

Reader Question / County Apparatus Purchasing

12/27/06 168 W - + 17 - 19

Reader question: "Having moved from the area and state I have been wondering about the reason behind Wake County's purchasing of fire apparatus for the county departments. Has the tax system changed in WC? Is this for just standardization of responding equipment? Or is the County thinking ahead so annexed fire equipment can be easily assimilated into the city's fleets?" .

Good questions. The answer is... none of the above, sort of. The county departments put their heads together a couple years ago and developed single specifications for pumper-tankers, tankers, brush trucks, etc. This was done primarily in the interest of cost savings. With a single specification-- plus a number of options that could be added on a per-department basis-- apparatus could be purchased in bulk from a single vendor and, thus, with substantial savings. There were other benefits to the adopted single specs, such as centralized servicing. We'll let others more knowledgeable than ourselves expound accordingly. And/or correct any of the above.

Within the next 10 or so years you will see a county wide fire district with the "Wake County Fire Department" as the only department other than the current municipalities Raleigh, Apex, etc. We have so much disagreement among the current fire chiefs and volunteer departments, that it makes it easier for the county to slide in and take over....

Examples of the county taking over: The 800 system, the new minitor/ alpha pagers, turnout gear, apparatus, 24hr. staffing, etc.

wakeguest - 12/27/06 - 10:27

It's about time....

Guest - 12/27/06 - 11:28

I disagree. Not that I think it is a bad idea; I just do not see it happening. Converting to one ISO district would be a paperwork nightmare! I think service level on the street would work out fine, but the admin side of the change would be a HUGE task. I think one county dept, like everything, has some pros and some cons.

Not so sure - 12/27/06 - 12:38

...but that paperwork nightmare would be a ONE time task, no?

Legeros - 12/27/06 - 14:01

Several years ago, the County eliminated all of the individual tax districts controlled by the FD boards into a single countywide taxation district. The collective tax assessment is administered through the County via the budget office and the Fire Commission. This has eliminated much of the inequality taxpayers were receiving in fire protection – some departments were "haves" with paid staffs and premier equipment, while others had no staff, aged apparatus – and long response times. Through this project, many department purchases are now coordinated through the County – such as fire apparatus and turnout gear. By bidding a specification that is developed by the fire service, the County is able to take the fire tax dollars farther than if individual departments were making the purchases. Granted, the engines are not the Cadillac's that many departments were accustomed to and they are replaced when needed and not when desired, they nonetheless have raised the countywide apparatus standard a great deal.

As for the ISO question, if the existing apparatus in Wake County were distributed among stations (not departments) and automatic aid between stations was the rule rather than left to local exception, under the oversight of a single countywide administration, you would be hard put to find any parcel of land that would sustain a decline in insurance rating. Will it happen? Unlikely. But if you ask a retired fire chief from the 70's or 80's, they would tell you the same thing about the tax districts. What would be best for the taxpayers? I'll leave that one for others to answer.

Optimist FF - 12/27/06 - 15:13

The county wide ISO rating is not that difficult, all of the information is already there from each dept. The hard part is getting everyone to release the paperwork. As has been said on other discussions, the writing is on the wall folks. I venture to say that in a MAXIMUM of 10 years, there will only be municipal fire depts and a COUNTY Fire dept. While I do believe that volunteers will still be around, as they should, their role

will be redefined. I also believe that the depts will be able to keep their name on the side of the apparatus, but it will something more along the lines of Wake County Fire/Rescue on the front doors and other large areas on the apparatus, while the "area" (former Vol. fire dept. inc) will be on the side somewhere and only the area, Ie: Falls, Stony Hill, Eastern Wake, Etc. The control of the fire service, in non-incorporated areas, belongs (or should anyway)to the county because ultimately they are the AHJ! Now, the problem with the county, is it needs a strong leader to be there and in my opinion that is lacking currently.

As also stated before, if the county starts controlling the money and apparatus as it should and placed them where they needed to be, then the tax payers get what they are paying for. Bottom line, get the CORRECT APPARATUS (and number) AND NUMBER OF TRAINED PERSONNEL to the call! For example, House fire in non-hydranted area:

4 STAFFED (min 3 w/ at least 1403 qualified) ENGINE CO.S,
3 STAFFED (min 1 w/ D/O Cert)TANKER CO.S,
1 STAFFED (min 4 w/ at least FFII & some RT) LADDER CO.
1 STAFFED (min 4 & same Requirements for Ladder co) RESCUE CO.
CLOSEST CHIEF OFFICER

I will say it again, that it is time for this to happen, those in power quit making excuses and step up. If you don't want to step up, GET OUT OF THE WAY!!!!

Okay, I'm off of my soapbox. Best wishes to all this new year and be safe!!

Wayne - 12/28/06 - 11:36

Let's take this one step farther (further?). Could a merger then happen between a county-wide department and all the municipal departments? Creating something like, say, a Wake County Fire Authority? Where EVERY department's on the same page, or more. Not sure how that would play out. Maybe a unified authority that set standards and policy. Maybe more??

Legeros - 12/28/06 - 12:31

I think that if the County paved the way by consolidating all the non-incorporated areas into a single department, you would see the smaller municipalities convey their dept into the larger system. Fact of the matter is, whether it is 1 department, 3 departments, or 26 departments, if an authority-like body establishes the standards, especially like those cited above by Wayne, does it make a difference? And only those dispatched apparatus respond. But first, authority must be established. Where/how should this start?

Optimist FF - 12/28/06 - 12:47

I think it is possible, however, it is improbable. I think a better solution is to come up with a "Triangle Area Operational Plan/Guide". This type of plan would correct a lot of issues facing this area today. With the influx of people coming to this area on a daily basis, NO ONE jurisdiction can keep up. However if all of the jurisdictions come to together and finalize some sort of regional operational plan, together we can keep up. Through resource sharing everyone wins, however it will take some open mindedness and alot of dedication. Here is a SHORT list of what this plan could do:

Standardize reponse/operational plan(s)

Standardize staffing levels

Standardize min. training levels per apparatus (ie more training required to staff/ride specialty companies- ladder/rescue)

Standardize apparatus/equipment designation (define what each piece of apparatus is, so you know EXACTLY what you are getting when it is dispatched) a numbering system can be worked out

Standardize communications (Major Working Fire vs 2nd alarm, Condition Red vs working fire, etc) (how about just a good size up?!)

I have traveled this country from one side to the other, I have served in areas that were set up this way and talked, at great length, with others who have systems set up this way so I can tell you FROM EXPERIENCE that it can work. I guess we are all waiting around to see if this area is going to at least jump into the 1990's in terms of philosphy.

Okay, off of the soapbox again.

Wayne - 12/28/06 - 13:03

I agree some standardization would be a good thing, but on the flip side, not all the districts are the same, so one run call (for a given call class) county wide will not always work. Wayne's suggestion of 4-E, 3-Ta, 1-L, 1-R and 1-Ch will surely work a lot of places, but some other will need at least 5 tankers to meet the class 6 ISO rating.

If we are going to continue to move toward working together let's take some small steps now and I think the easiest ones to take are some standardize communication terms (Major Working Fire vs 2nd alarm, Condition Red vs working fire, etc)(I know some of this is being worked on, but I have no details or time frame) and standardized apparatus/equipment. The apparatus CAD designators are changing, but still with little definition as to what each apparatus type is, at least I have not seen any.

So let's talk a bit about what the group thinks an ENGINE should be. We can talk about other types later, but the Engine should be simple, right?

Class A pumper?

500 Gal tank? 1000 Gal?

1000' of 5" supply hose?

Class B Foam? Maybe class A foam too?

TIC,

Chain saw?

Light tower?

Extrication?

Multi-gas detector?

Fan (PPV or negative pressure)?

Quick dump?

What do you think?

Not so sure - 12/28/06 - 13:32

Engine Company:

Class A pumper by NFPA 1901 Standard

No larger than 1000 Gal tank size

You can carry both A & B Foam

Nozzles and appliances

1000' of supply line either 4" or 5" (Actually in my experience, I have found that 4" is better for rural ops)

Although I am not completely happy with it, I will concede to add the following as well:

Multi-gas detector

TIC

Light tower

The rest of that stuff belongs on the Truck and Rescue Companies. If you put that stuff on an Engine co, it changes it to something other than an engine.

Wayne - 12/28/06 - 23:16

Name: (real name preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

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