

IAFC 2004 ISSUES ASSESSMENT SURVEY

OVERVIEW/METHODOLOGY

On Jan. 9, 2004, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) sent a survey electronically to 7,377 members, asking them to identify the challenges and problems they expect to face in 2004, as well as how the IAFC can help them address these issues. As of Jan. 14, 2004, 863 individuals responded.¹ The survey also asked respondents to identify the type of department they lead: fully career, mostly career with volunteers (combination), mostly volunteer with career (combination) and fully volunteer.

The brief survey consisted of one multiple choice question and three open-ended (comment) questions.

1. Is your department fully career, primarily career with volunteers (combination), primarily volunteer with career (combination), or fully volunteer?
2. What are the problems you expect to face in your department in 2004?
3. What topics would you like to see the IAFC address through publications, conferences, articles, etc., in 2004?
4. What can the IAFC do to help you in 2004?

A private, third-party vendor hosted the web-based questionnaire, provided real time tabulation of results and captured the text responses of the three open-ended questions. The results of the three open-ended questions were hand-tabulated and analyzed by IAFC staff members.

The intent of the survey was not to obtain data for purely statistical or scientific purposes. Rather, the intent was to obtain an accurate picture of the issues and challenges that the leaders of the fire service expect to face in the coming year—and to determine how the association may address these issues for its members.

The information gathered in the survey will be used by the IAFC staff and Board of Directors to better serve IAFC members. Information also will be shared with the IAFC membership through an article in the association's newsletter, *On Scene*.

¹ This report is based on the results as of Jan. 14, 2004.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Overall, budget and staffing problems were listed as the most common issues plaguing fire departments; 68 percent of respondents cited problems with budgets or funding and 57 percent cited staffing as a problem. Increasing demand for fire department services was the third most common problem listed with 32 percent; next was training needs with 15 percent; equipment needs with 10 percent; and personnel/labor relations issues with seven percent.

Among the various types of departments, however, the order of the responses varied. See figures one and two for a breakdown of each item listed by department type.

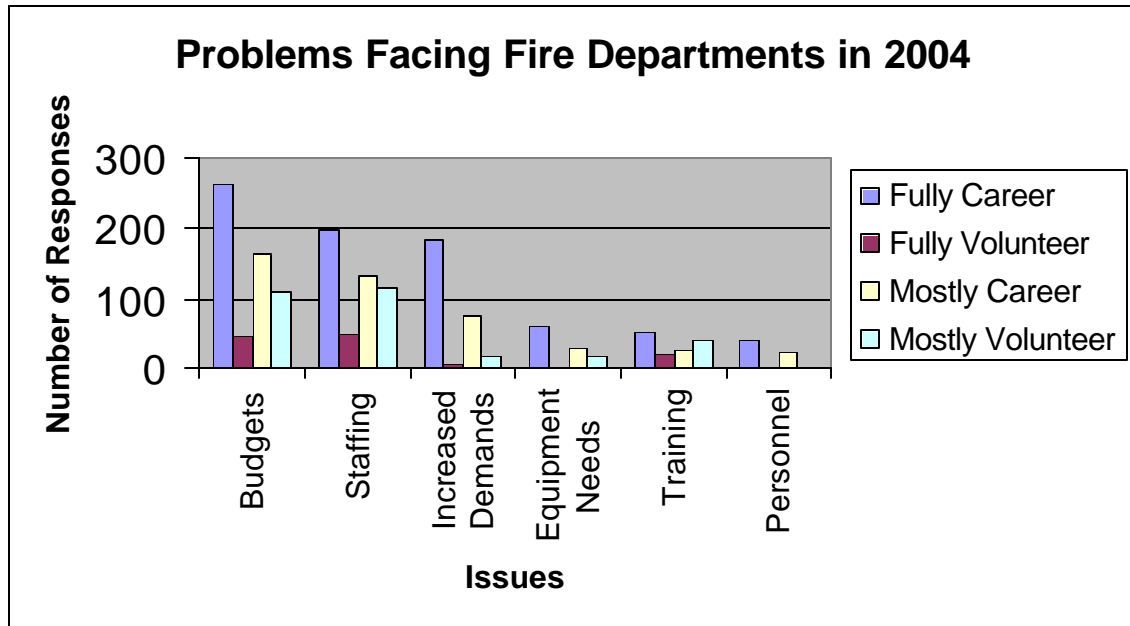
Figure 1

Type	Fully Career	Fully Volunteer	Mostly Career	Mostly Volunteer	Total (Among all Types)
Total Number of Respondents	378	94	199	192	863
Budgets	263	46	164	111	584
Staffing	197	48	132	116	493
Increased Service Demands ²	183	5	76	16	280
Training	51	19	25	40	135
Equipment Needs	59		28	17	104
Personnel/Labor Relations	41		23		64
Other		23			23

² For fully career, this number includes the separate category, "Increased homeland security responsibility."

SUMMARY OF RESULTS (Continued)

Figure 2



Problems Facing Fire Departments in 2004

Lack of funding and staffing issues top the list of problems facing all fire departments in the coming year. The responses to survey question number two (What are the problems you expect to face in your department in 2004); left little appreciable difference between career and volunteer fire departments and combinations they're of.

Without a doubt, every issue has a link to department budgets. Funds needed to maintain current levels of service and to hire new staff. Increased demands on budgets for health care and labor costs. Capital to replace aging equipment and apparatus and to build new stations in keeping with growth demands. Funding to match the needs of increasing homeland security. Unfunded mandates. Rapid community growth.

Problems Facing Fire Departments in 2004 (*Continued*)

Funding. Career, volunteer and combination departments all indicated the need for securing and managing grants and matching requirements. Tax cuts are prevalent and departments are struggling with recruitment, community growth and the need for funds not only to maintain status quo, but also to meet elevation in services and homeland preparedness expectations. All said they need additional funds to maintain and or increase service, “Budget cuts are a cancer eating us up from within. We cannot continue on this downslide for many more years... the fire service is dying and despite extensive measures to reduce costs, overtime, etc... we are dying,” was the message from one combination department (primarily volunteer).

What the IAFC can do. Many comments indicated approval for visibility and the current level of lobbying for fire service and emergency service funding. Several asked the association to continue its proactivity toward gaining funding for staffing, associated overtime and personnel costs, training, equipment and buildings. They appreciated efforts in what was sometimes referred to as the association’s “heavy lobbying” for the Fire Service, Fire Act, Safer Act, Fed Grants.

On specific agendas, the IAFC was asked to oppose unfunded mandates, address decreasing levels of Medicare Medicaid financing and help the smaller population departments. It was suggested the association take the lead in the area of fire prevention and code development.

Many members recommended that the association research and publish grant opportunities for local fire/EMS departments. Others asked for specific assistance in grant writing.

Problems Facing Fire Departments in 2004 (*Continued*)

Staffing. A significant number of members responded that staffing and training would be their greatest problem in the coming year. Finding enough staff whether paid or volunteer, retaining that staff, and making sure they are trained, are challenges facing all departments across the board. Many departments are experiencing layoffs due to fiscal cutbacks while at the same time they are encountering increased calls, community growth and new responsibility requirements for homeland security. “Responding to WMD threats, and specifically, actual acts of terrorism, will be a significant challenge in 04 and beyond. While it is unreasonable to expect anyone to have enough staff for such an event, additional staff with a technician level of skill sets to share with other department members would be very valuable.”

Volunteer departments are not only challenged with new preparedness measures, they face recruitment and retention concerns in this category. “My department is made up of 40-50 volunteers, we are one of three companies in our municipality; incentives and motivation are at the top of our problem list.”

Others find challenges for example in meeting minimum staffing requirements for every day operations, saying the pressure from the fire association to a minimum manning of four on each apparatus was stretching their career department.

What the IAFC can do. Consensus among respondents in this area asked for an Association survey to provide members with statistics regarding department budgets, salaries and benefits across North America. Several said they would find the data invaluable and that another benefit would be development of a strategy manual for chiefs on how to justify the amount of personnel per department and associated costs.

It appears that many departments would like strategies on senior member attrition and pension issues. Others asked for assistance in establishing reasonable staffing mandates as they relate to individual cities. One volunteer officer asked the Association to help develop volunteer recruitment through other means -- tax incentives, free car license fees, reduced education costs for emergency service training...anything.

Problems Facing Fire Departments in 2004 (*Continued*)

EMS. Increased EMS calls have affected career, volunteer and combinations alike. One combination department (primarily career) said they would struggle this year with a staff shortage, especially paramedics. Another cited concerns with HIPA requirements and their need to continue patient, care, transport and feedback for quality assurance and protocol compliance. Increased medical runs. “We currently run 19% fire and 81% medicals,” according to one combination department (primarily volunteer).

What the IAFC can do. Various recommendations for EMS challenges were offered: continue to lobby nationally for EMS funding through Medicare; establish a Federal 'Office of EMS' under USFA, more USFA outreach courses to states for Fire/EMS program education; and to work on increasing EMS participation in the organization.

Homeland Security. A significant number of the respondents said they were concerned about managing additional preparedness requirements without additional staff and in an economically repressed environment. Several said there is difficulty in finding staffing resources for WMD response and hazmat training. One said, “Not enough staff dedicated to adequately address the homeland security issue, both in the field and 40-hour staff.” Homeland security training and coordination is an issue. Career department members would like to see practical and comprehensive curriculum for homeland security issues. One member said, “Everyone has a program but seldom is there a coordinated focus.” Another said, “Homeland security issues are getting too big and encompassing too many areas, we need subject matter experts not jacks of all trades.” Combination departments report that Orange and Red Alerts are causing financial impacts and many combination departments are concerned with training and supplies, “Incorporating training for regional response involving WMD and acquiring supplies necessary for such.”

What the IAFC can do. Members responding perceive the Association is doing a strong job in Washington lobbying for the fire service portion of monies directed at home land security, “Continue to be a strong voice for adequate federal funding for terrorism preparedness, training, etc.” Several individuals suggested the Association work to change the perception in Washington that homeland security is just about the law enforcement. One individual said it would be helpful to have national leaders like cabinet members or high level officials in Homeland Security address national, state and local assemblies of local officials, city managers and council members, on the subject of national dependence on local organizations for homeland security and terrorist response. The Association was also asked to maintain strong emphasis on a national Incident Command System.

Problems Facing Fire Departments in 2004 (*Continued*)

Training. Training issues were cited by many as a problem facing their department. Career, volunteer and combination departments would like help in officer development, succession planning, specialized training needs, dealing with high call volume burnout and budgeting time and money for training. Several volunteer departments mentioned help in complying with state training mandates. There is a need for full time training officers. A career department officer said, "I currently do not have a full time training officer and with WMD issues adding to our already hectic workload, it seems we do not have the time to get everything done and maintain proficiency on all the items we need to." Three career departments said they didn't have full time training officers.

What the IAFC can do. Several members asked to be provided with regional training programs at affordable costs. One member indicated it would benefit departments if the Association were to look into a national policy or legislation mandating that employers must give employees who are in the volunteer emergency services one week off for training annually similar to the reserves.

Equipment. Many of the respondents said equipment needs to meet terrorism threat response is of significant concern, "Additional demands of specialized services such as: WMD, tech rescue, mass casualty etc. with no funding for equipment." Several are concerned with just the basic replacement for aging apparatus and vehicles. Interoperability communication concerns were highlighted by both career and volunteer departments. Some discussed border concerns, state to state interoperability and local communications with police and county fire departments.

What the IAFC can do. Other than continue its' lobby in Washington for funding, members offered few comments or suggestions for Association help in this area.

Labor Issues. Officers of career departments and combination (mostly career) cited labor issues as a significant concern for 2004. Several career department members mentioned the difficulty of recruiting in a "cut-back budget climate," minority recruiting limitations, struggling with labor contracts and declining labor relations. One simply said, "Union trying to run the department." A response from a combination (mostly career) stated: "Contract driven issues. The unions are learning how to play politics and circumvent administration."

What the IAFC can do. Members suggested the Association continue with conferences and sharing of labor relations issues. Many would like the IAFC to establish mutual goals such as officer development, political advocacy techniques and one voice on mutually agreeable issues with the IAFF. Members would like the Association to oppose legislation which favors labor organizations to the point where it negatively impacts management rights and the efficient and effective operation of the fire department.

Problems Facing Fire Departments in 2004 (*Continued*)

Other issues. Very few comments surfaced about actual fire fighting. A combination (primarily career) commented that one of their issues was “Fires in new construction, high density, small lot developments.” Urban wild land fire interface was a topic for many. Concerns for meeting levels of response and response times were mentioned as were other compliance issues. Education of governmental bodies was revealed in several comments.

What the IAFC can do. One member summed it up well, “Continue to be an open source for networking. Networking = survival.” Several asked for an online forum such as a list serve to discuss various issues. Members were not asked to provide a rating on the IAFC, but 26 % volunteered positive comments, saying they thought the Association was doing a good job. An equal number started their recommendations with “keep working” or “continue to...” indicating their understanding and level of appreciation for what the Association does for its members. Most comments related to the level of government relations.