



Dragons of change*

By Michael S. Williams

"Change is not looking for friends; change calls the tune we all dance to." Al Swearngen

I want to thank all of you that wrote and called in response to last month's article Read with Caution. The article generated the type of response we anticipated. What we did not expect was the number of career fire chiefs and chief officers that thought the article was too narrow in scope. They thought the article should have included the entire fire service.

Several negative emails from Northern California grew from negative to positive. On behalf of the CSFA Volunteer Committee, FSTI sent William Teie's *Leadership for the Wildland Fire Officer, Leading in a Dangerous Profession*, Deer Valley Press, to several departments in Northern California as a token of our appreciation for getting involved. More training publications are on the way in mid-January. Some members of the CSFA Volunteer Committee will be attending several workshops in Northern-California at their request in March. Yes, several counties are interested in getting together, getting involved and engaging. Things are indeed changing.

The provocative HBO program "Deadwood" was truly innovative television. The series ran for three years as it chronicled the growing mining down of Deadwood South Dakota in the 1870's. The show depicted an outlaw town that slowly grew into a small rural community. As the community grew, the show introduced the Deadwood Volunteer Fire Department with the order of a steamer that arrived in a crate.

Change is here in many forms. The California fire service is no exception to the transformation that is occurring throughout the state. Riverside and San Diego counties are rapidly growing and as a result the volunteer fire service as we know it in these counties is significantly changing form. This is no different than other counties such as Orange County about ten years ago. As communities grow into small towns and cities, so must the rural volunteer fire department grow to meet the needs that certainly follows. In time this means moving from volunteer based to career based staffing.

The definitive publication on change in the fire service is *The Future of Volunteer Fire and Rescue- Taming the Dragons of Change*, by Perkins and Benoit, published by Fire Protection Publications, Oklahoma State University. The book should be required reading for anyone engaged in the enviable growth and change within the fire and EMS services and the communities they serve.

Volunteer emergency organizations are either independent or dependent of local government (non-profit versus district, for example) and are either all volunteer or a combination of staffing. This matrix must also include just fire services, just EMS services or a combination

of each. A second matrix develops from an all volunteer organization to mixed staffing to all paid staffing. There are many factors that promote the changes within the matrix. The number of calls for service is the most obvious. In time, the calls for service will overwhelm volunteer based staffing.

The CSFA Volunteer Committee, under the leadership of former California State Fire Marshal Ronny Coleman, is taking this change seriously. The committee is currently updating their strategic plan. The updated document includes national, state and local challenges confronting today's volunteer fire organizations including:

- Development of an adequate database
- Increased involvement of volunteer fire chiefs in legislative activities
- Increasing the number of volunteer fire agencies that participate in CSFA
- Improve availability of training and education for volunteer firefighters
- National integration of California's volunteer fire service

Coupled with the plan is the Volunteer Firefighter Instructor Guide.

This is a cooperative project with CSFA and FSTI under the supervision of Sonoma County Fire Marshal Robert MacIntyre. The project is the collective effort of numerous professionals within and associated with the California fire service.

The guide looks very similar to other state fire marshal programs, but includes all federal, state and local requirements for volunteer firefighters. Much of the research used to develop the guide was done years ago by Dave Schoonover and his staff at the San Jose Fire Department. The guide utilizes NFPA standards as the primary guideline.

Change within the volunteer fire service is enviable. This is not bad. Growth generates the need for

improvement. The CSFA Volunteer Committee and the Fire Services Training Institute are here to help with the transition. 

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