



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

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Playing in the Big Leagues

What is the difference between watching a little league game on a Saturday morning that consists of your children and watching the World Series on television later that year? Well, for one thing, some of you probably enjoy the game with your children a lot more in comparison to the Series. Secondly, you probably have a much higher expectation for the performance of the people playing in the World Series. These leagues are worlds apart and so they should be.

The reason for drawing this analogy is the difference between an organization that is playing in a sandlot league with one that is playing in an arena championship. While they are both carrying on activities that might be classified as professional - there is a difference. Over the last several decades, it has become clear that the difference between defining levels of service as being amateurish or professional, are not always drawn using the same tools of measurement.

For example, at a certain point in time, we refer to some activity as amateurish. At a later point in time we often find that the activity is now referred to as professional. However, there are also people who are amateur-professionals. How do we know all these distinctions mean anything?

One of the answers is that is more and more acceptable is that we can rely on third party evaluations of organizations to determine the current level of competency. Starting in the days of W. Edward Demming, followed up by the creation of the International Standards Organization (ISO) and the work done by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the idea on certification and accreditation has gained a very strong foothold in the public safety arena.

One does not have to look far today to find examples on how this has been brought to bear in the fire profession. We have an accreditation model that was generated for the entire fire service called the Center for Public Safety Excellence There is an accreditation model for another public safety agency, the ambulance industry. We also have several accrediting organizations that function within the realm of training and education, i.e. International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) and the Pro Board. .

We also have an accreditation model for our sibling agency - law enforcement.

A new model has recently been developed to provide this same type of high level quality control evaluation for purposes of one function of government - fire prevention. This model is referred to as ACS 427 and is available from the ICC-Accreditation Services.



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Patterned after these models that have been mentioned previously, this document is positioned to begin to influence the shape of fire profession in the years to come. It is published by the International Code Council (ICC).

Over the last two years, a model was created based on connectivity with the National Fire Services Accreditation Model. It has been developed primarily to assist independent fire prevention bureaus in setting standards of excellence for themselves while they may not have a fire suppression responsibility. The model was created as a partnership with the Center for Public Safety Excellence. I was asked to serve as the first chairman of the committee in order to try to make it match the CPSE Model as closely as possible. Those that are already familiar with the self assessment process will have no difficulty in seeing the relationship.

For example, ACS 426 has a framework very similar to the International Fire Service Accreditation Model. It addresses the same generic concepts of governance, risk assessment, organizational, organizational structural, finance, program management, physical facilities, human resources, training and education, internal support activities, and external support.

The one difference between this model and the model supported by the Center for Public Safety Excellence is that it focuses on only one program activity within a fire department; fire prevention functionality. This is really not much different than a training division being singled out for being able to become part of fire service training and education. While the overall agency may not be an accredited entity, the ability to do this function by function, places a strong emphasis upon how to measure free standing programs that may or may not be associated with a fire department. A good example of that would be the Georgia State Fire Marshal's Office. It does not operate a fire department but it does operate on a statewide fire prevention activity that is subject to many levels of interpretation.

The very first effort at this was conducted with the Georgia State Fire Marshal's Office. The beta test was recently finished in Tinley Park Illinois. In both cases, the process that is rapidly becoming well known in the fire service was utilized; the concept of self-assessment.

The primary benefits of conducting self-assessment have been discussed numerous times in fire protection publications. The reason for conducting self-assessment is to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and actions. By conducting a self-assessment process, no organization is required to look like somebody else. Instead, they are asked how well do they comply with the performance criteria in the document and how are they personally solving that locally. In other words, this model uses the self-assessment concept to identify credibility and congruity of the organization.

Lastly but certainly not to be forgotten is the idea that actually putting an organization out for third party review is consistent with the world of quality control and quality improvement that is influencing



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manufacturing and other industries. It literally defines the difference between the professionals that can prove what they are doing and the professionals that have a program that may or may not be meeting the community needs. You will notice in the last paragraph that I didn't say that there was any such thing as an amateur fire prevention bureau.

The rationale behind this philosophy is that all organizations are professional in intent but sometimes they need to take the extra step to prove to our self that we are doing the right thing for the right reason in the right way. One cannot help but believe that in the long run it significantly improves the performance of an organization.

For further information on how your fire prevention bureau can become involved, please see: [www.http://iasonline.org/](http://iasonline.org/)