IAFC Recommendation on Human Relations and Inclusiveness

The words we speak and write play a significant role in creating the reality of an inclusive work environment. With an increasingly diverse workforce, the IAFC recognizes the need for more inclusive language in written fire department policies and communications, as well as in daily fire department verbal communications. The following are examples of inclusive rather than exclusive words:

- Use “staffing” instead of “manpower”
- Use “personnel” or “people” instead of “men”
- Use “fire fighter” instead of “fireman”

In addition, IAFC strongly encourages fire departments to have written policies (with regular training that reinforces same) that specifically prohibit disrespectful, hurtful, exclusionary, and/or other unprofessional language including, but not limited to, jokes regarding gender, racial, religious, alternate life styles and/or ethnic jokes and slurs in the workplace and that all personnel are held accountable for following these policies.

Fire Service Training

With an increasingly diverse workforce, the IAFC recognizes the need for human relations training at all levels beginning with entry level through fire chief and encourages all fire service organizations to incorporate human relations/diversity components into their programs.

The inclusion of human relations training should be available in all fire service educational programs, including community colleges, fire fighter academies, fire fighter recruit training, and fire degree programs. Advanced professional development entities should also be encouraged to emphasize human relations.

For example, the voluntary designation programs (Commission on Fire Accreditation International & Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation) and the education/training programs of the National Fire Academy (NFA) are designed to enhance the professionalism of fire service organizations & personnel throughout the world. They are to promote excellence in the fire and emergency services profession to serve as a career path for chief officers and provide continuous quality improvement. Therefore they should be encouraged to include human relations components in their criteria.
All inclusive fire service textbooks used for fire fighter basic training and professional development should include a component on human relations. All fire service related textbooks should use gender-neutral language. Pictures should portray an inclusive and diverse workforce.

Human relations have become an increasingly complex component of today’s fire service. Relationships between fire fighters and the community they serve have increasingly become dependent on the ability to understand and accept differences in cultural, race and gender.

Today, more fire services are plagued with problems related to human relations than delegated tasks. However, the majority of training hours and retraining is centered around only those tasks associated with fire fighting and technical material.

**Publishing and Advertising**

To ensure that the consistent professional image of fire fighters and the integrity of their role in the community is maintained, the IAFC encourages all periodic publications, particularly those that are fire service oriented, to reflect the diverse workforce that makes up today’s fire and emergency service agencies.

The makeup of today’s workforce is vastly different than even ten years ago. Minorities and women have become more and more a part of the U.S. landscape and are now represented in significant numbers. The diversification of the fire service is a positive by-product of this growing trend. Women, African-American, Latinos, Asians, along with other ethnic groups are all major contributors to today’s fire service.

The IAFC endorses and encourages that all publications, particularly those of fire service orientation and their advertisers, be representative of the many different types of individuals, including minorities and women, in their depiction of today’s fire and emergency service personnel.

**Category: Governance/Leadership**

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