



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

Boy Scout Motto

Be prepared! Sounds like good advice to me. In fact, it sounds like common sense. How about another motto - stay prepared! Since their beginnings, the Boy Scouts have been telling the youth of the world to do stuff to make sure that they are capable of dealing with anything life dishes out.!

So, can you give me one really good reason why many fire departments have discontinued their pre-fire planning preparedness? Why? If you are one of those that have not done so, please accept my congratulations. But if you are one that has abandoned the concept, please consider having everyone in your department do a little back stepping.

If you have scaled back or discontinued your preplan program then I would ask you to give that decision a visit. I would like to convince you that one of the most effective things you can do to reduce line of duty deaths (LODD's) is to increased awareness of building and content conditions.

This is not just my suggestion because it has been discussed before. You know that. The National Fire Protection Association has created a standard for pre-fire planning: NFPA 1402 - Standard on Training for Initial Emergency Scene Operations. It is probably just as important as the other standards associated with fire ground safety: NFPA 1500 and 1710.

True believers in fire ground safety have always advocated better pre-planning. Think not? Well, visit the 16 life safety initiatives and see if you can detect the NFFFs support of preplanning.

Of course we cannot forget the advice of the two organizations that have distributed information on how to act appropriately in the past. The National Institute of Occupational Safety has published a significant amount of documentation with commendations promote increasing pre-planning.

What do you think? Are you or your department doing a good job of pre-planning? Do these recommendations need to be repeated time and time again?

Can you imagine the airline industry receiving a report that states a recommendation should be followed to prevent air crashes? The Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board have been investigating pilots and plane crashes for decades.



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Would someone in the federal bureaucracy be upset if individual pilots or airlines just chose to ignore their safety suggestions or investigative findings? What if they refused to do it? How long do you think they would be allowed to function as a pilot flying passengers?

Another voice in this arena is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Is OSHA just kidding us that pre-planning is important? I have lost track of the number of times they have recommended stronger pre-planning programs in their reports.

The reality is that any fire department that does not have an active pre-planning program is just one response away from a tragic event. This means that everyone within our ranks is in the same position. In other words, the next call could be the one that they are not prepared for.

What should we be doing about the apparent lack of pre-planning? The answer is found in your level of commitment to the motto of *be prepared*. It's your decision. It relates to the decisions of you and your fellow firefighters.

Be prepared relates to the decisions made on the fire ground. It relates to the level of dialogue that is used in after action critiques. In many ways pre-fire planning is a type of "toggle switch" that when in the off position results in organizations vulnerability.

In discussing pre-planning with a lot of chief officers I have heard many give reasons as to why the concept is not carried out in the level that it has been in the past. To try and describe them all in this column is probably not necessary but I will bet you have heard some of them already. So, let's start with a shorter list. What should you be doing?

- Does your department engage in pre-fire planning?
- Which level would be characterize you properly?
- Its extensive and covers a wide range of risks and hazards
- Its limited to only specific "target" hazards
- Its minimal and covers only a few situations
- Is your system accessible to both incident commanders and fire officers in the field?
- Are preplans available electronically or in manual editions?
- Is your system only accessible to incident commanders in the command vehicle?
- Are the plans only kept in the communication center?
- There is a cycle of review that results in preplanning being evaluated on a scheduled basis



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- Are preplans ever used in after-action critiques to determine their ability to support decision making?
- Are preplans incorporated in staff briefings on a periodic basis?
- Are preplans used in officer development programs?

In summary, for decades Boy Scouts have been earning merit badges in order to prove that they are prepared. What evidence do we have that we are prepared - that we will not kill or injure our firefighters when we send them into harm's way?

Having a pre-plan program should be a part of your department strategy to prevent loss of life and property and is essential for your own safety. Scouts honor!

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