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IAFF–Metro Fire Chiefs Joint Statement

Despite Financial Crisis, Safety of Fire Fighters and the Public Must Remain Top Priority

Washington, DC – The International Association of Fire Fighters and the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association today issued a joint statement regarding the safety of fire fighters, paramedics and the public during the ongoing economic crisis.

The statement acknowledges the severe economic crisis facing many municipalities, but calls on jurisdictions to consider safety first when making budgetary decisions concerning their fire departments.

“Too many times, tough decisions about fire department resources are being made without consideration for the safety and well-being of our members or the public, and this must be pointed out and challenged,” said IAFF General President Harold Schaitberger. “We hope this message reaches the entire fire service and goes up the chain of command to decision-makers in every jurisdiction because this is truly a life safety issue during this economic crisis.”

“During economic times like these, requests for response to all types of emergencies increase, so a decrease in staffing while that call volume increases has a compounding negative effect on the safety of fire fighters and the public at large,” said Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association President and Miami, Florida Fire Chief Shorty Bryson.

The joint statement reads in part:

“We acknowledge the current economic reality. The value of the assets used to generate local government revenue has plummeted. Local governments across North America are contemplating or proposing decreases in size and/or reductions in the span and depth of their services. The fire service is often caught up in that contraction. We must weather this storm by having a realistic strategy grounded in the safety and security of fire fighters, paramedics and the public at large.

“We must keep all-hazard emergency response personnel as safe as possible. A fire company should be able to function as an independent unit at the scene of a fire in order to permit the Incident Commander to employ the proper tactics and strategies to safeguard the occupants of the building, as well as the operating force, and to protect the property of the public. Whenever understaffing necessitates the combination of two companies to accomplish a specific task at the scene of a fire -- which normally could be completed by one effective unit -- the standard operating procedures are dramatically and adversely affected.

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“Adequate staffing is imperative at the individual fire company level. In order to permit the effective operation of fire companies at the scene of a structure fire, the minimum number of personnel on both engine and ladder companies must be four members per unit for low hazard environments and five or six members per unit for medium and high hazard (high risk) environments.

“All resource decisions must be viewed in light of these fundamental requirements. Accordingly, if a decision is made to reduce departmental resources, it must never be accomplished by reducing company crew size on apparatus.”

The full statement can be viewed at www.iaff.org/09News/PDFs/JointStatement.pdf

The International Association of Fire Fighters, headquartered in Washington, DC, is the leading advocate in North America for the safety and training of fire fighters and paramedics. The IAFF represents more than 295,000 full-time professional fire fighters and paramedics who protect communities in every state in the United States and throughout Canada. More information is available at www.iaff.org

The Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association is a section of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), based in Vienna, VA, and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), based in Quincy, MA. Metro Chiefs brings together fire chiefs from large metropolitan fire departments to share information and focus on major issues effecting policy changes in the U.S. and abroad. Its members belong to the IAFC and NFPA and are the fire chiefs of jurisdictions with minimum staffing of 400 fully paid career firefighters. More information is available at www.nfpa.org/metro

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