

# Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives

## Initiative #1



Throughout the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, there are opportunities for both organizational and personal change. As your department moves toward adopting a safety-minded culture, use the tools offered in the 16 initiatives as guiding documents.

**Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety; incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility .**

**Culture can be influenced daily by making decisions in the right direction.**

Identify behaviors and artifacts that are clearly influenced by cultural beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. The red truck? The words we use to describe an emergency? The way we divide labor? Feelings about leadership? The stories we tell? Do you know your organization's values about safety? Once we understand the influence culture has on our values, beliefs and behaviors about safety, the easier it will be to pull apart the strands of behaviors that are supporting unsafe practices.

**Practice understanding how culture influences outcomes in the typical line-of-duty death scenario.**

Read NIOSH Firefighter Fatality Investigation reports ([www.cdc.gov/niosh/fire](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fire)) and try to understand the cultural forces which may have led to the LODD under discussion. Was the apparatus related fatality a result of reckless speeding, or failure to wear seat belts – does the use or non-use of seat belts reflect organizational values? Did the rookie die in a training accident because no one was watching her? Did the forty-two year old volunteer firefighter die of coronary heart disease because he never received an appropriate physical with stress test?

**Understand that a cycle of unsafe behavior reinforcing itself is driven underground by departments who ignore the messages of near-misses.**

Near-misses should be studied and understood for what they are: gifts to your organization and opportunities to make substantial changes.

**Is Firefighter safety even mentioned in your department's mission statement?**

Is it enumerated as a core value in your guiding vision statements? Do your attitudes and beliefs, exemplified by behaviors, support the values in your mission statement? If not, there is work to be done.

**History is the stories we tell ourselves about the past.**

As leaders who want to foster safe departments for our firefighters, focus on telling stories that have a different ending because your firefighters made pro-safety decisions. Model safe behavior and reward safe behavior. Discuss firefighter safety in relation to the Rules of Engagement as prioritized by your organization. Construct new organizational values accordingly.

**CULTURAL CHANGE HAS TO BEGIN WITH INFORMAL LEADERS, MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS. FROM THE TOP TO THE BOTTOM: THE CULTURE OF THE FIRE SERVICE MUST CHANGE. YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR TODAY.**

# TEACHING POINTS



## CHALLENGE:

The Fire Service has many long standing traditions that date back to the very first firefighters. Inherent in our culture is the strong desire to help those in need even at the risk to ourselves. For many years the fire service family simply accepted injuries and line of duty deaths as part of the job; but no more. Today we see the opportunity to provide the same level of service to our communities while keeping our members safe and healthy. To do this we must change the acceptance of death and injury and work together to make sure everyone goes home after every run.

## DISCUSSION:

What is your department's view of firefighter and organizational safety?

What attitudes / behaviors in your fire department are influenced by cultural beliefs?

What attitudes and behaviors in your department need to change?

What roles do the following play in the safety of the members and the organization:

- Fire Chief
- Deputy / Assistant / Division / District / Battalion Chiefs
- Company Officers
- Firefighters / Engineers / Medics

Are members of your organization empowered to stop unsafe acts? What does your organization have in place for reporting unsafe conditions or recommending changes for unsafe conditions?

Are near-miss incidents studied to ensure they are not repeated?

What actions has your organization taken to reduce incidents related to:

- Speeding / Reckless Driving
- Lack of Seatbelts
- Physical Fitness
- Medical Evaluations
- Situational Awareness
- Respiratory Protection

What can you do to enact Initiative #1 in your organization?



**Illinois Firefighter Life Safety Task Force**

P.O. Box 423

Woodstock, IL 60098

Visit us at [www.eghillinois.org](http://www.eghillinois.org) for further information

