

**THE HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIREFIGHTER SAFETY PLAN 2003-2005**

Submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

The Houston Fire Department (HFD) has had the misfortune of losing four firefighters over the past three years. While the department has made great strides in many areas, Emergency Operations now requires significant attention. I was appointed fire chief on May 23, 2001. Five months later, the fourth firefighter was killed in the line of duty on October 13, 2001. I ordered that the department conduct an internal investigation to supplement the State Fire Marshal's and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reports on this incident. These three reports have provided a detailed review of what happened at this tragic incident. The NIOSH report was the last to be completed on October 21, 2002.

These reports on the Four Leaf Tower, as well as the NIOSH reports concerning two firefighters dying in February 2000 at a McDonald's restaurant and another at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport of a heart attack during a training exercise, provide a road map to correct deficiencies in HFD. It is critical that strong leadership, at all organizational levels, be exerted to address the recommendations listed in all these investigative reports. It is not okay for firefighters to die in the line of duty. Unfortunately, the tragic loss of four firefighters in Houston is simply a reflection on how approximately 100 firefighters die each year in the United States. Aside from the 343 New York City firefighters killed on September 11, 2001, the fire service is not discovering new ways for its members to be killed. The same recommendations appear time and time again in each line of duty death (LODD) report. This madness has got to stop.

As chief, I have a responsibility to make sure that HFD takes significant steps to improve the safety of the department's members and minimize their risk as much as possible. It is also imperative that all officers in the department buy-in to this plan. They are the managers where the rubber meets the road in getting these improvements done. This must be a collaborative effort ranging from our government leaders, the fire chief, command staff, and all officers and personnel to ultimately improve the safety of our members. While there are no proverbial money trees to relieve concerns of not having to deal with budgetary constraints, there will inevitably be some increased costs. We have to recognize this fiscal reality and work to overcome these constraints in creative ways. Fortunately, many aspects of this plan have little or no costs associated with implementation.

We **all** have a duty and responsibility in this effort. As fire chief, I am committed to implementing this plan. While all risk will never be eliminated in this profession, it is critical that significant efforts be implemented to avoid as much risk as possible.

The top three killers of firefighters are in rank order:

1. Heart Attacks
2. Apparatus Accidents
3. Asphyxia, Structural Collapse, and Burns

The following initiatives have already been implemented over the past four years:

- Three Safety Officers on each shift
- Standard Operating Guidelines updated
- Portable radios for each firefighter
- Building construction classes
- Voluntary Saving Our Own classes
- Emergency driving classes
- Thermal imager training
- Staffing all engines and ladder companies with a minimum of four firefighters
- 24-hours of continuing education each month
- Multi-company drills
- Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Training
- Formation of the Houston Medical Strike Team (HMST)
- Quarterly HMST training
- Purchases of additional one-hour air bottles
- Voluntary fitness program
- Tactical Evaluation Assessment Plans (pre-fire plans)
- High-rise surveys updated annually
- Quality Assurance Inspections to review various incidents
- Operational Readiness Inspections by District Chiefs, Shift Commander, Assistant Fire Chiefs, and Fire Chief
- Fire Chief review McDonald's and Four Leaf Tower investigative reports with each district and shift
- Air bottles kept full at a minimum of 4300 psi
- Mandatory use of one-hour bottles at high-rise incidents and some other types of incidents

The following three-year plan will place greater emphasis on some of the above initiatives, as well as implement new efforts to improve the likelihood of Houston firefighters surviving emergency operations:

2003

- Fire Chief review McDonald's and Four Leaf Tower investigative reports with each district and shift
- Continuous standard operating guideline familiarization
- Mandatory Saving Our Own training for all firefighters working in emergency operations. This will take three years to complete.
- Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) training. This will take three years to complete.

- Thermal Imager Camera training. A standard operating guideline will be developed and published in 2003.
- Work to gain City Council approval through the budget process to acquire thermal imaging cameras for all engine companies. This goal will be phased in over three years.
- Incident Command School will be established at the Jahnke Training Facility
- Continue Tactical Evaluation Assessment Plans and High-rise surveys
- High-rise firefighting simulation training at Greenway Plaza
- Advanced air pack techniques – air management course
- Purchase fire ground accountability system with awarded FEMA grant with training and implementation
- Purchase 400 updated portable radios
- Modify existing guideline to better utilize Engineer/Operators in an emergency incident
- Purchase fitness equipment for each fire station and provide voluntary fitness evaluations through awarded FEMA grant
- Continue driver training course – ongoing
- Zero-tolerance for not wearing seat belts while the apparatus is in motion
- Zero-tolerance for crew fragmentation
- Implementation of a mayday standard operating guideline incorporating avoidance of duty ambiguity with follow-up training
- Training to recognize how weather impacts operations
- 35% reduction in call processing time
- Mandatory briefing sessions for crew members when personnel changes occur during the shift
- Implementation of safety officer standard operating guideline

- Reinforce training related to protecting building openings (closing doors) as well as being utilized for escape of firefighters (opening doors) in overall operations at emergency incidents
- Continue to test equipment that improve fire ground communications and purchase when a system is identified
- Improve utilization of firefighters assigned to EMS units during operations
- Adoption of a mandatory retro-fit sprinkler ordinance for all residential high-rise buildings
- Incident commander must make sure that all companies at an incident know the correct floor in multi-story incidents. This is incorporated in the high-rise guideline.
- Improve on communication and feedback during an incident. The incident commander must know the location and activities of all personnel.
- Implementation of minimum standards where all firefighters are evaluated every four years
- Building construction classes – development of a standard operating guideline concerning lightweight truss construction and other hazardous building features that firefighters must be cognizant of when entering structures.
- Develop a plan to be in compliance with NFPA 1710
- Quarterly HMST training
- Create specialized standard operating guidelines for weapons of mass destruction
- Weapons of mass destruction continuing education training
- Multi-company drills simulating weapons of mass destruction incidents
- Specials Operations Command review and make continuous improvements with HazMat, Technical Rescue, and ARFF

2004

The following programs are ongoing from 2003 or are new additions for this year:

- Continuous standard operating guideline familiarization

- Saving Our Own training
- Rapid Intervention Team training
- Thermal Imager Camera training
- Incident Command Training
- Continue Tactical Evaluation Assessment Plans and High-rise surveys
- High-rise firefighting simulation training at Greenway Plaza
- Advanced air pack techniques – air management course
- Continue voluntary fitness evaluations
- Driver training
- Mayday training
- 35% reduction in call processing time
- Continue to test equipment that improve fire ground communications
- Minimum standards evaluations of all Emergency Operations personnel on a four-year schedule
- Building construction classes
- Budget for NFPA 1710 implementation phase-in
- Acquire taglines for all companies
- Initiate crew resource management training
- Purchase flashlight belts
- Purchase additional portable radios
- Budget for command aides for 12 districts
- Quarterly HMST training
- Weapons of mass destruction continuing education training

- Multi-company drills simulating weapons of mass destruction incidents
- Specials Operations Command review and make continuous improvements with HazMat, Technical Rescue, and ARFF

2005

The following programs are a continuance of those in 2004 or additions for this year:

- Continuous standard operating guideline familiarization
- Saving Our Own training
- Rapid Intervention Team training
- Thermal Imager Camera training
- Incident Command Training
- Continue Tactical Evaluation Assessment Plans and High-rise surveys
- High-rise firefighting simulation training at Greenway Plaza
- Advanced air pack techniques – air management course
- Continue voluntary fitness evaluations
- Driver training
- Mayday training
- 35% reduction in call processing time
- Continue to test equipment that improve fire ground communications
- Minimum standards evaluations of all Emergency Operations personnel on a four-year schedule
- Building construction classes
- Budget for NFPA 1710 implementation phase-in
- Crew resource management training

- Budget for ten more command aides
- Adoption of the IAFC/IAFF Wellness Program
- Mandatory fitness evaluations begin on a three-year rotation
- Develop and provide a bond proposal to the City Administration to upgrade the city's radio infrastructure and enhance regional interoperability for the next CIP
- Quarterly HMST training
- Weapons of mass destruction continuing education training
- Multi-company drills simulating weapons of mass destruction incidents
- Specials Operations Command review and make continuous improvements with HazMat, Technical Rescue, and ARFF

This three-year plan is focused solely on improving the odds that Houston firefighters will survive emergency operations, go home to their families at the end of their shift, and ultimately enjoy a well-deserved retirement. There are no goals more important in HFD. This plan is perfectly aligned with the department's vision statement, mission statement, values, and will be incorporated into the strategic plan.

HFD is an organization that has risen above significant challenges in its past and has accomplished achievements that many outsiders thought impossible. Some of these achievements include:

- Largest accredited fire department in the world by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International
- Largest ISO Class 1 fire department in the world
- Best cardiac resuscitation rates in the world which is the primary benchmark in evaluating EMS systems
- 98% customer satisfaction rate related to EMS incidents

HFD will again rise to this challenge. This plan is dedicated to saving the lives of Houston firefighters and enhancing emergency services to Mrs. Smith. It is ambitious and must be implemented. The price is much too great to do anything less.