trained in, and implement the National Incident Management System (NIMS) in order to be eligible to receive future federal funding for homeland security initiatives.

As discussed earlier in this Chapter, there is a significant disparity in the level of training and certification between the seven fire companies; this is true for incident command training as well.
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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

Of the 41 officers in the LMFD, only 16 have completed an Incident Command System (ICS) course. In terms of NIMS compliance—only 29 percent of the officers have completed the IS700 course which is the NIMS introductory course which is done completely “online.”

Incident command training is critical to the success of incident management. If emergency responders expect to have positive outcomes at the incidents to which they respond, then those responders must be well-trained and well-versed in incident command. Fire department incident command has grown well past the days of the fire chief standing in the front yard of a burning home with nothing but his helmet on and his portable radio in his hand. Today’s incidents can challenge even the most seasoned incident commander; all incident commanders must be able to command and operate in an era of fire agency mutual interoperability when many fire departments may be required to work together on incidents.

Without training and certification in incident command, fire departments are exposing their organizations to a high level of liability and the potential for disastrous outcomes. In the United States, for nearly every firefighter line-of-duty death that has occurred on the fire ground over the last ten years, investigative findings have listed ineffective (or absent) incident command and poor crew accountability as common contributing factors to those deaths.

The Study Team suggests that the LMFD require all chief officers to complete the NIMS ICS 300 incident command training and all captains and lieutenants to complete the NIMS ICS 200 incident command training. The Study Team recommends that the LMFD establish a deadline of no longer than one year for all officers to comply with this mandate. The Study Team recommends the removal of incident command authority from those officers who have not met the requirement within the one year period.
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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

Skill Maintenance Training

One of the most important parts of a fire department training program is the continued maintenance of skills and knowledge. In-service training, as it is commonly called, generally covers a wide area of topics including basic fire fighting skills, emergency vehicle driving, and government mandated hazardous materials refresher training.

When developing a company drill training program, the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule used by the Insurance Services Office (ISO) should be considered. The Schedule is actually a manual that is used by ISO to review the firefighting capabilities of individual fire departments. One section of the Schedule reviews a fire department’s training functions and assign points (credits) based upon certain training items. The following list provides examples of the training required for all fire department personnel for which credit points are allotted:

- Half-day drills (three hours), eight per year
- Half-day multiple company drills (three hours), four per year
- Night drills (three hours), two per year
- Company training at the fire station, 20 hours per member, per month
- Leadership/command training for all officers, two days per year
- Half-day sessions for driver and operator training, four per year

Each of the LMFD fire companies have a designated company drill night. Most of the fire companies have a designated training officer who is most likely an officer in the company who may or may not have completed any instructor training. In a few of the companies the training officer seems to just be the coordinator of drills for the company. In a few fire companies, it seems that the training officer function is shared among a several individuals.

A review of the company drill topics and drill attendance records (Firehouse Software database) submitted to the Study Team finds that almost all of the companies appear to be
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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

engaged in regular company level training activities and that attendance varies but is consistent with other volunteer organizations of this size. The Study Team does have some concern about who is actually delivering the training at some of the companies; this concern stems from the lower percentage of formally trained and certified members of these companies. However, if the previous recommendation addressing officer certification requirements is implemented, this concern regarding the leadership and instruction on drill nights should be eliminated in the future.

A number of the fire companies engage the services of qualified, outside instructors to present various company level drills or certification course work. The Study Team encourages the continued use of these outside resources as long as they aid in meeting the goal of the company level training program.

The Study Team does wish to note that they were impressed with the fire companies’ use of the LMFD training center for live fire training and other practical skill sessions. Many volunteer fire departments desire access to live fire training yet they are denied access because of many reasons: distance, lack of availability, etc. The Study Team encourages the LMFD’s continued use of the Lower Merion training center for live fire training and other related practical skill sessions.

Drill Attendance

Through interviews, the Study Team noticed that it appears that company drill attendance requirements vary from fire company to fire company and that some topics were often repeated in lieu of more complex activities. While these items could not be completely confirmed, the Study Team believes that regular attendance at company level drills should be a requirement of maintaining active member status.

The Study Teams recommends that the LMFD establish a required, minimum attendance level for active members at company drill training sessions. This requirement should be
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LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

applied equally and equitably to all fire companies. Should an active member fail to meet this minimum training standard, then that member would be placed in a provisional (non-minimum staffing) status until the training is completed.

Interoperability Training

In terms of multiple company operations and mutual aid interoperability training, it was clear to the Study Team that little of these hands-on drill-type training activities occurs. It was made very clear during numerous interview sessions that “companies just don’t train with each other,” yet they are expected to work together on the emergency scene. It was also evident that any type of regional or mutual-aid training has been non-existent over the past few years and that there are not any immediate plans to implement such training.

The Study Team believes that multi-company training events are important to the development of teamwork and to reinforce the concept of fire ground discipline at the company level. The Study Team suggests that the LMFD develop and implement a company drill program that:

A. Ensures that meaningful, multi-company drills are held at least six times a year and that these drills focus on the various emergency response activities that require multiple units to work together in order to mitigate an incident;

B. Ensures that these drills also include the use of mutual aid agencies from outside of Lower Merion Township;

C. Includes the members of the chief fire officer’s and fire marshal’s offices; and,

D. Addresses the training goals and objectives of the LMFD and its individual fire companies.
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

Driver Operator Training

Of all the services provided by a fire/rescue department, only two positions really provide
great exposure to liability: a provider of emergency medical care and the driver of an
emergency vehicle. In both cases, training needs to be extensive, well documented, and
recertified on a regular schedule.

As with all other aspects of training thus far discussed, driver training programs and
procedures also vary among the individual LMFD fire companies. None of the procedures
appeared to be compliant with the requirements set forth in NFPA 1002, Standard for Fire
Apparatus Driver/Operator Professional Qualifications.

The requirements for completing the Emergency Vehicle Operators Course (EVOC) before
becoming a driver at the individual fire companies was also unclear to the Study Team.
While most companies seemed to require EVOC in order to drive, it was unclear if all current
drivers have completed the course.

The Study Team urges the LMFD to develop and implement an emergency vehicle driver
training program and procedure that is NFPA 1002 compliant and that is applied equally and
equitably to the individual fire companies.

The Study Team also recommends that the LMFD require all current and future engine
(pumper) drivers of all fire companies to complete the PVFSCP Pumper/Driver Operator
certification.

LMFD Training Officer

Currently, one of the LMFD Deputy Fire Marshals has a collateral duty of serving as the
department’s training officer. Although the term “training officer” can be found in several
LMFD documents the Study Team could not find where the roles and responsibilities of this
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

collateral duty assignment were defined. The Study Team was able to find and review a job description for the Deputy Fire Marshal which refers to the collateral duty of training officer.

The DFM job description provided the following text to the Study Team:

“Work involves responsibility for assisting in the enforcement of all local safety regulations and developing and implementing Fire Department training programs.”

Under the Essential Functions section of the job description, the following describes some training related duties:

“Develops and arranges specific training sessions for the volunteer fire companies. Develops training bulletins. Schedules training at fire stations, the Drill Tower, or the County Fire Academy. Maintains training records.”

Current Training Officer Duties

Training was certainly one of more prominent discussion points during the Study Team’s interview sessions and the topic of the LMFD training officer arose at most every session. Presently, it appears as though the training officer is primarily responsible for the scheduling and operation of the LMFD’s fire training grounds (drill tower/burn building). LMFD SOP No. 4, Fire Training Grounds—Multiple Company Access (August 2005) establishes the rules and regulations for the safe and efficient use of the training grounds and it is in that SOP that the training officer is given the responsibility of managing the use of the facility.

Nowhere in SOP No. 4, or any other LMFD document, does it require the training officer to actually deliver any training. The Study Team received many differing opinions concerning the current roles and responsibilities of the training officer – but most personnel agreed that the LMFD training officer should have a more direct role in coordinating and delivering standardized training throughout the department.
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

The Study Team concurs with many of the opinions expressed by LMFD members and considers that the LMFD training officer has an important role in helping to implement many of the training recommendations already identified in this chapter. The Study Team suggests the following:

A. The LMFD training officer position should be a stand alone position within the LMFD and not a collateral duty. There are sufficient volunteer and career personnel in the LMFD to warrant a full-time training officer position. Minimum training qualifications for the position should include certification to at least the Fire Officer I level, the Instructor I level, and as a Pumper/Driver Operator.

B. The LMFD training officer should be responsible for coordinating the delivery of all certification-based training programs outlined earlier in this chapter, with emphasis placed on conducting the training within the Township, on a regular basis, absent of fire company boundaries, and at times convenient for LMFD member attendance.

C. The LMFD training officer should be responsible for coordinating the company drill program so that all facets of fire and rescue skill maintenance are covered on a regular basis and the LMFD and individual fire company needs are met.

D. The LMFD training officer should be the custodian of all training records for the LMFD through the use of modern record keeping processes.

E. The LMFD training officer should report directly to the deputy chief fire officer (current title) and should serve on the Training Committee.
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

LMFD Training Committee

There currently exists a "township training committee" that meets several times a year to discuss various training issues impacting the fire companies. Each fire company has a representative on the committee and the committee provides reports and feedback to the Chiefs and Presidents Committee, the Lower Merion Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association, and the current LMFD training officer.

Reportedly, the committee was established as an ad hoc committee under the former LMFD chief fire officer and its existence has continued through the years. The committee is most responsible for scheduling large training seminars or sessions that benefit the entire LMFD. For example, in 2006, the committee coordinated the purchase and delivery of a weekend seminar presented by a nationally known speaker.

The Study Team suggests that the training committee should have a more active role in determining the processes by which training activities are delivered in the LMFD. The Study Team therefore recommends that training committee be officially endorsed as the LMFD Training Committee and that its members shall include:

A. The LMFD training officer;

B. The training officer (or designee) from each LMFD fire company; and,

C. A representative each from the Lower Merion and Narberth relief associations.

In addition, the Study Team suggests that the newly re-established Training Committee be given limited authority in implementing departmental policy in cooperation with the chief fire officer and serve more in the advisory and workgroup role.
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

The Study Team suggests that the Training Committee be charged with the following during its first year of operation:

A. Determine the immediate training needs of fire company officers and active firefighters to comply with the LMFD minimum training qualifications and develop a plan and time schedule by which to deliver that training.

B. Develop short-range considerations for the development of the company drill program.

C. Develop a plan for the renovation of the existing drill tower/burn building with possible inclusion of a classroom: either permanent or detached building.

Training Facility

The LMFD operates a small training facility located on township-owned land in the northern end of the township. The Study Team was informed that the facility has existed for many years and has provided many hours of practical skills training opportunities for the members of the LMFD fire companies.

Presently, the facility has a prefabricated, metal burn building, a roof simulation module, a pump test site, and space to conduct vehicle extrication and vehicle fire training. The funding for the facility’s maintenance and operation exists in the LMFD’s budget. There are currently no funds approved in the department’s capital budget for any renovation work or facility replacement.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the LMFD training building.

The Study Team conducted a short, visual assessment of the facility grounds and the burn building and found that the burn building is in need of repair—but perhaps not complete
Figure 6.1

Lower Merion Township
Fire Training Building
Damaged Burn Building
Needing Repair & Upgrading
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

replacement. The two main issues with the burn building are:

A. There is some corrosion on and around various metal components on both the interior and exterior of the building; and,

B. The walls and ceiling of the burn room are damaged and in need of replacement: a process that reportedly takes place annually.

These indications of serious damage were observed during the Study Team's short walkthrough of the structure. A more in-depth inspection should be conducted by a structural engineer to determine if the damage has affected the structural stability of the building and its usability as a live fire training facility or merely its cosmetic appearance.

A review of the LMFD annual reports for the last three years shows that the training facility receives a significant amount of use by most of the LMFD fire companies. In 2006, there were over 2,500 student contact hours of training conducted at the training center, involving all of the seven LMFD fire companies.

The Study Team considers the training facility to be a very valuable asset to the LMFD and should not be allowed to fall into disrepair and possibly be placed out of service. Therefore, the Study Team suggests that the LMFD initiate a planning process for the renovation or possible replacement of the burn building. This planning process should first include a structural integrity assessment of the building and a review of the options.

The LMFD Training Committee should be assigned as the lead group to gather ideas and plan for renovation/replacement of the building. The project plan should consider the addition of another burn room to the burn building and the construction of a small classroom structure on site capable of supporting at least 25 students.
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

LOWER MERION FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING (continued)

Funding

The funding for most of the training activities conducted by the LMFD fire companies comes from the Lower Merion Volunteer Firefighters’ Relief Association and the Narberth Volunteer Firefighters’ Relief Association. Relief Association funds can only be disbursed for certain expenses; training is an allowed expense for the use of these funds. This type of funding is common throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and is authorized under the Volunteer Firefighters’ Relief Association Act, Act of June 11, 1968 (P.L. 149. 84.) Commonly referred to as Act 84.

The Study Team was advised of no issues or concerns involving the funding of training activities. The fire companies and their relief associations are to be commended for using the relief association funds for this purpose; a priority that should continue in a substantial manner. The Township and the relief associations are encouraged to expand the financial support of LMFD training and certification programs and activities.

SUMMARY

The main objective of the fire services is to prevent injury and loss of life and to protect property and the environment. Training is a key element to successful emergency scene operations and organizational effectiveness. Training in the fire, rescue, and EMS disciplines is also a career-long venture, starting with recruit and basic training programs and progressing to more sophisticated advanced training and participation in higher educational opportunities. Between formal training programs and educational courses there must be ongoing reinforcement of knowledge and hands-on skills provided to all ranks.

It is very apparent from speaking with the members and officers of LMFD fire companies that the organizations are committed to providing good service to their customers. It is also
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

SUMMARY (continued)

important for the organizations to remember that its members and employees are its customers as well. Like many other fire departments across the United States, there are some serious shortfalls in training at the LMFD. The three critical areas of concern to the Study Team are the lack of training certifications at the officer ranks, the inconsistencies in training among the fire companies, and the lack of multi-company, interoperability training.

The Study Team realizes that the findings presented in this chapter present serious challenges to the leadership of the LMFD. However, the Study Team urges all parties to work together to overcome these challenges

RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The LMFD should implement a process by which the training records of all members are reviewed at the fire company level for accuracy and any corrections are made in the Firehouse Software training record database.

6.2 The LMFD should consider establishing a process by which any member wishing to dispute a training course record entry in the Firehouse database must help resolve that dispute by producing a copy of a course completion certificate or a copy of a training institution transcript.

6.3 The LMFD should initiate the review of individual training records and the subsequent updating of the LMFD Firehouse training record database and complete the process within six months.

6.4 The LMFD is encouraged to implement and enforce the existing LMFD SOP No. 22 and allow a 45-day grace period for current officers who are out of compliance to submit training course completion documentation.
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

6.5 Any LMFD officer failing to comply with the current SOP No. 22 after the 45-day grace period should have his operational command authority removed.

6.6 The LMFD should create a workgroup to revise and re-issue SOP No. 22 so that the officer requirements are more consistent with today's professional standards and follow these suggested minimum training requirements:

A. Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief: Fire Officer II, Hazmat Operations, Instructor I, EVOC, and NIMS ICS300. Fire Chiefs and Deputies at companies running Rescue Units or Squads should also complete the Basic Vehicle Rescue Technician Course.

B. Assistant Chiefs: Fire Officer I, Hazmat Operations, Instructor I, EVOC, and NIMS ICS200. Assistant Chiefs at companies running Rescue Units or Squads should also complete the Basic Vehicle Rescue Technician Course.

C. Captains and Lieutenants: Fire Fighter II, Hazmat Operations, Instructor I, EVOC, and NIMS ICS200. Captains and Lieutenants at companies running Rescue Units or Squads should also complete the Basic Vehicle Rescue Technician Course.

6.7 The LMFD should develop a program and plan to deliver any training courses needed for the existing LMFD officers so that they have an opportunity to comply with the revised SOP No. 22.

6.8 The LMFD should eagerly pursue participation in the Participating Department Recognition Program (state training certifications).

6.9 The LMFD should immediately develop and implement a minimum training standards policy/program that clearly identifies the training requirements for probationary (new) members; the requirements should:
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

A. Apply to all LMFD fire companies;
B. Require the completion of Modules 1 and 2 of the Pennsylvania Essentials of Firefighting course and the Hazardous Materials-Operations course before the member can ride beyond an “observer/helper” status;
C. Require the completion of Modules 3 and 4 of the Pennsylvania Essentials of Firefighting course before the member can ride as minimum staffing on a fire incident; and,
D. Require the completion of Basic Vehicle Rescue and First Responder (EMS) courses before the member can ride as minimum staffing on a rescue incident.

6.10 The LMFD is encouraged to require all chief officers to complete the NIMS ICS 300 incident command training and all captains and lieutenants to complete the NIMS ICS 200 incident command training.

6.11 The LMFD is encouraged to continue its use of the township’s training center for live fire training and other related practical skill sessions.

6.12 The LMFD should establish a required, minimum attendance level for active members at company drill training sessions.

6.13 The LMFD is encouraged to develop and implement an in-service company drill program that:

A. Ensures that meaningful, multi-company drills are held at least six times a year and that these drills focus on the various emergency response activities that require multiple units to work together in order to mitigate an incident;
B. Ensures that these drills also include the use of mutual aid agencies from outside of Lower Merion Township;
C. Involves both the volunteer and paid members of the LMFD;
D. Includes the members of the chief fire officer’s and fire marshal’s office; and,
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

E. Addresses the training goals and objectives of the LMFD and its individual fire companies.

6.14 The LMFD should consider developing and implementing an emergency vehicle driver training program and procedure that is NFPA 1002 compliant and that is applied equally and equitably to the individual fire companies.

6.15 The LMFD should require all current and future engine (pumper) drivers of all fire companies to complete the PVFSCP Pumper/Driver Operator certification.

6.16 The LMFD training officer position should be a stand alone position within the LMFD, reporting to the deputy chief fire officer, with responsibility to coordinate the delivery of all certification-based training programs, to coordinate company drill programs and to oversee the management of training records.

6.17 The minimum training qualifications for the LMFD training officer position should include certification to at least the Fire Officer I level, the Instructor I level, and as a Pumper/Driver Operator.

6.18 The LMFD should re-establish the Training Committee in an advisory capacity with the membership to include the LMFD training officer, the training officer of each of the LMFD fire companies and a representative of each of the relief associations and adopt the following goals for the first year:

A. Determining the immediate training needs of fire company officers and active firefighters to comply with the LMFD minimum training qualifications and develop a plan and time schedule by which to deliver that training;
FIRE SERVICES TRAINING

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

B. Developing short-range considerations for the development of the company drill program; and,

C. Developing a plan for the renovation of the existing drill tower/burn building with possible inclusion of a classroom.

6.19 The LMFD, under the leadership of the Training Committee, should initiate a planning process for the renovation or possible replacement of the burn building, including consideration of an additional burn room to the burn building and the construction of a small classroom structure on site capable of holding at least 25 students.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
FIRE & RESCUE OPERATIONS