

Rough Notes Scribed during the event

Chief Tanner - Horry County Fire-Rescue - Hired for 138 new positions in past 36 months. Have lost 15% of those 138 at the same time. Of those who apply, 50% will return the phone call for interview, 50% of those will stay engaged through the hiring process (including those who can't pass a background check or drug test). Many who are leaving for "greener pastures" are reading the fine print of those jobs and are finding their way back into the fire service. Once you have an employee reach the 7-8 year mark, they will typically stay for the long haul. City/County administrators should get together and agree on a pay scale for the fire service. The group raises pay as a group, to help alleviate FF's "jumping ship". How much more can the taxpayer support?

Chief Horton - Greenville City - There's an identity crisis. Is the bag of goods we are advertising what we are truly doing every day? If you aren't comfortable running medical calls, this may not be the career for you anymore. Be creative in creating opportunities, summer camp.

Chief Bulanow - N. Charleston - Exit survey reveals that the majority of those leaving are doing so 1-3 years into their career, are leaving the fire service all together and are citing money as the largest consideration. "It is faster to advance/promote outside the fire service" than to stay and follow the internal process to move up." Starting a trial 48/96 schedule in January. It is unhealthy to bring new personnel into a culture where their thoughts, beliefs, differences, etc. are not respected by current employees. To break the diversity challenge, we have been opened minded.

Chief Helms - Columbia - Attrition is the highest it has ever been, 10.25%. Hired 416 suppression personnel since 2015. Exit interviews reveal leadership issues and management at company officer and battalion level. Pay is the second issue. 35% of buildings inside of Columbia are not taxable (government, university, schools & churches). Continually run below the staffing "hard deck". Excessive overtime, to meet minimum staffing, is causing fatigue and causing folks to leave. Workload must remain manageable for all personnel. Does your organization pay to be able to live in the community they serve. Considering an alternate shift start time, 10 am rather than 7.

Chief Jones - State Fire Marshal - State Fire is struggling to find and keep the "rock stars" that the fire service expects to be delivering the program State Fire oversees. A lot of folks are living away from where they work and not setting down roots and taking ownership in the community. That fact makes it too easy to pick up and move departments. The number of firefighters in SC each year are remaining around 17,000.

EMS - 47% leave the profession in 10 years. Of those who obtain EMT/Paramedic certification in SC, 50% let it go within 5 years.

What are some of biggest hurdles in our region?

- People
- Smaller number of people available all the while competing with the large number of industries that are moving into the area.

- The volunteer base has gotten smaller as well and that reduces the number of available folks who have some level of experience and vetting of the job
- The daily workload continues to increase, pushing folks away. Higher call volume, more inspections, more training hours.

Marketing - are we reaching the right people?

Upstate -While we have the draw of the mountains, there may not be the flash of living at the beach or taking carriage rides every weekend in Charleston. However, we are seeing some move once they are in the state when they find out there is not a constant traffic jam, and high cost housing.

Shorter tenure of personnel. With that, we are missing the leadership/experience development link to support their quick growth.

Developing leadership is key

Are there opportunities to improve?

Consider a consortium application/hiring process. Regionally, departments work together to bring applicants in to prepare them for hiring.

Departments working together regionally to host training and development for all levels of the organization. The topic of not only training, but department standards must be addressed.

The need of leaders to create a culture of which firefighters want to be a part. Appreciation for those who are there. Create ways they have ownership. Organizational goals are important, so to needs to be their personal goals professionally.

What are action items to move forward?

We need to do more to interact with the schools. We do well with PubEd in elementary school and CTCs in high school, where do middle schools fall?

Outside marketing support. Someone to help deliver a common message. BIG marketing efforts, not just for hiring but for the fire service in general.

An opinion exists of a change in opinion that the fire service is not a professional career. We've heard from guidance counselors with the career center and other job placement services that still view the fire service as a good ol boy hangout.

There must be training/opportunities for leaders at all levels to be able to provide real mentoring and coaching to a work force that is expecting us to do that at an impeccable level.

Consider recruitment bonus pay for current employees who bring folks to the table for consideration.

Community to provide housing assistance for public safety to live in the neighborhoods they serve (allows them to set roots).