

TRAINING

- Recently, we had a close call where an untrained member of a VFD was freelancing at a structure fire in the county and could have severely injured several firefighters by their actions. **FREELANCING** in the fire service, by definition, is a dangerous situation at an incident where individuals do not check-in with the Incident Commander and receive an assignment, but instead work independently and take actions without the express knowledge or consent of an officer or the Incident Commander. Essentially, it is when firefighters do what they want to do, when they want to and where they want to.
- As a result of this incident, I sent an email to all the VFD chiefs telling them only members trained for the type of incident that is occurring are to respond to an incident when MPFD is responding to the incident also.
- The Fire Protection Agreement between the City of Mt. Pleasant and Titus County places the responsibility of Command on MPFD for incidents it responds to, except for incidents in the City of Talco or the Talco Fire District. This includes the safety of all personnel working at the incident
- MPFD does not have enough personnel on scene to work the incident as well as watch out for situations like the one above. We depend on the VFD members responding to incidents to have the training required to work at the incident safely and efficiently. It is the responsibility of the VFD Fire Chiefs to make sure their members are properly trained.
- During the November 8th Commissioners Court meeting you were told the county volunteer firefighters are unpaid professionals doing the same job and same training as the professional career firefighters of MPFD.
- You were told there are 30 volunteer firefighters that are fully certified to fight structure fires.
- You were assured that VFDs in Titus County respond to incidents with more than 6 members on a regular basis.

- You were told that some VFDs are pretty much self-sufficient and the reports that I am providing to you do not reflect that.
- There was no documentation provided to support any of those statements.
- However, the documentation that you have before you show those statements were not accurate.
- Career firefighters are regulated by the Texas Commission on Fire Protection and must be certified which requires several hundred hours of initial training and also requires many hours of continuing education training annually.
- Volunteer firefighters are not regulated by the State and are not required to have any training to be a volunteer firefighter. It is up to the VFDs to determine what, if any, training is required for their members.

STATEMENT

- In late 2020 a committee made up of county officials and several volunteer fire chiefs worked together to come up with an agreement that all agreed on for Fire Protection Services between the County and the VFDs. In early 2021 the agreements were executed. Included in the agreement was the requirements that the VFDs would develop standard operating procedures, meet training requirements and have their equipment tested, in addition to other items. The agreement requires the VFDs to provide documentation to the County Emergency Management Coordinator which I serve as. I did not ask for this role, but I agreed to take on the responsibility and provide reports to the commissioner's court on a bi-monthly basis. The information I provide to the court comes directly from information provided by the VFDs monthly. All I am doing is compiling the information from what the VFDs turn in. I can't help it if the information in the reports are not favorable for some of the VFDs and/or that you don't like what I am telling you, as when I provided you the documentation showing the new Sugar Hill Fire Chief was lying and falsifying documents. Some of you were more concerned on how the issues were discovered than what he did.

- There is a perception by some that I am making these presentations to cause the VFDs to go away or that it is being done to benefit MPFD in some way. MPFD or I do not have anything to gain by VFDs going away, in fact it will negatively affect MPFD because it will put more of a burden on MPFD to provide fire protection services in the county. MPFD is doing all we can to make the VFDs successful by establishing on-line training that can be accessed by a volunteer firefighter and done at their own pace and own time. We also offer our instructors to provide classroom training for the VFDs as well as conducting monthly countywide training for all the volunteer firefighters. There is no cost to anyone for this. All the volunteer firefighters have to do is spend their time to get the training, which very few are doing. MPFD is not required to provide these training opportunities however, I believe it is the right thing to do.
- MPFD does need additional career firefighters. In years past the VFDs had personnel that were trained and would respond however, that is not the case in recent years. MPFD depended on those volunteer firefighters to provide the additional apparatus and manpower needed for the incident.
- The Fire Protection Study funded by the City and County in 2016 included the need for additional career firefighters. That was 5 years ago, and there is even a greater need now.
- Recently we responded to a structure fire in the county with a person trapped inside and the structure heavily involved in fire and smoke. MPFD arrived with a four-man engine company and a deputy chief, several minutes before any VFDs arrived. MPFD did not have enough personnel to fight the fire and rescue the person in the house. The decision was made to abandon the fire attack and focus on the rescue operation. This was done at great risk to our firefighters. 2 firefighters entered the house through a window and found the victim, however, due to his size they needed more help to get him out of the house, so a third firefighter went in to help. The three firefighters with the help of a fourth person at the window removed the victim from the house. Sadly, he succumbed to his

injuries, but our firefighters gave him the best possible chance to survive. If something had gone wrong while the firefighters were inside the house, like the ceiling and roof collapsing on them, there would not have been enough firefighters to rescue them. The 5 MPFD firefighters were the only ones on scene during the rescue, because no volunteer firefighters had arrived. If this incident had occurred in the city there would have been 10 trained and equipped firefighters on scene to make the rescue, fight the fire and if something had gone wrong, there would have been personnel to rescue the trapped firefighters.

- MPFD had to remain on the scene of this fire for over 4 hours because there were no volunteer firefighters available and trained that we could turn the incident over to for them to finish mopping up the fire. During that time, if there had been another structure fire, or any other type of incident in the county, it would have been up to the VFDs to respond to the incident and handle it. Based on the volunteer firefighter response to this incident and the training of the volunteer firefighters, it is highly unlikely that there would have been a response to the other incident that would have had a favorable outcome.
- This situation occurs multiple times a month because anytime MPFD is working an incident in the county and another incident should occur in the county, it will be up to the VFDs to respond and handle it.
- Apparently, some do not understand MPFD getting more career firefighters would benefit the county, as well as the city, because MPFD would be able to send more firefighters to calls in the county, when needed.
- As for the VFDs:
 - Are the VFDs as an organization doing the best they can? I would say yes, for the most part. The VFDs have good equipment and stations. However, the VFD can't make people join, it can't make members train and it can't make the members respond.
 - Are the members of the VFDs doing the best they can? There are some members of the VFDs that attend most of the training sessions and respond to a lot of the

incidents and MPFD greatly appreciates those individuals who are giving their time and effort for the VFDs. Sadly, we have lost 2 of these kind of firefighters in recent weeks while they were working at incidents and they will be greatly missed. However, there are far more members that do not get the training and do not respond. They are basically just names on a piece of paper, which does not help the VFD or anyone else and results in incidents like previously described.

- A VFD needs strong leadership for it to succeed. Some of the VFDs have strong leaders but some do not.
- My responsibilities as the Mt. Pleasant Fire Chief are:
 - #1-Make sure our personnel go home to their families at the end of their shifts in the same shape they arrived for duty.
 - #2-To protect the lives and property of the Citizens of the City of Mt. Pleasant and Titus County as well those people who visit Mt. Pleasant and/or those just passing through.
- MPFD is going to continue to provide the best possible fire and rescue services with the resources that we have available however, if we don't have adequate resources for the incident, we will most likely not meet the expectations of the person who called us to make their situation better.
- I would also remind the court that in the 20 plus years that the City has had a contract with the County for providing fire protection services in the county, MPFD has exceeded the requirements of the contract by sending more personnel and equipment required by the contract to almost every incident MPFD responded to in the county and will continue to do so as long as I feel that I can.