



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

Combat Intelligence

The military has gone to great lengths to be able to know as much about the enemy before becoming engaged in combat as possible. While there are still jokesters who declare the phrase “military intelligence” as an oxymoron, the reality is that lives are often saved by collecting information on your adversary before going face to face with them. The intelligence function in the military is often referred to as the Battalion S-2 or the Divisional G-2.

There is a lesson to be learned in this approach to survival. A well informed officer is a better decision maker when confronted with a dangerous scenario. We tend to think that this is the purview of the operations people don't we? It's the captain or the BC who is usually calling the shots when the chips are down. When we use the term “well informed” we assume a body of knowledge that is broad in scope and deep in content. Unfortunately, modern fire suppression operations often involve complexities that can be beyond the scope of normal information sources. The complexity of some problems requires a degree of specialization to achieve a high level of competency. A complex problem means we had better be prepared for that complexity.

This phenomena points us in the direction of needing additional resources to keep officers well informed instead of merely hoping that they will get it on their own.

That resource needs to be better developed in most departments. In some it needs to be created. The concept I am proposing here has probably never been described in detail before so it might take a couple of real world issues to make it real. What I am referring to is the adoption of techniques making a fire prevention bureau into the eyes and ears of the operations division, an S-2 or G-2, as it were for a fire agency.

This concept is based upon a very simple fact; that fire prevention bureau gets to see what's new in the world of construction before its covered up and hidden away from sight. Specifically, I am referring to one of the most dangerous areas of firefighting commitment; the interior of buildings. I am, of course, referring specifically to building construction and occupancy information. Right now as you are reading this column, new buildings may well be made of newly approved building materials that have never been seen by your firefighters before. Lastly, the processes and materials may be as different from existing processes as to border on mystical and threatening.

This is where the concept of reconnaissance comes in. A well organized and productive fire prevention program is likely to bear witness to this new material and process well before OPS ever gets a clue. Failure to share this opportunity can result in catastrophic results.



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It's not that these materials and processes are illegal; in fact, this may well be approved, listed and labeled by all sorts of entities. But when they are exposed to the crews during an emergency operation, there may be unknown scenarios. That is unless someone has told them about the materials and then trained them on the context of their use.

Bluntly speaking, operations cannot afford to receive a lot of surprise at 0300 in the am. They need to know what they are up to before they try to tear into the situation.

For this reason, this is likely to be the only time I have submitted the same exact column to two different magazines in order to capture two different spans of attention. This article is going to Sprinkler Age to reach Fire Marshals. It is also going to Fire Chief Magazine to reach Fire Officers. My intent is to raise the bar on both of these groups realizing how important it is to increase the exchange of information between the bureaus and operations.

To further the exchange, I am going to propose that these two groups of officers come out of their offices and go down to a mythological conference room for a brief staff meeting of the minds. Here's what I suggest we discuss briefly:

- 1) What is it that you both "know" about the community fire problem?
- 2) What is it that each of you knows that is different about the community fire problem than the other?
- 3) What is it that neither of you know about the community fire problem?

Depending upon a lot of variables, the answers to these questions could be quite varied. In some cases, there might be an encyclopedia, and in others place a Sunday newspaper insert. In all cases, it will be a reflection of the breadth and depth of your department's defense against being surprised.

Here are some suggestions. The first one addresses how to keep track of approved materials and techniques of construction.

In the fire code, there is a provision where owners of property can substitute one material for another. These materials have been reviewed and identified as being evaluated according to a set of acceptance criterion.

The one reference here is called the "ICC-Evaluation Services System". To access the system go to the internet and type in <http://icc-es.com>. This will take you to a website that has a series of choices for consideration. At the first screen you will receive a welcoming statement from the ICC. There is a telephone number there that you can use to follow-up if you want to. There is also a location that says "click here for more information about ICC-ES. Click on it.



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This will take you to a screen that will provide you with more detail on the system. It explains how materials are considered and approved in the process. It will tell you how the public hearing process works also. You can find out about “Legacy Reports.”

If you look to the upper left hand side of the web screen under the banner there is a topic “Evaluation Reports” Click on that label. This opens up the Evaluation reports section. It allows you to look at a complete list of evaluation reports, search for a specific report, seek out the most recent reports and there is a session on how to read an evaluation report.

Click on the Most Recent Reports. You will get a pdf of the most recent reports. You can print it out or save it to a folder. Hit the back button. Open the Evaluation report Index. This is combined index of the current active ICC- ES Reports. Look up ER 4531. What is the title of the report? Hit the back button and go to search for a specific report. When the screen opens up to Search Reports, type in 4531 in the report number box. It will give you the report in a pdf format. Click on the report number and a pdf of the report appears. You can then download it or print it out.

Well, that is enough time in cyberspace for today. As a practicing fire officer today I hope that you will find the time to become reasonably familiar with this resource. It is a treasure trove of information, but is not very well known among our peers.

It may not be as much fun as playing a computer game, but it could make a real difference someday. Wouldn't it be nice if you were the one that knew something that everybody else was just dying to know about?