

# **Toronto Fire Services: Training Challenges on the Fireground**

## **Amalgamation**

The Toronto Fire Services was amalgamated on January 1, 1998 as a result of provincial legislation. The Government of the Province of Ontario, believed that duplication in government in Canada's largest city, formerly comprised of six lower tier municipalities and one upper tier municipality, must be streamlined to create an efficient public Service. The amalgamation created the fifth largest fire Service in North America, serving a population of 2.5 million residents. The city encompasses 632 square kilometers or 244 square miles. Toronto is a unique city, as we are indeed very cosmopolitan with approximately 130 different nationalities, and over 100 different languages spoken. The Toronto Fire Services was created through the amalgamation of the six former fire departments creating a Service of 3,073 full time staff responding from 80 stations across the city. The department's budget is in excess of \$260 million dollars. The Service responds to approximately 115,000 emergency calls annually which represents approximately 260,000 vehicle responses.

## **Training**

The Service operates and maintains four major training facilities to handle the various training needs of the department. Due to the complex nature of the city, there are a variety of specialized training requirements for the members of the Service. The city is home to thousands of high rise structures, both residential/commercial, residential communities and underground walkways, subways and transit systems. The southern border of the city is Lake Ontario, which encompasses the Toronto Islands and the island airport. The Lester B. Pearson International Airport serves the city; and is also referred to as the Greater Toronto Airport Authority. The former Canadian Armed Forces Base is located in the northern portion of the city. Toronto is the home to a variety of industries, commerce, and financial institutions. The Trans Canada Highway is the major transportation corridor linking Canada, which runs through the city. The number of emergency incidents requires our staff to be highly trained to provide emergency response capabilities to the citizens and visitors we protect on a daily basis.

Upon amalgamation, there was a conscious political thought of reducing our training facilities down to one center.

The politicians were looking for ways to reduce the infrastructure and capital assets of the corporation. We successfully defended the need to retain all four training centers due to the unique training needs of the Service. The Toronto Fire Academy is primarily utilized for Recruit Induction Training and Officer Development. The Martingrove and Sheppard Avenue Training Centers are used for Operations and Recruit Training. The Special Operations Training Center is the home of the Toronto HUSAR team and provides specialized training props: a tower for high angle rescue, numerous building collapse simulators, confined space simulator, auto extrication, clandestine drug lab, and trench rescue. This site also has a subway train station and subway car and numerous hazardous materials props. Training is provided to Toronto Fire Services staff from one of the four locations identified above as well as within the fire districts located across the city.

## **Training Challenges and Opportunities**

Currently there are 128 in-service vehicles serving the citizens of Toronto staffed by approximately 2,800 fire fighters responding from 80 stations. The amalgamation has created and continues to create training challenges and opportunities to standardize the level of training across the Service. The Service has:

† Developed and adopted a standardized incident management system for the department.

- † Budgeted for an 800Mhz Radio System, Central Communications Centre, Computer Aided Dispatch, and Records Management System
- † Installed and trained staff for new systems
- † Standardize and select a single type of self-contained breathing apparatus.
- † Selection, purchase, and training implementation across the department have been completed and the equipment has been placed into service.
- † Training Notes, Standard Operating Guidelines, and Policies for the Service have been introduced.
- † Standardized vehicle specification and equipment purchases have added to the ongoing training challenges

One can appreciate the need to decide on reference materials and texts for staff use. Staff selected the Essentials of Fire Fighting, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition as the basis of our training programs. Staff from TFS actively participated in the development of IFSTA texts, such as Fire Service Instructor, Safety Officer, Technical Rescue, Driver Operator, and Fireground Support Operations.

Further, the members of the Service assisted in the development of the Ontario Fire College, Learner Guides and developed specific Toronto Fire Services, Training, and Equipment Notes. One can appreciate the workload and hours of development required in producing effective documents for use by staff.

The introduction of the Incident Management System is a prime example of a major training challenge. The system is predicated on fire fighters working in pairs once a fire fighter has passed through entry control and has gone on air utilizing a self contained breathing apparatus. This concept was not easily embraced by five of the former six fire departments. The rationale to adopt the pairs policy within the new TFS was a direct result of a fire fighter's death in 1992. The crew concept was utilized in 1992 by the former North York Fire Department. In this situation, a captain and two fire fighters entered a second floor window into a commercial office building. The pair of fire fighters were in close physical contact and entered into the smoke. The captain was approximately 2 – 3 seconds behind the two fire fighters. The fire fighters remained in close contact in zero visibility and high heat conditions. The fire fighters were unaware of the captain's whereabouts after they departed from the ladder. The captain was, therefore, separated from the crew and became entangled in a suspended ceiling grid system. The captain was calling for help and was lost in the complex due to the size of the structure. On review of the incident and after thorough preparation for the Provincial Coroner's Inquest, the decision was made to adopt a pairs only policy within the fire department. The Coroner's Inquest Recommendations also included a pairs only policy for the safety of fire fighters as one of the many recommendations.

I am sure that you can appreciate the immense training challenge in implementing the pairs only system to the newly amalgamated Fire Service. Crews were reluctant to adopt the policy and practices, as this system was foreign to them.

Staff from the Professional Development & Training Division and Operations Division spent countless hours training staff how to use the system to their advantage. Safety of the fire fighters in a pairs environment continues to be emphasized on a daily basis within the Toronto Fire Services. This concept is not unique, as the British Fire Service has operated in a pairs environment for many years.

Accountability is the key to an effective Incident Management System. Our staff are tagged in and assigned a work location and task. Documentation is completed for each pair assigned to a fireground task marking the time in and location entered in the structure. The officer/firefighter assigned the task of entry control is responsible to monitor the time factors for each pair of fire fighters entering a structure. The above was a major challenge for the service.

## **Recruit Induction Training & Officer Development**

Since amalgamation, the Service has trained over 350 fire fighter recruits based on the Ontario Fire Marshal's, General Level Curriculum. This training program encompasses 16 weeks and is equivalent to the following NFPA Standards:

- 1001 (level2)
- 1002 ( Pump and aerial operations)
- 472 ( Operations)
- 1670 (several areas of technical rescue)
- Firefighter defibrillation
- Emergency Patient Care
- BLS-D Tiered Response

The Service, through partnership with the Ontario Fire College, delivers the Company Officer Diploma Program at the Toronto Fire Academy. This program is being offered to all captains and acting captains within the Service and will take approximately 6 years to complete. The program will act as the basis of all Officer Development programs for the Service.

The courses within the program are currently in the accreditation process at the post-secondary level.

## **Delivery of Training**

Training is delivered through a variety of methods within the Toronto Fire Services. This is accommodated through the District Training Officer concept through the shift-training instructors assigned to various platoons. The District or Command Coordinators have diligently worked in developing a network of shift training instructors to administer the program. The shift-training instructors are on duty fire fighters that have a particular skill or expertise in delivering the various programs:

- Pumper / Aerial Operations
- Driver Training
- Hazardous Materials
- EMS
- Water/Ice Rescue
- Technical Rescue

The above delivery of training has numerous advantages, as it expands training delivery opportunities across the department. Further, the program develops a base of qualified future training staff for the Service and empowers staff to develop their respective abilities. Staff assuming these duties are compensated at the rank of a captain for the hours taught.

In conclusion, our staff rose to the challenge in developing training programs and delivery methods to meet the needs of the fifth largest fire department in North America. We were not afforded the luxury to develop programs over time, as the training needs were identified due to the magnitude of change with the creation of the new Toronto Fire Services. The Service continues to face the challenges as standardization continues. One must never forget that change within the Fire Service is not easily accepted and we will continue to face the challenges now and in the future.

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