

A STUDY OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES OF KING GEORGE COUNTY, VIRGINIA



Conducted by:
The Virginia Fire Services Board
The Virginia Department of Fire Programs
The Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services

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INTRODUCTION

This is the report of the present organization of the fire and E.M.S. resources in King George County Virginia, and recommendations for improvements, conducted at the request of the King George County government.

The following were members of the study committee:

Lora Cooke - Chairperson
Lieutenant, Prince William Co. Fire and Rescue Department
Member, Virginia Fire Services Board

Chris Eudailey
Director of Fire, Rescue, and Emergency Services
Spotsylvania Co.

Ken Pullen
Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services

Tina Skinner
Director
Rappahannock E.M.S. Council, Inc.

Chuck Thompson
Director of Fire, Rescue, and Emergency Services
Stafford Co.

Jeff Crawford
Lieutenant, Prince William Co. Fire and Rescue Department

Mr. Bert Roby
Area 2 Manager
Virginia Department of Fire Programs

The members of the study committee collectively have backgrounds in both career and volunteer fire and E.M.S. organizations and have each been involved in other studies of this type.

The committee's goal: To make recommendations for a fire and E.M.S. organization that will serve the needs of the citizens of King George County in an effective and efficient manner.

The committee gratefully acknowledges the assistance of:

- Captain Steve Basham - King George Co. Emergency Services
- All the officers and members of the five fire and E.M.S. stations who took the time to talk with us and make us feel welcome.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this study was to examine and make recommendations in the following areas:

Management, administration, and accountability

Examine the administration of the fire and E.M.S. departments at both the county and station level. Look at areas such as financial management and bookkeeping, decision and policymaking, SOP's, organizational structure, and insurance coverage.

Level of service

Examine the current availability of volunteers during daytime, nighttime, and weekend periods given current needs and projected population growth. Examine current response procedures to ensure timely response and adequate career and volunteer staffing for all types of incidents.

Personnel

Examine the current volunteer recruitment and retention efforts for effectiveness. Examine the job descriptions for career staff and review the current employee benefits, work schedules, and salary structure.

Training

Examine the current levels of training for the various volunteer and career members of the county fire and E.M.S. services. Examine the current training programs in place to ensure that they are adequate, available to all, and cover all areas of need such, as firefighter, officer, driver, and E.M.S.

Safety and operations

Examine response standard operating guidelines to ensure that an adequate Incident Management System (to include accountability, RIT team, etc.) and

SOP's are in place, are being used at all incidents, and all personnel are trained and required to follow the existing policies.

Apparatus and equipment

Examine the existing apparatus and future apparatus purchase plans for adequacy.

BACKGROUND

Fire and E.M.S. services are provided to King George County residents through a combination career and volunteer system. There are three fire stations and two rescue stations in the county. Each station has a full complement of officers and there are approximately 80 volunteers providing service to the citizens. The two stations of the King George Volunteer Fire Department and the Fairview Beach Volunteer Fire Department recently merged into one organization and merger with the Dahlgren Volunteer Rescue Squad is currently being considered. The operations of the three fire stations are coordinated through a volunteer county fire chief and the two rescue stations are managed by a volunteer rescue captain. The activities of the career staff are coordinated by Captain Steve Basham. The county fire chief has operational authority at incidents and operational policy is established by the senior staff. The county chief prepares a budget for the county and administers that budget for the various fire stations. The rescue captain prepares the budget for the rescue stations. The career captain prepares the budget for the career staff. The county funds most of the operational and capital improvement costs. Additional money is raised by fund raising activities by various individual stations.

Due to increased growth over the last few years the fire and E.M.S. services are coming under increased pressure to maintain adequate service. A small career staff currently assists the county fire and rescue stations during the weekdays and volunteer staffing at several of the fire and rescue stations is marginal.

In 2000 the county fire and rescue stations responded to 1124 fire incidents and 2703 medical incidents. This information was based on statistics supplied by the individual stations and is not completely accurate. Information on how many times a particular station failed to respond on a call is lacking.

OUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our study started with a briefing by the county administrator, a number of the county officials and several of the individual volunteer station officers. We met a number of times in the county to discuss the various issues we were requested to review. During those meetings we met individually with the county administrator and county planner. We visited the communications center and were briefed on its operation. The committee visited each fire and rescue station and met with key volunteer officers and members.

We also met with the members of the career staff. The meetings were for the purpose of asking questions and receiving comments on the various issues. This also provided an opportunity to see much of the county and the growth areas. Following these meetings the committee formulated the recommendations to be presented to the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrator.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

This section of the report will discuss organizational structure in relation to the needs that were expressed by members and observations by the committee. The intent of the committee is to provide a report that can be used to guide the fire and rescue service during the next five to ten years. This will not provide detailed instructions for adoption nor does this document anticipate every potential situation. These are recommendations, which will have fiscal and cultural impact on the system. Implementation of these or any recommendations must be decided by the County's administration and elected officials in accordance with public safety initiatives.

Fire and Rescue Official

It is imperative to identify one individual as the head of the fire and emergency medical services for King George County. At this time there are at least three individuals that are fulfilling that role, the volunteer fire chief, the volunteer rescue captain and the career captain. This situation leads to conflicting agendas, duplication of work, and confusion in relation to completing the mission of providing EMS and fire service to the citizens.

Consolidation

The initiative of the two volunteer fire companies to consolidate into one is a very progressive and admirable decision. Most of the volunteers interviewed viewed the consolidation as a positive action and are supportive of the new organization. Consolidation of the volunteer rescue squad with the fire department is very important for the provision of comprehensive emergency service to the citizens. This needs to be pursued aggressively by the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrator. Following that action, the next step would be to combine the volunteer organization with the career organization. This is necessary for fiscal accountability, resource allocation, and a unified chain of command. An excellent article that details one organization's consolidation and the benefits can be read in the February 2000 issue of FIRE CHIEF magazine. To successfully consolidate, there must be effort put into alleviating the concerns of volunteer fire department members. A survey was conducted to identify the level of support for the fire department consolidation, the consolidation of the rescue squad and the fire department, and the cross training of members. While the majority of the respondents support cross training and the combining of facilities, there is a lack of strong support of consolidation of the fire department and rescue squad. Much of the concern was among fire department personnel who were unsure of their responsibility to

respond to medical calls. Identifying and resolving these concerns should open the door to successful total consolidation.

Administrative Issues

A resounding message from the volunteer and career personnel in King George was the significant lack of planning, policy development, and organizational structure necessary for the service to function in accordance with the rise in service demands. Both volunteer and career personnel desperately need a training program. Someone to oversee volunteer recruitment efforts and to develop and implement a human resource management policy is a paramount need. These program areas cannot be effectively developed and put into action without a full time staff.

Considering the staffing recommendations made in this report, hiring a full time fire and rescue chief is the most appropriate decision. However, considering the unfinished consolidation of the fire and rescue departments, it may be more palatable to retain a volunteer fire and rescue chief as head of the fire and EMS until the total consolidation is worked out. If the elected volunteer chief possesses the required credibility, organizational skills, and leadership ability, the move to replace this individual with a salaried employee is less immediate. It is reasonable to predict that the demands of managing a growing fire and rescue service will necessitate a full time employee in the near future.

Fire Prevention

In addition to training, personnel management, and policy development, King George lacks a fire prevention official with the authority to enforce the statewide fire prevention code. In consideration of the coming economic growth it is desirable to reduce fire loss risk during the planning and construction phase of development. By having an individual who can work with your building official to apply loss prevention elements in the plans review of new construction, King George would be taking a proactive stance to reduce property and life loss. Fire prevention is also an ongoing process to insure that buildings remain safe to the public after construction and to teach the citizens fire safety through public education programs in the schools and in the community.

Emergency Planning

Emergency disaster planning and the management of SARA Title III obligations of King George were not identified as areas to review under this report. These are areas of importance and are traditionally located within the fire and rescue department's realm of responsibility. It may be desirable to have career staff available to address these areas as well. More information on emergency planning is available through the International Association of Fire Chiefs at www.ichiefs.org or (703) 273-0911, the State Fire Chiefs' Association of Virginia at www.sfcav.org, and the Virginia Emergency Management Association.

Leadership Structure

The proposed leadership structure shown below is intended to address chain of command and program management. Because it may be the choice of the Board of Supervisors not to employ a Fire and Rescue Chief immediately, the majority of administrative demands are assigned to the Deputy Chief position. This structure places a high amount of program responsibility on the Deputy Chief. To accomplish these assignments the Deputy Chief is recommended to be a salaried employee. The Chief and Deputy Chief would delegate as necessary to accomplish program objectives, but the Chief would be the responsible program manager. The administrative workload will necessitate a second career officer to manage fire and emergency medical training. Both of these individuals should be EMS and fire certified and expected to assist with emergency response delivery. Secretarial support will also be required to manage the assorted programs.

PROPOSED LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

Fire and Rescue Chief (volunteer or career)

Deputy Chief (career)

Fire prevention, personnel management, recruitment

Captain (career).....
Fire and EMS Training

Vol. Assistant Chief
(Fairview Beach)

Vol. Assistant Chief
(King George)

Vol. Assistant Chief
(Dahlgren)

Career station officer
Volunteer station officers

Career Captain
(to oversee field staff)
Volunteer station officers

Career station officer
Vol. station officers

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Response Goals

The Emergency Communications Center reported that the average time it took for the fire department to have a unit responding to an incident is five to ten minutes. The time for a volunteer-staffed ambulance to respond is routinely over fifteen minutes. These response

times should be considered high and would have significant impact on the ability of the fire or rescue station to provide a positive outcome on a serious fire or a life-threatening emergency. Each agency has five minutes to respond to a call prior to the Communications Center paging a second time. After ten minutes the agency is paged again and mutual aid is requested. In most cases the mutual aid agencies are a long distance from the location of the emergency.

Recommendations

- Implement the recommendations for additional career staff as outlined elsewhere in this study.
- Consider utilizing sleeping facilities to staff stations with duty crews.
- Hold public hearings on current service and future plans and request input on what level of response is acceptable to the community.

Staffing

Currently there are two rescue squad stations and three fire stations within the county. The Dahlgren Volunteer Rescue Squad reports having 34 active members and the fire stations report a total of 44 active members. These volunteers, supported by a small career staff, provide fire and rescue coverage for King George County.

The volunteer rescue squad is very limited in its number of advanced life support providers and routinely is unable to staff more than one station or even one ambulance at a time. In addition there is only one ALS preceptor available through the volunteer agency.

There are four full time career EMS personnel who are all cross-trained in fire and EMS and provide weekday coverage through two shifts between the hours of 5:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. In addition there is one career Captain who works weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at King George Fire Station 1. The county has part-time fire and EMS personnel who fill in as needed.

It was reported that volunteer EMS personnel are rarely available during the weekdays and that often the career Captain is the only firefighter available during the day.

The volunteer fire and rescue agencies and the career staff expressed a need for additional career personnel. The following recommendations will aid in improving the ability to meet the demands of the increasing call volume and ensure twenty-four hour advanced life support coverage for the county. It will also ensure an adequate number of firefighters during daytime hours for safe and efficient fire ground operations, and improve access to training and ALS preceptors.

Recommendations

- Staff the King George, Dahlgren, and Fairview Beach stations with two career firefighter-paramedics each during weekday daytime hours.
- Staff Station 1 (King George Courthouse) with twenty-four hour career firefighter-paramedics (a minimum of two people per shift for three shifts).
- Increase the hours for the daytime staff to fifty hours per week. This will provide staffing from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.
- Establish committed volunteer duty crews for both fire and EMS during nights and weekends. The minimum staffing of these crews should include two qualified individuals at each station. The volunteer crews should also combine with the career staff to place more staffed ambulances in service.

Communications Practices

Currently the Enhanced 911 system in place through the Communications Center appears adequate. There are concerns with the call out procedure, incident numbering, and response mark up.

The current call out procedure involves individual tones for each EMS agency member and is very time consuming. This is especially true in the case of a multiple system call where both fire and EMS are toned. Following these individual tones, each EMS agency member calls in to the Communications Center to acknowledge receipt of the call and to receive additional call information.

Recommendations:

- Modify call out procedure to eliminate individual tones and the procedure of agency members calling the Communications Center. Consider five-minute commitment time from initial tone to entire crew marking up as responding to the call.
- Consider station-alerting devices.
- Update the Fire and EMS Dispatch Protocol as this has not been revised in several years. Review periodically and update as needed.
- Utilize one fire and EMS Incident Number for all calls. Establish a records management system and allow each station to track its own data for specialized reports. Both the Virginia Department of Fire Programs and the Office of Emergency Medical Services have recognized reporting systems that are available for a standard computer.
- Explore a Countywide Emergency Medical Dispatcher Program to assist citizens when calling 9-1-1. Implement the program through dispatcher training and through the purchase of EMD booklets to be utilized in the Communications Center.
- Regain control of address database for Communications Center or require a contractor to provide more frequent updates to the database.

- The communications system should be studied to identify areas of county where reception problems exist.

The current communication practices are too time consuming and add to the increased response time of EMS and Fire personnel. By allowing members to call in to the Communications Center to mark up on a call from their residence or other location, a false indicator is set that a unit is committed to a call before it's actual response. These recommendations will reduce response times, eliminate duplicate paperwork, and aid the County in obtaining accurate data on the number of incidents truly run. It is the understanding of the committee that many of these communications related recommendations are currently being addressed. Additional information on the operation of 911 centers and emergency medical dispatch can be gotten through APCO International at www.apco911.org or by phone at (888) 272-6911.

Training Needs

Documented standards for minimum training requirements for both volunteer and career personnel are not clearly stated. These standards are essential to the established rules and regulations of the Virginia Department of Health, OSHA and the safety of all providers as well as the quality of care provided. Both the fire and EMS agencies reported the need for a dedicated Training Officer.

Recommendations:

- Institute a written policy to outline specific training requirements and criteria for each position in the Fire and EMS Department. Incorporate a plan for maintaining these certifications.
- Within the proposed Leadership Structure establish a full-time position for a Training Coordinator to meet the needs of both volunteer and career fire and EMS personnel.
- Consider incentive programs to encourage providers to maintain or increase their training.
- Provide the funding necessary to join the other jurisdictions currently planning a regional training facility in Fredericksburg. This will provide an excellent training facility near King George and allow the county to have input into its development and unlimited rights to its usage when it is completed.

Apparatus

King George County historically has worked with the Fire Department and Rescue Squad to replace vehicles on an as needed basis through a shared cost. The Committee is aware that a vehicle replacement program has been made part of the County's Annual Capital Improvement Program.

The committee noted two problem areas. The Rescue Squad reported that despite having six ambulances between two stations, they routinely have one or two out of service for repairs. Despite limited water access, the Fire Department only has one tanker in use.

Recommendations:

- Equip each station with a minimum of one ambulance, one engine, and one tanker. Tank capacity for engine apparatus should be a maximum of 1,000 gallons and tankers a minimum of 1,500 gallons due to water supply issues.
- Additional specialized vehicles such as a heavy rescue squad and brush unit are also needed and should be located in the stations that facilitate the best response.
- A minimum of one engine and one ambulance should be kept in reserve in case of breakdowns and routine repairs to frontline units.
- Based on current usage, each engine or tanker should be replaced at least every twenty years. Based on the recommendation for seven large units (three engines, three tanker-pumpers, and one heavy rescue squad), the county should plan on purchasing a large unit every three years. Units removed from front line service could be used as reserve units for a period not to exceed five years. These time frames should be reevaluated periodically to see if they should be accelerated. Smaller units such as brush trucks and utility vehicles should be evaluated annually and replaced based on those evaluations.
- Ambulances should be replaced every three to four years based on mileage and over all condition. Budget planning should plan for the replacement of one ambulance per year.
- There should be countywide standardized fire and rescue vehicle specifications. Such specifications should incorporate all applicable national and state standards.
- A routine maintenance schedule should be developed and the county should consider contracting with a qualified emergency vehicle maintenance and repair service with mobile repair capabilities.
- All pumps, hose, and ladders should be tested annually.
- An aggressive in-station inspection program should be in place with each fire and rescue vehicle being checked each day and a more in-depth inspection done once a week. This will ensure vehicle safety and early detection of repair needs.
- More information on vehicle maintenance programs is available through the International Association of Fire Chiefs at www.ichiefs.org (703) 273-0911, or the State Fire Chiefs' Association of Virginia at www.sfcav.org.

I.S.O. Rating

The Insurance Services Organization rates each community on an as needed basis or when requested, based on significant changes in fire service delivery. This service is provided to communities to establish fire insurance rates for property owners. The committee is aware that King George has recently completed an I.S.O. survey and is awaiting the results. An improved I.S.O. rating may result in a reduction in insurance

premiums. That would in essence put money back in the pockets of property owners and make the county more attractive to businesses and corporations looking to expand or relocate into the county. We would recommend that the county review the results of this survey to identify areas where improvements can be made and make those changes. We would further recommend that the county complete any expansion of the career staff and improve the tanker situation and then request that the I.S.O. come in and review the just completed survey. We believe that these changes may improve the overall rating.

Fire and Rescue Stations

The committee was asked to look at possible new station locations. There are large areas of the county that are some distance from the closest fire and rescue station. We met with the county planner and the county administrator to discuss projected growth areas. We could not identify any growth areas that are expected to develop in the short term and therefore do not have any recommendations for new stations at this time. New stations require additional volunteer members. The current problem finding adequate volunteers for the existing stations is another reason not to start new stations. A new station in a very rural area would probably require career staffing in a section of the county that would generate very few calls. A better short-term solution is to have comprehensive, written, government level mutual aid agreements in place with surrounding jurisdictions. This will insure that the closest fire and rescue stations are always sent to calls.

As building expansion or replacement becomes necessary, combine the King George Courthouse fire and rescue stations into one and the Dahlgren area fire and rescue stations into one. The recommended consolidation makes separate fire and rescue buildings unnecessary and this will increase efficiency and reduce operating costs.

As station upgrades become necessary all stations should be provided with bunk rooms and dressing areas to provide for crews that staff a station overnight. Provision must be made to provide for the 24-hour career crew recommended to staff one medic unit.

As with fire and rescue apparatus, all future station construction or renovations should be made part of the county Capital Improvements Plan.

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Budget Development

The budget should continue to be prepared each year in line with the rest of the county budget process. This is a good practice and should be continued. All members of the senior staff should be involved in the process and the budget should include all aspects of the fire and rescue budget including career salaries, operating expenses, maintenance, and protective clothing and equipment purchases. The purchase of major items such as new apparatus should be approved through the Capital Improvements Plan to enable the

county to prepare for the orderly and timely replacement of fire apparatus and ambulances.

Centralized Purchasing and Storage of Equipment and Supplies

Each of the stations is currently buying most of the equipment and supplies on its own. Centralization of purchasing and stocking of equipment and supplies will permit greater efficiency in the overall operation, allow for standardization throughout the fire and rescue system, and save money due to large quantity purchasing. Equipment and supplies should be purchased through the county purchasing system and coordinated through the fire and rescue office. Use of the county purchasing system will ensure that proper purchasing and accounting practices are followed and eliminate the need for any money to be distributed to the stations. This would lessen the burden on the volunteers to maintain a budget and go through periodic audits.

Supplies and equipment could be stored at a central location and distributed to the stations as needed. This would allow for ease of storage and inventory and ensure that certain minimum levels of often used supplies are maintained.

Once an inventory management system is in place the county fire and rescue office should explore group purchasing with other surrounding counties. This could result in greater cost savings and further standardize equipment purchases with jurisdictions that provide mutual aid response.

Fund Raising

A traditional part of the volunteer fire and rescue service is fund raising. The county should review the process of fund raising to ensure that all money is accounted for and spent in a manner that benefits the fire and rescue service and provides for the needs of the volunteer fire and rescue members. It is important that the volunteer fund raising efforts are not used to replace county money to fund essential fire and rescue purchases. The major function of the volunteer fire and rescue members to provide the well-trained core of the emergency response system. This "free" labor is the greatest savings to the county and more than offsets any money needed to fund the system.

PERSONNEL AND RELATED ISSUES

Fair Labor Standards

The county should carefully examine 207K exemption for fire and E.M.S. personnel and specifically declare a workweek. The exemption allows for a variety of choices with regard to the workweek options. As has been discussed, our report is recommending some 24-hour career staffing.

The standard fire and rescue workweek is based on 212 hours, 28-day schedule, 53 hours per week before overtime. This choice of the workweek would require only three people to fill one 24-hour position as opposed to 4 people for a 42-hour workweek.

It is customary to include payment for all job-related functions to include maintenance of skills and certifications required as part of the Job Description and these functions should therefore be compensated. More information on the Fair Labor Standards Act is available from the U.S. Department of Labor at www.dol.gov.

Recommendations

In accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act, employees should be compensated for the following:

- Attendance at job required meetings
- Precepting volunteer personnel during non-working hours. This would have the decided advantage of cementing career and volunteer relationships assuring well-qualified volunteers who enjoy working side by side with their career counterparts.
- Teaching volunteer training classes to include firefighter, EMT, and ALS Job Descriptions.
- Replacement or compensation for lost years of service is both a morale and equity issue for the career staff who previously worked for the volunteer rescue squad or fire department before the county took them in as employees. Some career members lost up to eleven years of retirement credit with the changeover.

Job Descriptions (Job Components)

In keeping with the newly adopted King George County broad band compensation program:

Recommendations

- Well-defined job descriptions (components) will clearly lay out all working requirements, compensation issues, and Fair Labor Standards Act questions. Job descriptions (components) should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are updated and in line with actual job functions.
- Good job descriptions (components) also will have a positive effect on morale. We observed a great deal of apprehension with regard to the total consolidation of the fire and rescue services concerning a clear-cut chain of command, standard operating procedure, and supervisory controls.
- The job descriptions (components) prepared by the county should include a mechanism for personal growth of the employee that will ultimately benefit the system. Job descriptions (components) with corresponding pay incentives at various levels for career development will help to improve morale and performance.

- Other hiring and job related issues that should be addressed by the county include:
 1. A standardized hiring process to include: agility testing, background checks, written testing, and an oral interview.
 2. Medical examinations by a licensed doctor retained by the county for new applicants as a final step prior to hiring.
 3. Biannual medical examinations for all career personnel.
 4. A physical fitness program as part of each workweek.

Recruitment and Retention

We have chosen to address this as a unified issue. We feel both the career and volunteer issues in this area are irrevocably tied to each other. A healthy fire and rescue service depends on satisfied and fulfilled personnel in adequate numbers, both career and volunteer.

Recommendations:

The county should consider:

- A Length of Service Award Program for volunteer personnel who serve the county for twenty years or more. Such programs are cited as Volunteer Retirement Programs. At least, the county should pay the individual share in the newly created Virginia Volunteer Retirement Program slated to begin within the next two years.
- The implementation of a paid-on-call program for volunteer fire and rescue members. Paid-on-call is common in some parts of the country and even in some parts of the state. It involves paying a small hourly "salary" to volunteers to respond to fires and to other activities such as training sessions. It would provide an additional incentive to be well trained and active in the fire and rescue service. It would also provide an incentive for new members to join the department and remain active. More information on paid-on-call systems is available through the International Association of Fire Chiefs at www.ichiefs.org or (703) 273-0911, and the State Fire Chiefs' Association of Virginia at www.sfcav.org.
- Law Enforcement Option (LEO) for the career staff - frequently cited as Law Enforcement Firefighting Option under the Virginia Retirement System. Such an option allows employees to retire at age fifty with twenty-five years of service. The program provides not only retirement benefits but also a supplement until the beneficiary is eligible for Social Security. More information is available on LEO at www.state.va.us/vrs/vrs.htm or at (888) 827-3847.
- The Training and Personnel Officer we have proposed should provide an analysis of the programs in use in other jurisdictions to improve recruitment and retention of volunteers. This must be a top priority. Volunteers should be the heart of the King George system for many years to come. Clearly the

county fire and rescue departments, like departments everywhere, have had trouble attracting young people and others who are interested in and committed to the volunteer emergency services. Failure in this area will lead to a rapid increase in the need for career staff and a corresponding increase in costs to the county.

VOLUNTEER SURVEY

An unscientific survey was conducted of the volunteer members on the rescue squad and fire department. The purpose was to measure the members' acceptance of the fire department consolidation and the proposed consolidation of the rescue squad and the fire department. Thirty-six surveys were completed. Based on what the committee was told about the number of active members, the response of thirty-six individuals is fairly representative of the membership.

Respondents were asked to rate their responses to questions with one of the following answers:

Highly Supportive Somewhat Supportive Did Not Support

- First we asked if the respondent supported the consolidation of the two volunteer fire companies into one department.

100% of the respondents support.

- Second we asked if the respondent supported the consolidation of the rescue squad and the fire department.

61% of the respondents support.

In an attempt to identify why there was a reluctance to support the rescue and fire consolidation, we asked additional related questions.

- When asked if the respondent was in support of having rescue squad vehicles and fire apparatus housed in the same station.

64% of the respondents support.

- The idea of having assigned duty crews for emergency response.

78% of the respondents support

- We also asked how many respondents support the idea of having members cross trained in emergency medical response and firefighting.

92% of the respondents support.

The majority of responses to the survey questions indicate there are positive opinions on sharing equipment space and duty responsibilities. Survey respondents affiliated with the rescue squad responded "Highly Supportive" and "Somewhat Supportive" more often than fire department members on the issue of sharing stations and company consolidation. Almost 92% support the idea of cross training. The committee thinks these survey results support another attempt to consolidate the rescue and fire department.

The second purpose of the survey was to measure the volunteers' opinions on how much support is needed in the system by a career staff.

When asked if the county needs to hire more career personnel for emergency response, thirty of the thirty-six respondents affirmed the personnel are needed.

Most respondents indicated they thought additional career personnel are needed to cover responses from 5:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Some volunteers specifically requested career staff to be available on a 24-hour shift for advanced life support medical response. The lack of advanced life support response is an area of concern rescue squad members brought forward during the interview sessions.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning is the cornerstone of every organization as it is for the King George fire and rescue service. This is a process that identifies the organization's long range objectives and proposals for achieving those objectives. Planning establishes coordinated efforts to anticipate change and consider the impact of change. Standards used to control (ex. budgets) and measure effectiveness (ex. five-year plans, capital improvement plans), are elements of strategic planning.

Resources available to assist with the planning process are:

- Insurance Services Organization (I.S.O.) grading system measures fire protection services.
- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has established recommended standards for delivery of fire services.
- Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (AAS) has an established process that evaluates ambulance service delivery.
- Commission on Fire Accreditation International self-assessment process provides for detailed departmental services provided to the community, additional information is available through cfai@cfainet.org.
- More information on strategic planning is available through the International Association of Fire Chiefs at www.ichiefs.org or (703) 273-0911, and the State Fire Chiefs' Association of Virginia at www.sfcav.org.

CONCLUSION

There are four major reasons why conducting an in-depth evaluation of fire and rescue service agencies is critical today:

1. When organizations are trying to cope with change.
2. To provide for periodic organizational evaluations to ensure effectiveness (outcomes) and efficiency (costs).
3. When there is a change in leadership - whether it is the chief, county manager or key elected officials.
4. To raise the level of performance and professionalism within the organization and ultimately within the profession.

(Taken from the Commission on Fire Accreditation International)

The steps that the members of the King George Volunteer Fire Department and the Dahlgren Volunteer Rescue Squad as well as the elected officials and county staff have taken to identify issues and seek solutions to these should be highly commended. While the process to consolidate the fire and rescue service into a single entity is an arduous task, the final outcome will be well worth the effort put forth. Much work still remains to see this to fruition, for it is the basis of many of the recommendations of this panel.

We wish the members, county staff, and elected officials good luck in the continuation of this process.