



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

Why Didn't You Say So?

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. –Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene II

Vocabulary is important! Words mean different things to different people. A friend of mine, Retired Chief Fire Officer Brian Fuller, who once ran the British Fire College, says that Americans and Englishmen are two nations divided over the difficulty of sharing a common language. Shoptalk and jargon almost always separate insiders from outsiders. We firefighters talk different than city engineers, and so forth

So it should come as no surprise to you that the availability of definitions in the context of the fire service is an important part of our profession. One of the difficulties with that is that our profession is starting to gather a great deal of momentum. As a result we often find ourselves having to share our vocabulary and lexicon with some of our allied agencies.

This came into my consciousness in attempting to respond to some issues associated with a particular product recently. I was asked some questions about a hazardous material that required that I look into the vocabulary of those who are in the energy field. Almost instantaneously I discovered that there was an entire vocabulary of those in the energy field that was different from those of us in the fire service field.

So what's a fire chief to do! The name of the game is to establish two things that should be part of your arsenal of defense against being uninformed. The first of these is to develop a glossary of terminology that you accumulate and collect over the length of your career. I know I started mine back in about 1964 by collecting terminology from textbooks as I read them. First I created my own glossary and then I soon found that there were others that had been published.

The second technique is to become much more knowledgeable in how to use the Internet to provide you with an ongoing vocabulary. According to the Oxford dictionary a glossary is a list of explanations of abstract, antiquated, dialectical or technical terms; it is a partial dictionary.

If you are functioning in the field of fire prevention this could be an absolutely and viable asset. I know that there are literally thousands of glossaries of terminology out there floating around the Internet so I do not wish to imply that there is a simple solution to this. However I would like to provide you with some examples of what I am talking about.

For example, I have located a series of glossaries located on websites that deal with everything ranging from urban wildland interface to the field of energy and liquefied and natural gas. In the following



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paragraphs in this column I am going to identify some examples of these websites. This is by no means an exhaustive list. You might find it useful to locate them and to see if any of these glossaries will be helpful in expanding your vocabulary.

They are as follows:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/glossary/html>

<http://www.marconi.com.html.glossary>

<http://www.callafco.org>

<http://www.cfda.gov>

<http://www.fpa.nifc.gov>

<http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov>

<http://wildfirelesson.net>

<http://progressiverailroading.org>

<http://www.lngwatch.com>

Adding to your vocabulary allows you to communicate with a broader range of individuals. If you have taken the time to look up any of these websites I would almost bet you that you are going to find things that you have never seen before. On the other hand if you are one of those kinds of individuals who are knows all that stuff then I would hope that you would send me a letter identifying a few websites that I failed to identify. I learned something from almost all of these.

Here for example, are some terms extracted from the Glossary of an urban planning guide for a community that was undergoing some growth and re-development at the same time. Note that some of these terms could have an impact upon our response to an emergency and the planning of fire station sites.

Design Speed - The velocity at which a Thoroughfare can be comfortably driven without the constraints of signage or enforcement. There are four ranges of speed: Very Low - below 20 mph, Low - 20-25 mph, Moderate - 25-35 mph, and High - above 35 mph. This factor determines the character and context for a particular segment of the Thoroughfare system.

Free Flow - A thoroughfare which has dedicated striped lanes of travel and tends to be a more highly traveled thoroughfare.

Slow Flow - A thoroughfare, of moderate capacity (shorter in length than a free flow street) which does not have the striped, dedicated lanes of travel but has enough width for cars to pass each other comfortably but at a slow speed.



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Traffic Calming - A set of techniques which serves to reduce the speed of traffic. Such strategies include land-narrowing, on-street parking, chicanes, yield points, sidewalk bulge-outs, speed bumps, surface variations, mid-block deflections, and visual clues. Traffic calming is a retrofit technique unnecessary when thoroughfares are correctly designed for the appropriate speed at initial construction

Yield Flow - A thoroughfare of low capacity, shortest in length, and of a type where a single travel lane is shared by cars in both directions.

Good luck in improving your language.