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# POLICE AND FIRE CONSOLIDATION

An Ineffective Use of Resources



# Introduction

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Combining roles of fire fighters and police officers is a concept that challenges and undermines the career fire fighter's role as a guardian of public safety. In the past, the term "consolidation" was used to describe the merger of fire and police departments and roles. Today, this form of public safety operation employs cross-trained personnel who perform both fire fighting and law enforcement functions known as Public Safety Officers (PSO). Due to the gradual transition of terminology and usage, "consolidation," "public safety officer" and "PSO" are used interchangeably throughout the text.

The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) and the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) developed this manual to provide their members with general information about this practice and insights for prevention.

Research and academic/municipal studies are limited on this issue, therefore, the content herein includes the opinions of IAFF and IAFC officers, staff experts and members of the IAFF and IAFC, as well as documented outside resources.

Consolidation as used in this document is generally defined as: Elimination of the fire chief as head of the fire service in favor of a public safety director serving over both fire and police and the replacement of career fire fighters with "public safety officers" who perform both police and fire functions.

There are four types of consolidation: full, partial, functional and nominal.

- **Full Consolidation** Police and fire fighting duties are combined under a single agency.
- **Partial Consolidation** Police and fire services remain separate, except for a designated cadre of PSOs who perform both fire fighting and law enforcement functions.
- **Functional Consolidation** Police and fire departments operate separately, with some of the duties typically performed by one department assigned to the other; e.g., fire fighting personnel may help in administering police work, or police officers may assist fire fighters at a scene by reading gauges or hooking up hoses.
- **Nominal Consolidation** Fire and police departments remain completely separate; however, they operate under the administration of a single director who maintains full authority over all police and fire services.

Academic and practical course requirements for cross-training personnel can vary by jurisdiction. For example, in some areas emergency medical technician (EMT) certification may be required for all participants, while other jurisdictions may base EMT requirements on ratios between EMT personnel and public safety officers, and evenly divided between primary fire fighter functions and primary law enforcement functions.

## Consolidation and the Career Fire Fighter

One foreseeable outcome of partial or full consolidation is that reduction in fire fighter staffing can occur within these communities. Shortages in public safety personnel can impede job performances, deteriorate the identity of professions and create substantial costs and risks to the community.

Consolidation is generally considered by cities as a quick fix method to lower municipal budgets, while addressing the public's misperception of excess fire fighter downtime through the restructuring of two jobs into one. Municipalities will argue that consolidation of fire and police services is more efficient and, therefore, an improvement in the overall delivery of public safety. Frequently, however, the anticipated benefits are not realized. Consolidation can undermine effective fire suppression by disregarding proven fire fighting techniques and relying on PSOs with inferior skills and experience.

The IAFF and IAFC, along with many other groups in the fire and police fields, are opposed to consolidation because it can have a negative impact on municipal fire services. These groups are against consolidation of fire and police services because it could impair safety for both the public and the service providers.

When a city is considering consolidating its fire and police forces, it is vital for the public to understand and consider all the facts regarding consolidation before implementation. The IAFF and IAFC and other fire organizations do not believe that consolidation solves a city's budget problems; nor will it increase the fire department's efficiency. The local fire fighters union and fire department officials have a responsibility to assure that communities understand the facts before a city accepts a plan that its residents may regret.

Even if consolidation has not yet been mentioned in your city, it is important to recognize the early signs that the city may be contemplating a move in that direction. When a city begins to talk about cutting costs through possible consolidation, the fire fighters' union needs to take an active role to find solutions that are less dangerous.

This guide offers information about the issues that surround consolidation; addresses the arguments you can expect to hear for and against; an historical overview; warning signals that may indicate your city is considering consolidation; and guidelines to develop a preventive strategy.

Moreover, the IAFF and IAFC seek to provide technical assistance directly to affiliates and fire department officials confronted with consolidation. Affiliates and fire department officials are urged to keep the IAFF and IAFC fully informed about the status of consolidation attempts in their areas so the IAFF and IAFC can determine what technical services are most appropriate.

# History of Consolidation

## Historical Overview

Consolidation is an idea that has been around a long time, but it is mainly since the 1950s that the proponents of consolidation have made much headway. Some people claim the ancient Romans started it all by appointing “vigiles” whose responsibilities could include fighting fires as well as keeping law and order.

More relevant to our modern times were the “special constables” who kept the peace in Great Britain in the early 1800s. They were sworn citizens who performed both police and fire services. England’s Reform Act of 1832 cast the concept of a dual service into law, and the practice persisted in England until World War II. However, in 1941, faced with the terrible fire bombings of the war, Great Britain adopted a Fire Service Act that nationalized fire and police services and separated them into two independent departments. After the war, fire fighting was returned to local control.

Germany and Japan both had a type of consolidated police and fire service until the end of World War II. After the war, the allies considered it undesirable to maintain police involvement in the fire service in either country, and they reorganized the two activities into separate departments.

Consolidated fire and police services made its first appearance on this continent in 1857 at Trois Rivieres, Quebec. In Canada, consolidation grew slowly; outside the province of Quebec, its spread was limited. The first U.S. town to consolidate was Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan, in 1911. Since then, the approach was adopted, with varying results, in a number of other cities in both countries.

In the United States, proponents of consolidation started actively promoting the concept during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1950, Sunnyvale, California, was among a succession of cities that implemented consolidation. It was often efficiency-oriented city managers, who had little or no direct knowledge of fire fighting, who led the effort. An example of this is Oak Park, Michigan, whose city manager aggressively promoted the idea in his own town in 1954, and later moved to promote it elsewhere. Articles in popular periodicals such as *Reader’s Digest* debate the merits of merged police and fire service.

Pressure on cities to respond to population growth and rising costs in the 1970s and 1980s fueled the consolidation debate. As a major expense, fire departments stand out as targets to the cost-cutters who claim consolidation a “solution” in a growing number of cities. Advocates of consolidation find a forum for their views in the International City Management Association (ICMA), which produces publications and conferences that extensively cover the subject from a city manager’s perspective. A study of the history of consolidation reveals changes that occur in the nature and purpose of this form of operation. When the ancient Romans combined law enforcement and fire protection, they were certainly not dealing with the complex social and environmental conditions facing police and fire personnel today. A dual service today would have to recognize and combine the complex and specialized skills of modern police and fire services into one operation.

Today’s city managers may be more easily tempted by the argument that consolidation can cut costs, even if that argument is unfounded, when faced with the pressure to decrease budgets.

## Types of Consolidation

In different cities, consolidation can take many different forms. One city may only merge a few specific fire and police functions — such as arson inspections — and call that “consolidation.” More far-reaching changes occur when a city has operational consolidation, that is, it eliminates police and fire fighter positions altogether and replaces them with public safety officers (PSOs) who are trained in both fire and police work.

Most consolidation efforts today do not involve operational consolidation. Instead, a limited number of functions may be combined, or two departments may be nominally consolidated under a single administrator. Such cases do not normally alter the delivery of fire and police services.

A greater concern to career fire and police officers is the consolidation systems using PSOs, which profoundly change the way fire and police professionals work. There are several ways to classify consolidation, and for our purposes — to get a better understanding of how consolidation typically works — we will group them in four general categories.

- **Full consolidation** — *where the administration and operations of the fire and police departments merge into a single public safety department.* In most cases, a public safety director manages the department, public safety officers (PSOs) are cross-trained to provide both fire and police service, and there are no traditional fire fighters or police officers. However, PSOs may be assigned to work primarily as a fire fighter or police officer on a rotating basis.
- **Partial consolidation** — *where a portion of the administration and operations merge (as in full consolidation) and fire and police service are performed by traditional fire fighters and police.* In partial consolidation, PSOs usually play a major role in fire and law enforcement operations. In this case, each fire company is partly consolidated, and PSOs and traditional fire fighters work together as part of the same fire company. In other cases, consolidation is practiced in a limited area of the city with cross-trained PSOs serving low-risk areas and traditional fire and police officers serving the rest of the city.
- **Functional consolidation** — *where certain operations are performed jointly, but the separate police and fire fighter identities are retained.* With functional consolidation, fire fighters may be assigned to do record-keeping and paperwork at police stations; or police officers may prepare the hydrants for hoses at fire scenes. A joint fire and police communications and dispatch service can be considered an example of functional consolidation.

■ **Administrative consolidation** — *where the administrative functions are combined, but operations remain separate.* This type of consolidation employs a public safety director at the head of the department who oversees the operation of separate fire and police services. Administrative support functions, such as payroll and personnel, may be combined but the fire and police services maintain traditional operations. *Note: administrative consolidation is generally excluded from the discussions in this guide and the emphasis is on various forms of operational consolidation.*

### **Do Cities Ever Abandon PSO Programs?**

Abandoning a merged system has its own costs, both politically and financially, which can make it difficult for a city's elected officials to admit that the PSO program was a mistake. In 1962, Peoria, Illinois, implemented a partial consolidation; however, under the new system, the city's per capita fire losses and its per capita fire department budget costs soared. It was not until a major turnover of the city's elected officials occurred, including a new mayor and a majority of new aldermen, that Peoria abandoned the unsuccessful system in 1970.

The mayor of Daytona Beach, Florida, addressed a memorandum to the city manager and other officials reversing his decision on PSOs. In 1979, he stated:

"It is sometimes difficult for a person to say 'the six most important words — I admit I made a mistake.' I honestly believed the city was providing a more efficient public safety service. However, our public safety costs more money, our turnover rate now exceeds 16 percent, our new recruits often wait six months before they are placed in productive positions. . . ."

The mayor pointed out that the PSO program cost \$908,000 more over a seven-year period than traditional fire and police service would have cost. He urged the city to return to separate police and fire organizations, which it did. (Kelly, 1979)

The city of Durham, North Carolina abandoned its PSO program in 1985 after a consulting firm hired by the city council recommended a return to traditional departments. The Durham program had been controversial from its start in 1971, as it quickly became evident that the competing demands of patrol duty and fire fighting were not compatible. Faced with public pressure to resolve the controversy, the city council brought in the Washington, DC-based firm of Cresap, McCormick & Paget. The consultants found that the PSO system lacked the flexibility needed to respond to changing demands for fire and police service. Among the reasons it cited in recommending a return to traditional departments were the difficulties experienced in assembling fire teams in the parts of the city with heavy patrol needs, as well as problems related to longer response time, inadequate in-service training, and insufficient pre-fire planning. The return to separate fire and police departments put an end to the 14-year public controversy over the effectiveness of the Durham PSO program (Cresap, McCormick & Paget, 1985).

Sometimes city administrators are not aware that their public safety chiefs are ignoring consolidation. For example, the U. S. Fire Administration (USFA), with the participation of the IAFF and other organizations, sponsored a comprehensive study of PSO programs. The study found that the PSOs no longer carried their fire fighting gear in their cars but revealed that the city's top officials mistakenly believed that safety services were still consolidated (Ryland, 1979).

### **Who is Against PSOs?**

The International Association of Fire Fighters is one of many national organizations opposed to the PSO programs. Listed below are other groups and their members or affiliated organizations that have traditionally joined with the IAFF in campaigning against PSOs. They may be helpful in your efforts to maintain a separate fire department.

### **The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC)**

has been on record against PSOs the longest of any group — since 1877! In the opinion of the IAFC, the most important concern of the fire chief is that the use of PSOs:

Replaces the functional unit of a fire department (company unit) that can rapidly assess and respond to many hazards with the limited response of an individual or two individuals in a single unit. These small numbers are unacceptable for the fireground, urgent medical care and other situations where citizen and public-safety personnel lives are dependant on rapid intervention.

The IAFC stresses the importance of teamwork in fire fighting, and contrasts this with the police emphasis on individual action.

Consolidation exchanges the team concept for individual action. Individual action on a fire or EMS scene leads to unsafe acts, inefficiency and chaos, which too often has fatal consequences.

The IAFC reports:

The IAFC has examined the issue as it relates to the 21st-Century fire/EMS department and continues to believe the consolidation of fire and emergency service departments and law-enforcement agencies creates a hazardous environment for the public and responders."

**The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)** is on record against PSOs. After studying the issue for many years, the NFPA released commentary that reads:

We are convinced that there is no advantage, either from the point of view of economy or efficiency, in combining police and fire department functions. It is our considered opinion that a community needs both good police service and good fire service and that the combination of the two results in poorer police service and poorer fire service.

An NFPA representative further reported, "It is our observation that when fire and police departments are combined, the fire department suffers more than the police department and that the overall fire protection of the community is not at the proper level."

### **The International Union of Police Associations**

**(IUPA)**, an affiliate of the AFL-CIO, has opposed PSOs for a number of years. The group considers the consolidation of police and fire services “as a false economy that will impair the operation of both these essential services.” (Personal Interview with Dennis Slocumb, IUPA Vice President, 5/06)

The IUPA also endorses local efforts “to maintain the individuality of the police and fire services and ... produce and perfect the proficiency and effectiveness of both the police and fire services until each reaches the completely professional status the citizens of our country have a right to expect.” (Personal Interview with Dennis Slocumb, IUPA Vice President, 5/06)

It is important to note that although the IUPA is on record against PSOs, some police associations or unions take a more favorable view of it. Concerned IAFF locals may find that the police are their allies in this fight, but in other localities the police are on the other side.

### **Advocates of PSOs**

The city manager usually takes the lead in promoting PSOs in a local area, and often calls in outside consultants to help make the case for merged fire and police services.

Many individual consultants, management organizations and professional associations specialize in promoting PSO programs. If your city is considering hiring a pro-PSO organization, it is unlikely to get a balanced and objective assessment of the issue. If you cannot prevent the city from hiring a pro-PSO consultant, you can insist on having other experts brought in to provide a balancing point of view.

Individuals with credentials as public safety directors or city managers often serve as consultants to other cities to promote PSO programs. This can be particularly misleading if the individuals purport to have expertise in ‘public safety’ as a whole and yet are actually deficient in either fire protection or law enforcement. Public officials and decision makers should carefully exam any outsider’s credentials prior to allowing influence in an area as critical to the well being of citizens as public safety.

# Pros and Cons of PSOS

## KNOWING THE ARGUMENTS ON BOTH SIDES

You can make your strongest arguments in support of a separate fire department when you know the facts that support your position — and are knowledgeable of the opposition's arguments. The following information will help you develop your position in favor of a separate fire department.

This section of the guide describes the arguments you will most likely hear from pro-PSO advocates. The material provides many reasons for maintaining separate fire and police services, and identifies objections to PSOs. Additionally, reviewing this section will help you anticipate the arguments of pro-PSO groups that may be at work in your area now or in the future.

### Arguments in Favor of PSOs

Supporters commonly use an argument that stems from one basic idea: Getting more service for less money.

Advocates of PSO programs believe that fire fighters' time could be better used. In their view, fire fighters could assist police personnel with street patrols. According to these arguments, a PSO program would permit the city to reduce its fire and police budgets, each person would perform in dual roles, and fewer people would be required overall. The bottom line thinking is better service at less cost.

The simplistic reason for merging fire and police, as opposed to two other departments, is that fire and police are both concerned with public safety and both departments protect life and property. In the view of the pro-PSO groups, shared goals are an adequate basis for merging the two functions.

Pro-PSO groups also focus on the budget. Fire and police protection is a city's largest single expense. Fire and police costs can run to one quarter, one half, or even more of a municipality's general expenditures. The advocates of PSO programs claim that substantial savings can be achieved, both in the short term and over time, if the departments are consolidated.

The main reasons cited by cities in a 1977 survey conducted by the ICMA in favor of PSOs were:

- To achieve a higher standard of service at lower cost and long-range economy.
- To improve fire protection.
- To reduce fire response time.
- To create a greater number of trained career fire fighters.
- To reduce nonproductive time of fire fighters.
- To create a greater number of trained career police.

The most important motives for consolidating generally relate to:

- The belief that the fire service can be made more effective (that is, better protection or shorter response time), and
- The belief that fire fighting personnel can be better trained, motivated, and used.

The preceding reasons came from jurisdictions with full or partial consolidation. Cities with functional consolidation stated that their principal objectives were to increase coordination, eliminate duplication of effort, provide additional personnel at fires and provide additional personnel for police work. Separate surveys performed by other organizations reported similar reasons why cities have been persuaded to consolidate.

It is interesting to note that many of the cities in the ICMA survey reported that they had not actually achieved their goals with consolidation.

### Main Problems of PSOs

PSOs alter the basic roles and functions of police and fire services and often seriously affect the manner in which services are provided, and reduces the quality of service.

A number of interrelated problems invariably arise under PSO programs. The most critical issues examined in more detail in the following sections include:

- Neglect of the total fire safety program
- Increased costs
- Low morale
- Inadequate training
- Insufficient on-the-job experience
- Loss of fire fighting team concept
- Role conflicts
- Lack of departmental planning and goal-setting
- Failure to meet the demand for fire and police services

### Neglect of Total Fire Safety Program

Traditionally, modern fire fighting recognizes that an effective fire protection program involves much more than putting out fires. To give their communities comprehensive fire protection, today's fire departments focus on numerous preventive and protective services in addition to fire suppression. PSO systems allow no time or resources for these critical services:

- Safety Inspections. A significant part of the traditional fire fighter's job is routine visits to schools, commercial buildings, nursing homes and other facilities in their districts. These visits enable fire fighters to familiarize themselves with layout, emergency exits and potential hazards that would affect their method of operation in the event of fire.
- Attack Pre-Planning. Safety inspections also enable the fire fighters to prepare up-to-date attack plans for each major building in their jurisdiction for use in the event of fire. Building techniques have changed dramatically in recent years with the introduction of truss systems. It is essential that the fire service in a community be familiar with all structure types in order to pre-plan an effective attack.
- Public Education. When not fighting fires, the modern fire fighter spends a portion of his/her time meeting with community groups and making presentations on fire safety, emergency procedures, first aid techniques and other topics. The public must be made aware of the need for their help in a fire emergency and how they can

aid the fire department by calling in a suspected fire immediately and without delay.

- **In-Service Training.** The complex environmental problems of a modern city influence the performance of the fire fighter and necessitate continual updating of skills through in-service training. For instance, a fire fighter needs specialized training in hazardous materials to handle emergencies that can arise from these types of situations, and the only way to ensure their education is current is through a continuing program of in-service training. The need for refresher training cannot be overstressed or over used.
- **Emergency Medical Services.** Today's fire fighters also provide numerous other public services, including emergency medical services (EMS). In cities where the fire department is responsible for EMS, call volumes have soared. This alone is a successful argument against PSOs. What does a PSO do when he/she responds to the scene of a motor vehicle accident — do they provide EMS assistance or do they perform police duties? Information on the attributes of fire-based EMS are contained in the Second Edition of the *Emergency Medical Services: A Guide Book For Fire-Based Systems*, which can be found by visiting the Technical Assistance Division section of the IAFF website.

Cities that believe in PSOs may view these types of prevention, pre-planning, training and emergency medical activities as luxuries that must be sacrificed to a more efficient use of time. Public safety officers may not be allowed the time to make inspections or pre-planning visits, to undertake programs or participate in ongoing training. Reduced staffing at each fire station can stretch resources too thin to perform these activities.

The 1980 Ryland Research study revealed observations that confirmed this view. In the consolidation systems examined by that research team, all non-suppression activities necessary for a total fire protection program were reduced or eliminated. With fewer personnel permanently assigned to fire fighting duty, routine tasks consumed so much time that the fire services could not continue a high level of inspections, pre-planning work, public education and other prevention activities.

### **A Costly Approach**

PSO programs can be costly to the community. These costs show up in the jurisdiction's financial reports in terms of higher wages, increased pension costs and costs associated with cross training.

Most cities offer pay incentives to fire and police personnel as an inducement to participate in PSO programs. The increased wage base not only puts a strain on future public safety budgets, but it also effects all costs associated with these wage-related benefits, such as overtime and pension contributions. Since the new compensation plan may not be truly equitable, it may contribute to dissatisfaction and higher turnover among departmental personnel, which in turn increases public safety costs related to the hiring and training of new personnel. Other costs may not show up in the jurisdiction's budget, but they are very real for the citizens of the community. Among these are higher fire losses and higher rates of fire injuries and deaths.

Researcher W. M. Cunningham reported in his 1971 doctoral dissertation that no jurisdiction was known to have actually reduced its total fire and police budget through PSO programs, and confirmed the cost pressures resulting from these programs. Citing the high costs of conversion to PSO programs, he found that some cities never recoup that initial cost, and noted that the larger the jurisdiction, the less its chance of achieving economy using PSOs.

The Ryland study examined the experiences of municipalities where fire and police services were consolidated, and compared them to other non-consolidated areas. The study revealed costs to the communities in terms of:

- **Poorer suppression capabilities:**
  - *Higher fire loss per \$1,000 assessed value*
  - *More civilian injuries or deaths per fire*
- **Poorer prevention capabilities:**
  - *More fires per capita*
- **Poorer training capabilities:**
  - *More uniformed injuries or deaths per fire*

Data on response time does not make a distinction between the arrival of the police car and the fire apparatus, and is uncertain if the effective response time is any shorter under a PSO program. Actual experience indicates it is not. Once a PSO arrives at the fire scene in his squad car, he/she still has to put on the fire fighting gear before taking action. Even then, the PSO generally cannot perform rescue or suppression tasks until he/she is joined by other members of the fire company who have the hoses, ladders, rescue nets, etc. It is unacceptable for a lone PSO to enter a burning building without the support and backup of other fire fighters.

The public should carefully examine all of these potential costs before consolidation is attempted.

### **Low Morale**

Failure to overcome employee consolidation has led to serious morale problems in many PSO programs. Low morale in turn has contributed to increased turnover rates. For example, in El Dorado, Kansas, turnover rates of almost one third were documented, following the introduction of a "team concept" in its consolidated public safety department. In Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a 1975 survey revealed that more than 90 percent of the fire fighters, police and public safety officers blamed a drop in morale on the introduction of the PSO concept (Ryland, 1980). Even in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where fire fighters and police voluntarily accepted consolidation in 1982, the city discovered morale problems developing among PSOs, fire fighters, and police within the first year (Berg, 1983).

Morale problems are clearly costly for consolidated departments. Ryland found that turnover in consolidated cities averaged 8.9 percent each year in the five-year period examined. Attendant to that turnover are the costs of hiring and training new personnel. Unfortunately, few cities have attempted to address the root causes of the serious morale problems under a public safety system, so it is likely to remain a problem for jurisdictions with merged departments.

### **Inadequate Training and Personnel Development**

To competently perform dual services, PSOs require special training, both to acquire the necessary skills in both fields and to keep those skills up-to-date. Yet cities with PSO programs tend to let their training efforts lapse. As a result, the skills of PSOs deteriorate and they lose their ability to fulfill their dual role as law enforcement officers and fire fighters.

Training, of course, is an expense. Its costs include the nonproductive time of the individuals in training, as well as any overtime pay required for others assigned to perform their duties while they are in training. Furthermore, it is an expense that the public seldom understands or appreciates. PSO departments often cut back or eliminate their training programs to make it easier to sell the public on the supposed low costs of consolidation. Management may resort to training cutbacks when there has been public pressure for more law enforcement staffing. Rather than hiring adequate personnel, the city will pull its PSOs out of training classes and send them out on street patrol.

Fire fighting skills, in particular, suffer from these training cutbacks. Most PSOs are assigned primarily to law enforcement functions, and rely on their practice sessions to develop and maintain fire fighting skills. Loss of training means that PSOs are ill prepared to function on the fire fighting team — increasing the risk of injury to the untrained PSO, fellow fire fighters, and the occupants of the buildings he/she is supposed to protect.

Police proficiency can also be hurt by training cutbacks. A 1983 analysis by the city of Kalamazoo, Michigan, found that the police training provided to PSOs was inferior to that formerly given to police officers before consolidation. The analysis also found that in-service training for the city's pure police officers (non-PSOs) had been reduced due to budget constraints and other restrictions that accompanied the switch to consolidation. Informal on-the-street training was found to lack consistency.

### **Inadequate On-The-Job Experience**

Closely related to the training issue is the fact that cross-trained PSOs are deprived of adequate working experience in their secondary field, which is usually fire fighting. The lack of real on-the-job experience prevents them from carrying out their fire fighting duties effectively when they work in their secondary field. PSOs spend a majority of their time in law enforcement activities.

### **Loss of Team Concept in Fire Fighting**

Fire fighting has traditionally been performed by people working as a team. The team approach is especially suited to emergency situations where lost time or poor judgment can cost lives. Teamwork enables individuals to perform specialized functions while cooperating closely in a coordinated attack on a fire. The lack of adequate working experience as a fire fighter reduces the PSO's efficiency in fire suppression and rescue tasks. It also deprives them of essential experience working as a team with other members of the fire company to which they are assigned.

For the team to operate as a unit, it is essential for members not only to know their own assignments, but also to know, trust and rely on one another. In fire fighting, the engine company or truck company functions as a team.

Its members usually serve together on the same shift. Working and training together, they develop a coordinated approach for executing rescue and suppression tasks.

However, when PSOs are given fire fighting responsibilities, the number of persons on the permanent fire fighting team is reduced. The smaller fire company is then joined by one or more PSOs at a fire scene, and those PSOs are considered part of the fire fighting team. The fire company may have different PSOs assigned to it each time there is a fire, so it is often impossible to establish a team relationship. Even though some cities have acknowledged this problem and tried to correct it, experience shows that the law enforcement duties of PSOs still prevent them from working and training consistently with the same fire team. This detracts from the effectiveness of the total team effort.

Staffing PSOs is not compatible with the team concept because the work shifts for PSOs and police differ from that of fire fighters. The PSOs assigned to patrol duty, who also respond to fires, usually work an eight-hour day and a 40-hour week. In a consolidated system, persons assigned full-time to fire suppression usually work a 24-hour day on a cycle of one day on, two days off. Therefore, a PSO has to work with three different fire companies on three consecutive days. Further, a fire company will have three different PSOs assigned to it during one 24-hour shift.

Another obstacle to teamwork is that PSOs may be unable to leave their law enforcement assignment when an alarm occurs, requiring substitutes to be sent to fires in their place. When temporarily assigned to another district to fill staffing shortages, substitutes need to fill in for the PSOs. The substitutes may be unfamiliar with the operations of the team if they have not previously worked with the particular fire company.

There are claims that the quick arrival of the PSO at a fire in his/her own patrol car before the rest of the team arrives is a major benefit of a PSO program. In fact, the PSO's arrival time does little to speed up the rescue and suppression operations, and undermines the proven teamwork strategy used in fire fighting. In reality, the PSO may not even arrive before the regular fire apparatus, and if the PSO does arrive first, he/she cannot fight the fire without the fire apparatus nor without the support and assistance of other fire fighters. Alternatively, if the PSO arrives after the rest of the fire suppression team, they must stall operations or work shorthanded until he/she arrives and changes into appropriate fire fighting gear. Consequently, the ability to establish team relationships under these circumstances is unlikely.

### **Role Conflicts**

Dual service creates conflict in responsibilities for the public safety officers and their supervisors. An example is dual supervisors managing public safety officers: PSOs report to two different supervisors at different times, based on when they perform law enforcement or fire fighting functions. Generally, a PSO is assigned to a law enforcement supervisor the majority of his time, and is released to the supervision of a fire officer when a fire alarm occurs. The law enforcement supervisor generally has greater authority over the PSO than the fire supervisor, since the primary duties performed are in a law enforcement capacity and the law enforcement supervisor rates the PSO's performance.

The PSO's tendency to give priority to the orders of the law enforcement supervisor creates a variety of command problems at a fire scene where both are present. Until the fire supervisor arrives with the apparatus, the law enforcement supervisor is generally in charge of rescue and suppression efforts. However, once on the scene, the fire supervisor assumes the command. Experience shows that the PSO will continue responding to directions from the law enforcement supervisor even after the fire supervisor arrives and takes over. This type of situation creates conflicts that can undermine the effectiveness of the fire suppression effort and reduce morale among fire fighting personnel.

Due to the demand for a PSO to perform dual functions within a consolidated system, it is imperative that clearly defined policies dictate the response to emergency calls. For example, which event takes precedence: pursuit of a bank robber or response to a fire alarm? Conversely, engaged at a fire scene, at what point can he/she be released to return to law enforcement? Can he/she leave the fire scene as soon as the fire supervisor says the fire is under control? Does he/she have to stay and help the regular fire fighters in clean-up operations? What happens if the law enforcement supervisor wants to recall the PSO during the fire for a police emergency?

Most public safety departments do not have — or enforce — standard operating procedures to settle these kinds of role conflicts. As a result, the dual system frequently breaks down. Torn between their two roles, PSOs come to take their law enforcement responsibilities more seriously than their fire fighting work, and the quality of fire fighting work suffers.

Researchers documented another type of role conflict: Someone who is a good police officer is not necessarily a good fire fighter, and vice versa. Moreover, it is extremely difficult for personnel to switch back and forth from one role to another. Simply put, a police officer must be wary of other people; a fire fighter must be a helper. A police officer must deal with principles of law, right and wrong; a fire fighter must understand the properties of burning materials. A police officer must deal with problems caused by people violating the law; a fire fighter must deal with saving life and property from fire.

Due to the drastic differences in police and fire fighting roles, it is rare that a PSO is equally suited to both roles and able to perform one role as well as the other. Experience demonstrates that personnel in dual systems do not perform as well when they are working in their less favorite role. This results in diminished effectiveness of the PSO's individual performance, as well as that of his/her co-workers

A person who repeatedly switches roles will eventually experience increased levels of stress. Fire fighters and police officers are especially prone to stress-related problems such as heart attacks. A PSO program, with its dual roles, adds to these problems. Psychologists who have studied the behavior of personnel in consolidated departments believe the added stress of dual roles prevents PSOs from performing at full efficiency in either role. The stress can build up and cause the PSOs to work less efficiently, become confused about their work, and make errors in judgment.

It has been documented that the personality type best able to cope with the dual roles and tensions of consolidation are “complacent individuals who have a low reactive level to social stimuli, and as such would probably make dubiously effective police officers or fire fighters.”

### **Inadequate Planning and Goals**

A key step in the proper management of any program is a well-defined set of objectives and a plan for achievement. The plan should address wages, pension costs, training, response priorities, and so forth. Part of the planning process is the need for an assessment to determine if the program is accomplishing what it set out to do.

In most cases, planning is inadequate or nonexistent, and fire and police department officials may not even be involved in the limited planning that does occur. As a result, PSO programs have encountered numerous startup problems, and no one can accurately measure their accomplishments — or lack thereof.

### **Inability to Meet Demand for Services**

The greater a jurisdiction's fire and police call volume, the more likely that a PSO system will prove inadequate. Larger cities, in particular, have had serious problems in this regard. Communities where PSO programs have been accepted are generally smaller, stable jurisdictions with lower fire and police call volume activity.

Based on observations in his research, W. M. Cunningham wrote that the efficiency of a PSO system “is a variable which is progressively negated by increase in [jurisdiction] size in relationship with intensity of demand for fire protection.”

# Warning Signals

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## EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

A jurisdiction's actions with respect to its fire and police departments may signal that it intends to move toward PSOs, even before that intention is publicly acknowledged. There are certain patterns that cities often follow to lay the groundwork for a PSO program. When alert local and fire department officials can recognize these warning signals well in advance, there is more time for them to launch an effective campaign to defeat the consolidation attempt.

- **Concern about public safety costs.** When a jurisdiction faces fiscal constraints, jurisdiction administrators may start pointing to the large public safety budget as an area where savings could be achieved. A jurisdiction administrator may also make unrealistic projections on crime control and cost savings in order to persuade elected officials and voters.
- **Pressure for increased police presence on the streets.** Another key factor in many small cities' decision to consolidate is the public's demand for increased police protection. Jurisdiction management may capitalize on citizen concern about rising crime and present a PSO program as a low-cost way to expand police service.
- **Feasibility studies.** When jurisdiction management wants to consolidate fire and police services, it usually commissions a study or task force to give the proposal some credibility. The stated goal of the study may not even mention consolidation; it may be to "study ways of reducing fire and police costs." Alternatively, it may be to recommend ways to "increase fire department productivity" or "increase the efficiency of public safety services," and so forth. IAFF affiliates and fire department officials should seek representation on any study or task force committee.

Fire department and union leadership should offer the fire department accreditation process, and the risk assessment that is a central part of the process, as alternatives to potentially subjective feasibility studies that only look at a singular proposed solution. Community risk assessments and the department accreditation process co-created by the IAFC and ICMA evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of a department and the specific needs of the community. This data-driven model can produce multiple solutions that are equally – if not more so – cost effective than consolidation and put public and responder safety first.

- **Erosion of the two departments' separate identities.** Some cities pursue a more gradual approach to consolidation. Instead of proposing an outright merger of the fire and police departments, cities will gradually break down the separation between the two departments by merging first one function and then another. Of course, not every shared function is a sign that the jurisdiction is moving toward a full merger. Numerous fire and police departments have successfully shared emergency 911 numbers, dispatch services or arson teams, for example, without surrendering the integrity of the two individual departments. Therefore, it is important to assess each situation carefully to determine when the sharing of certain functions will strengthen the two departments and when it may actually weaken them.

# Developing Your Own Strategy

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## Resisting PSO Threats

Developing a strong counter offensive strategy that includes the tactical steps listed below can aid in the success of defeating the threat of consolidation.

- Assess the situation carefully
- Participate in studies and hearings
- Get all the facts
- Enlist your friends
- Keep your members informed
- Voter Initiatives

Each of these steps is critically important. Since the move to consolidate almost always originates with the jurisdiction government, the pro-PSO forces have plenty of resources to devote to the issue. In order to convince the public to abandon its traditional fire and police services, the jurisdiction will use special studies and consultants to strengthen their position, and may launch a publicity campaign to promote the concept of public safety officers. Those who oppose PSOs must be diligent to counter the jurisdiction's promotional efforts.

Additional details follow. Note that these are general suggestions only, and you will want to adapt them to the particular needs and opportunities in your locality. Consider that many of these steps will have to take place simultaneously even though the material reviews each individually.

## Assess the Situation Carefully

It is important for the union and fire department officials to develop a comprehensive strategy and action plan to present to the public. Before you make any public statements, it is prudent to begin the research and planning.

- Find out exactly what is happening. Discard unfounded rumors and sort out the facts. Who is proposing to do what, when and how?

*If your investigation indicates that a proposed PSO program is a real threat to your department,*

- The IAFF and IAFC can help you decide how to proceed. To assist in an assessment, be prepared to share the information you have gathered — for example, who authored the proposal, details of scenarios contained in the proposal, the names of consultants the jurisdiction plans to retain, and so forth.

## Buy Some Extra Time

Assert a public process of information gathering and review of the issues to prevent jurisdiction management from forcing its PSO plan to a vote before all the issues can be publicly examined. You will need adequate time to gather data, assess the strengths and weaknesses of the plan, study the local political tenor, formulate the arguments supporting your position and develop the support of other groups.

- Request a comprehensive study by a citizens committee. The study group, or task force, should include members across a broad spectrum of the community; people who will not simply “rubberstamp” management’s views. If union officials are denied participation on the committee, secure a position for a rank-and-file union fire fighter.
- Ask for public hearings as part of the study process. The hearings should be open to the public, and views of all affected segments of the public should be encouraged to testify — including, of course, fire fighters, police and citizen representatives.

These two review processes will slow down the approval process, and provide you with valuable additional time to develop your own strategies. It will also give you and your allies a forum for presenting your views and concerns about consolidation.

## Get All the Facts

Use your time effectively to gather substantiating data to support your arguments.

- Talk to others who have been through PSO battles. This includes other IAFF locals and fire department officials as well as your state or provincial association. Ask them to share their ideas with you about the types of arguments they found most effective, and seek their guidance to gather facts that support your arguments.
- Develop your arguments. Several sections of this guide will give you tips on key topics you will want to cover, such as arguments against PSOs and the policy positions of major fire service organizations.
- Be sure to collect, review and analyze data specific to your department and community.

## Enlist Your Friends

- Make it a broad-based campaign. Concern from many segments of a community will have greater influence on jurisdiction managers and elected officials than the perception of the union simply protecting its own interests. Work with fire department officials to develop a plan of action. Develop the support of community organizations and take advantage of the wide range of community activities of fire departments through the group and individual activities.

*Recommended groups to contact:* senior citizen groups; homeowner associations; Little League; civic and charitable organizations; political organizations; PTAs; the Boys and Girls Club; and groups whose members are particularly dependent on fire and emergency medical services and who have a greater stake in maintaining good service. *The latter might include the elderly, the handicapped, operators of schools or childcare centers, and so forth.*

Learn about available assistance from your legislators, those in the state or provincial legislature, and those in Congress or Parliament. Additionally, make sure that your AFL-CIO central labor council or local/state Fire Chiefs Association is fully informed about the consolidation issue. Educate other union leaders on the issue, and seek their support in voicing concerns to elected officials and in bringing the message to the public.

## Keep Your Members Informed

- Educate your members about the adverse affects of PSOs, and inform them of preventative actions. A key responsibility of the local union is to make members aware of the real threat consolidation poses to their jobs, their profession and their community.
- Let members know how they can help. Members of the fire service can be very effective advocates for maintaining their traditional professional roles and can reach deep into the community through their participation in wide-ranging civic and charitable activities. The inventory of your members' community involvements will help members identify the organizations they can go to with their message.

## Voter Initiatives and Goffstown, New Hampshire

When Selectmen in Goffstown, New Hampshire, voted to combine the fire and police departments under a public safety director, and chose current Police Chief Michael French to act as interim public safety director, a political action team was assembled by the IAFF. The team educated the citizens on the pitfalls of consolidation and drafted "warrant language" to go before the voters prohibiting the consolidation of the fire and police departments.

On March 14, citizens voted for warrant articles to prevent consolidation, continue separate police and fire departments, affirm police and fire department separation and reinstate Fire Chief Frank Carpentino.

Some of the warrant language is as follows:

### ■ Article 1

To see if the Town will vote to continue the Police and Fire Departments as the separate entities they have been for many years, and restore to office any personnel who may have been removed from said office, if reorganization has begun before this vote.

### ■ Article 2

To see if the Town will vote to reaffirm the continuation of separate Fire and Police Departments, with each department run by a fire chief and police chief, with each being the distinct department head for their respective department.

# Resources and Combating PSO Threats

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Jurisdiction managers advocating the use of PSOs will have plenty of facts and figures to support their pro-PSO arguments. The IAFF can provide vital assistance in refuting these consolidation efforts. Services available to IAFF affiliates are outlined below:

- **Municipal Financial Analysis (MFA)**. An MFA is an analysis of the financial condition of the city. An MFA is vital in addressing the fiscal constraints that are often cited by management as justification for consolidation. A list of documents required for an MFA can be found by visiting the Technical Assistance Division section of the IAFF website.
- **Geographical Information System (GIS)**. A GIS is a staffing and station location analysis. A GIS will assess the impact PSOs would have on Fire/EMS delivery. Both an explanation of a GIS along with a GIS checklist can be found by visiting the Technical Assistance Division section of the IAFF website.
- **Comparative Data**. The IAFF maintains a database that contains both demographic and economic information for reporting IAFF affiliates. This information will be invaluable in determining your jurisdiction's standing among its peer group. The IAFF will also solicit information for comparable affiliates if necessary. Contact your IAFF District Vice President to take advantage of this service.
- **Public Relations Assistance**. The possibility of a PSO system is important news that will interest the local media. You will need to explain the issues and the potential impact on the community. In order to accomplish this goal you will need to start a public relations program. Information on getting a public relations program off the ground can be found by visiting the Media and Communications Division of the IAFF website. Appendix A also provides you with a generic press release and talking points on consolidation to assist in your efforts.
- **Politics**. You will need to apply pressure to city administrators and lawmakers who make decisions on the proposed PSO program. Information on how to elect, meet and lobby lawmakers can be obtained by contacting the IAFF Governmental Affairs Department.
- **Legal**. When faced with a proposal to consolidate the fire and police departments you may have to explore legal options. The IAFF Legal Department provides a full range of services to meet the legal needs of IAFF affiliates. Contact your IAFF District Vice President to take advantage of this service.

Some similar information may be obtained by going to the IAFC website at [www.iafc.org](http://www.iafc.org).

# Preventing Future Consolidation Attempts

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The proverbial ounce of prevention is certainly the most effective medicine when it comes to PSO systems. If you make the right preventive moves you can ward off any efforts to consolidate the fire and police departments that might otherwise spring up and flourish.

As the basis for developing a good preventive strategy against PSOs, you will want to take a hard look at the way your department currently functions — even when there do not seem to be any problems — in order to determine what changes will strengthen the department and make it less vulnerable to attack. Naturally, every fire department presents its own unique needs and opportunities. However, a long-range preventive strategy is usually most likely to succeed when it includes these steps:

- Broaden the fire department's services to strengthen its base in the community.
- Amalgamation with other fire departments.
- Negotiate protections through the collective bargaining process.
- Demonstrate fiscal conservancy and engage with the budget process.

## Broaden Fire Department Services

In most of the consolidation case studies examined by Ryland Research for its 1980 study of fire departments, researchers concluded that the merged fire departments “probably were not aggressively pursuing a full range” of services prior to consolidation, thereby leaving themselves vulnerable to PSO proposals. This means, in the researchers' view, that if these departments had been engaged more actively in varied services — fire prevention, emergency medical service and other community services and support — consolidation might never have happened.

The best way for a fire department to generate public support is through the services it provides community residents. In addition, the public's support for an independent fire department can be one of the best weapons against consolidation.

Fire fighters' contact with the public is most dramatic when putting out fires, but it should not begin and end there. Other types of services — such as medical or non-emergency — actually offer fire fighters a greater opportunity to interact with the public on a person-to-person basis. Citizens who rely on fire fighters for a broad array of critical services are unlikely to endorse PSO schemes that would reduce or eliminate the services they are accustomed to receiving.

Usually there are three major areas in which fire departments can broaden their services in order to gain a stronger foothold against consolidation:

### ■ Prevention and Inspection Program

Fire departments that pursue an aggressive prevention and inspection program are typically better positioned to resist consolidation.

This is true for two reasons.

1. The community benefits from the improved fire safety and reduced losses resulting from effective prevention programs.
2. Such programs give fire fighters a visible service role in the community when they are not responding to calls — thus depriving critics of the basis of their argument that fire fighters should fill their spare time with PSO duties.

### ■ Expanded Education Programs

Most fire departments can make more extensive use of education programs to broaden their contacts with all segments of the community and increase their responsiveness to community needs. This can be done by increasing the number of fire safety programs in public and private schools and by offering regular classes in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

### ■ Integration of EMS into the Fire Service

Integration of emergency medical services with the fire service has proved both effective and popular. When the fire department operates the EMS, as it does in many cities, it gets an opportunity to assist large numbers of persons who might otherwise have no occasion to call on the fire department. A good emergency medical service will develop strong support in the community from those it has served. Few cities would think of altering an effective fire-EMS relationship by introducing consolidation with the police.

## Amalgamation With Other Fire Departments

IAFF affiliates in small municipalities have sought to improve their efficiency and reduce costs by merging with surrounding departments. Under this scenario, there is one labor contract for an entire metropolitan area. A city government interested in PSOs would have to face the opposition not only of its own local but also those unions from adjacent towns covered by the same bargaining agreement.

### **Collective Bargaining — No PSO Protections**

The best time to secure no-consolidation protections in your collective bargaining agreement is obviously before it is an issue. Therefore, it is never too early to work for language in your collective bargaining agreement to prevent consolidation. This language could be stated in terms of a specific and total prohibition against consolidation, e.g., “The police and fire departments shall not be consolidated.” Alternatively, it might be framed in terms of a prohibition against assigning fire fighters to unrelated work.

Such language will need to be renewed each time your collective bargaining agreement is renegotiated, so it does not provide permanent protection.

### **Fiscal Conservacy — Engage with Budget**

Economic cycles come and go, and the fire department needs to position itself to proactively address financial issues, rather than be reacting to decisions made by others. When the economy is well, fire officials and union leaders need to work together to engage in conservative strategies to use their resources wisely, explore revenue generating strategies, and enhancing financial and operational data collection. Enhancing the labor-management relationship can contribute to both long-term and short-term success of these efforts. The Labor-Management Initiative can provide support to both chiefs and labor officials, as well as forge better communications with city managers. Seeking accreditation is an excellent way to demonstrate a long-term commitment to better service and lower costs and conservative use of grant funds is another way to demonstrate that a fire department is driven by adequate funding for real needs and realistic solutions.

Ensuring that fire and union officials have a long-term investment in community budget decisions provides an environment where you are less likely to be put on the defensive, and have a better advantage in preparing a data-driven defense if you are. It is critical to engage in larger budget discussions, and to understand not only the public safety budget, but critical financial intersections, for example, tax revenue, transportation expenditures, and services to the poor and elderly. As a result, fire service and union leaders will be already seated at the table and be more prepared to propose solutions that protect the quality of service while contributing to the community’s overall success. ■

# Public Safety Consolidation Stretches Us Too Thin



Fire Fighters have been proudly delivering a high level of service protection to the citizens of Anytown for xx years. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, your fire fighters provide fire suppression, emergency medical care, XXXXX, XXXXX, XXXX and XXXX.

Now, your fire fighters need your support in opposing the City Council's proposal to merge fire and police under one public safety department. If implemented, this will not only lower the level of service, but leave many citizens unprotected.

## What's wrong with the city's plan?

- There will be confusion on the scene of an emergency incident because of cross-training. What does a PSO do when they pull up to a motor vehicle accident involving a trapped drunk driver and multiple injuries? Do they secure the scene and begin investigating? Do they extricate the driver and treat other injured parties?
- Response times will be increased under a PSO system. A fire truck responding to a fire will have to wait for additional PSO's prior to commencing fire suppression efforts. PSO's in patrol cars will also have to secure weapons and other associated law enforcement equipment/gear. Precious time will be lost.
- Taxpayers will incur added expenses, personnel will need to be cross trained to provide both fire and law enforcement services.
- Fire fighters currently perform both fire and EMS duties. The call volume has skyrocketed over the last XXXX years, to ask a fire fighter to perform in a law enforcement capacity is not feasible.
- A combined department will most certainly lead to low morale and high department turnover, depriving Anytown from its most experienced police officers and fire fighters.

**Please attend this City Council Meeting  
Tuesday, (month) (day)  
(place)**

**Or call your City Council Members**

**A message from the Anytown Professional Fire Fighters.**



## **Anytown Fire Fighters Oppose Combining Fire and Police**

Anytown (insert date)– Anytown fire fighters are opposing the City Council’s proposal to consolidate the fire and police into a single public safety department due to concerns a merger would put citizen safety at risk in the event of a fire or medical emergency.

Fire fighters are calling on Anytown citizens to attend Tuesday night’s City Council meeting to ensure that police and fire protection remain separate.

“There are many important safety factors to consider,” says XXXX XXXX, president of Anytown Professional Fire Fighters Local XXX. “Both are very specialized, dangerous professions that require very different tools and skills.”

Anytown fire fighters say that combining fire and police will reduce the number of fire fighters and police officers available to protect the citizens of Anytown and their property. Personnel remaining on duty would be responsible for responding to all emergencies – from crimes to house fires.

Anytown Professional Fire Fighters have proudly served and protected the Anytown citizens/community since 19XX, providing fire suppression, emergency medical care, hazardous materials response and XXXXX. In addition, Anytown fire fighters serve the community by raising money for {{{charity name}}}, providing fire protection education in schools, XXXX and XXXX.

A vote is expected on this issue on {{{{{{date}}}}}}.

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