



**CITY OF RICHMOND**

**REPORT TO COMMITTEE**

**TO:** Community Services Committee

**DATE:** October 2, 2000

**FROM:** Jim Hancock  
Fire Chief

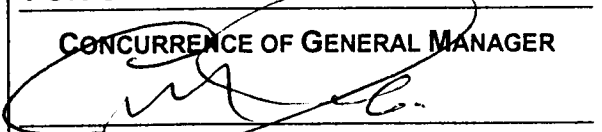
**FILE:** -

**RE:** Fire/Rescue Operational Action Plan - Final Report

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

That the attached report – “Richmond Fire/Rescue Operational Action Plan – Final Report, October, 31, 2000” be received for information.

  
Jim Hancock  
Fire Chief

**FOR ORIGINATING DIVISION USE ONLY**  
**CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER**  




Richmond Fire/Rescue

# OPERATIONAL ACTION PLAN

37

*Final Report – October 30, 2000*

**Table of Contents**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 3

YEAR ONE ISSUES ..... 5

*Career Development*..... 5

*Communication*..... 6

*Early Retirement Replacements* ..... 7

*E-Comm* ..... 8

*Inspection Targets* ..... 9

*Labour/Management Relations*..... 10

*Long term absences/Overtime System* ..... 11

*Scheduling and Coordination*..... 12

*Service Levels* ..... 13

*Technology* ..... 14

*YVR Operating Model*..... 15

NEXT STEPS..... 16

38

## **Executive Summary**

The Fire/Rescue Operational Action Plan (OAP) was undertaken in the Fall of 1999 and was borne out of the need to address the many outstanding issues within the department in a timely fashion. Although the day-to-day delivery of services to the community continued to run smoothly, many critical training, management and administrative issues were not being addressed or resolved. Over time, this had the effect of reducing morale within the department, alienating Council and Senior Management, resulting in a lack of confidence in the department and increasing the scope and depth of unresolved issues.

The Fire/Rescue Management Team, as well as an outside consultant and the Manager, Divisional Programs were tasked by the General Manager, Engineering & Public Works to develop a plan which identified and addressed critical issues facing the department. At this time the department did not have a permanent Fire Chief appointed, this made the task of completing this initiative more challenging. This hurdle was overcome by the Fire/Rescue management team. Each had over twenty years experience in Fire/Rescue and had moved up through the ranks to Chief Officer positions. The depth and range of their experience contributed significantly to the successful completion of the OAP.

Some issues, such as YVR negotiations and the relocation of Fire Halls were identified as being outside the scope of this project. The plan was divided into Year One and Year Two issues. The Year One issues are now complete. The Year Two issues will be considered as part of the process for developing Fire/Rescue's Department Plan in the new year.

The key areas of improvement within the department as a result of the OAP are:

- a department that is better managed,
  - ❖ overtime expenditures are significantly reduced
  - ❖ the large turnover in staff (25) resulting from the Early Retirement Incentive Program was handled efficiently with replacement officers in the positions vacated almost immediately
  - ❖ the operating model for providing emergency response service to YVR was revamped to be more cost effective
  - ❖ major activities within Fire/Rescue are now coordinated and scheduled more efficiently
- staff morale has improved,
  - ❖ Labour/Management meetings are held regularly and the relationship between management and the union executive is more cooperative
  - ❖ a Career Development Program which clearly states the education and seniority requirements for the Chief Officer positions was initiated
  - ❖ regular updates to staff from the Fire Chief ensure the lines of communication are open
- key services were reviewed resulting in,
  - ❖ comprehensive statements regarding levels of service developed which will form the basis of the long term strategic plan in the new year

- ❖ a stronger focus on Fire Prevention
- new initiatives are underway,
  - ❖ a captain from Fire/Rescue was seconded to oversee the E-Comm implementation
  - ❖ technology solutions for records management, staff scheduling and improvements to current systems were evaluated and will form the basis of a technology strategy for the department

Although outcomes identified for the Year One issues have been achieved, the team recognizes that some issues have a much larger scope than the original focus of the OAP. The Year Two issues identified by the team also need to be reassessed to determine how they should be dealt with. In the new year the Fire/Rescue management team will begin to develop a Fire/Rescue Department Plan. Much of the work undertaken to complete the OAP will form the foundation of this plan.

The overall outcome of the plan is a Fire/Rescue department that has recognized the need for, and a commitment to change.

## ***Year One Issues***

### **Career Development**

---

#### **Background**

Several of the Chief Officer positions were anticipated to become vacant as a result of the Early Retirement Incentive Program. There did not appear to be any staff in the department with the required qualifications to replace them. In addition, the qualifications for the Chief Officer positions which were negotiated with the union, in the early nineties, no longer met the needs of the department.

A comprehensive career development program was identified as necessary for the development of qualified staff to fill these senior union positions.

#### **Objective**

To develop a clear, comprehensive career development program that is fully communicated to all Fire/Rescue personnel.

#### **Actions**

The issue of career development is now well underway. The Organizational Restructuring of Richmond Fire Rescue Department has implications for this issue in that it opens doors for the implementation of new educational requirements and selection processes for officer positions within the department.

The promotional aspects of the organizational review, have been negotiated with Richmond Fire Fighters Local 1286 of the IAFF and have been supported by the membership. In this proposal, selection and educational clarity is provided for senior, unionized officer positions. Additionally, time lines for the implementation of these requirements are stipulated so that there are clear career paths to these and other officer positions within the department.

Selection has been enhanced to allow for far greater numbers of personnel to be considered. Educational requirements have been identified so that all personnel now have access to key courses and programs much earlier in their career in order to prepare themselves for promotions to senior ranks.

#### **Outcome**

As these new initiatives take root, greater numbers of staff may participate, eventually resulting in all firefighters aspiring for promotion being properly prepared for officer positions in advance of the promotional process.

## Communication

---

### Background

Fire/Rescue had a need for timely and effective communications. The nature of staff work schedules and the geographic separation of worksites, makes it difficult to stay informed. Lacking a timely, formal communications system employees tended to use the informal grapevine. As a result staff were constantly dealing with poor information and half truths.

### Objective

To develop some quick solutions to improve the internal communications system and bring closure to old studies and surveys. The goals were to improve the accuracy and timeliness of internal communications, counter "grapevine" inaccuracies and increase contact with Chief Officers.

### Actions

Newsletters and updates were delivered to fire-fighter's homes The Fire Chief made himself available to Fire/Rescue staff of all ranks and increased the presence and visibility of his office. A 20-minute video featuring the Chief giving a report of progress to date was produced and distributed to the fire halls. The O.A.P. and other important announcements were delivered to each fire-fighters home. Operations meetings were held monthly and District Chiefs held regular shift meetings to communicate current issues and progress to the rank and file.

The Fire Chief and the Union Executive increased dialogue and all Chief officers actively countered rumours with current information. Captain Mason's secondment to E-Comm has greatly increased the quality of information about E-Comm and the radio system changes.

### Outcome

Some thorny past issues have been laid to rest. General knowledge of current issues and their progress has increased. There are fewer rumours and a more positive view of the future with a confidence that management is moving Fire/Rescue forward in the right direction.

## Early Retirement Replacements

---

### Background

A large number of Richmond Fire/Rescue personnel will be eligible for retirement over the next ten years. The Early Retirement Incentive Plan had a significant impact on the department this year. Twenty-five staff took advantage of the plan, this gave staff a good indication of the issues which will need to be addressed in the future.

In the past there were numerous delays from the time a position was posted until it was filled. Unlike other departments, there are no 'savings' from this type of delay, as the successful member is back paid to twenty-eight days from the time of the vacancy, and there is greater potential for incurring overtime to ensure the position is filled.

### Objective

To have replacement officers in place on the first day after an officer retires and minimize operational impact.

### Actions

Promotions up to the rank of Captain are determined by lock step seniority, subject to completing the 'officer pool' course. The process for filling positions up to the rank of Captain was streamlined to dispense with individual postings and interviews. A 'group' posting for all Lieutenant and Captain positions was developed and posted. The qualified candidates were selected and notified two weeks prior to the date of their appointment.

### Outcome

Streamlining this process allowed the department to have an orderly transition for the high volume of retirements this year. It reduced the need for overtime and ensured a qualified candidate was in place without delay.



## **E-Comm**

---

### **Background**

Before Richmond Fire/Rescue can be dispatched by E-Comm a number of changes in our procedures, technical systems, equipment, etc. will need to take place. The go-live date for Richmond Fire/Rescue at E-Comm has been delayed several times. At present we anticipate mid-2001 as the date for implementation.

### **Objective**

To ensure a smooth transition to E-Comm by Richmond Fire/Rescue is achieved and to communicate regular updates to RFR staff.

### **Actions**

Due to the scope of the E-Comm transition the RFR management team recognized the need for a dedicated staff resource for the project who would liaison with E-Comm staff and coordinate the different phases of transition both here and at E-Comm. A Special Projects posting was developed and posted in the Spring.

The position was filled and the incumbent, Captain Dave Mason undertook the responsibility for the project.

### **Outcome**

The E-Comm implementation for RFR continues to progress. In September RFR successfully switched over to the new radio system.

## Inspection Targets

---

### Background

At present, Richmond Fire/Rescue have a standard for inspections which is, every building in Richmond, with the exception of single family dwellings, inspected annually. This amounts to approximately 11,000 inspections per year. In 1998 there was a shortfall of 4,273 and in 1999 there was a shortfall of 3,909 uninspected buildings.

### Objective

To review, and if necessary, revise the inspection targets and put a plan in place to achieve the agreed upon targets.

### Action

An analysis was undertaken to determine the cause of the shortfall. A number of options were proposed to increase the number of inspections. These options were explored by the Chief Fire Prevention Officer and the Deputy Chief, Operations for feasibility, benefits, impact on operations, etc. The decision was made to select the option which added one extra day to the inspection program for suppression. It was also recommended that the program be constantly monitored and that the Deputy Chief's office be given regular quarterly reports by shift.

### Outcome

The desired outcome was to reduce and eventually eliminate the shortfall in the number of yearly inspections. The Early Retirement Incentive Program has had a trickle down effect on suppression staff time. Assisting with the new recruit training and replenishing the Officer Pool program has impacted the amount of time available from suppression shifts for company inspections.

For 2000, it is not expected the target goals will be met, although the new members in F.P.O. and the inclusion of one temporary staff in this division will help in maintaining our current status.

The overall benefits of the additional day will be evaluated when overall staffing in the department stabilizes next year. Fire Prevention was identified in the organizational review as an area which warranted more resources. How this is accomplished will be determined as part of the Fire Rescue Department Plan in the new year how

## **Labour/Management Relations**

---

### **Background**

There was a perception within the department that the relationship between the Management and Union of the department was at best strained, and that there was a lack of clear understanding of roles, or honesty in discussions. It did not sufficiently focus on building respect, communication, trust and cooperation.

### **Objective**

To establish areas of mutual respect at all levels of department management. To establish a Code of Conduct between management and the union. To establish open and honest communications.

### **Actions**

Since this issue was first identified a new Fire Chief has been appointed. Under his leadership the actions identified have been initiated:

- regular union management meetings have been established
- the Fire Chief initiated reports to the membership on current issues. This was in video format which was distributed to all the Fire Halls for viewing by staff. Plans are underway for regular written updates.

Two outstanding recommendations being considered by management and the union executive are:

- publishing the agenda for the Fire Chief/Union executive meetings
- establishing a formal Code of Conduct between management and the Union Executive

### **Outcome**

The relationship between management and the union executive has improved significantly. There is a greater willingness to understand and respect boundaries and areas of authority.

## **Long term absences/Overtime System**

---

### **Background**

Fire Suppression staffing levels have a minimum staffing requirement in order to meet service levels. The number of staff required for each shift is 41. If the number of available staff drops below 41, then off duty staff must be called in to work at overtime rates.

Long term absences due to illness and injury reduced shift levels and incurred overtime costs to meet minimum staffing requirements. The 'Carline Report' placed a heavy emphasis on the use of overtime to maintain minimum staffing.

### **Objective**

To significantly reduce the use of the overtime except where operationally necessary, i.e. at the end of a shift or for an emergency callout.

### **Actions**

The following actions have been taken to resolve this issue:

- Ten additional fire fighters have been added to the staffing complement.
- Some of the long term absent members have retired.
- Long term members have been distributed among each of the four shifts to minimise the overall impact.
- An agreement has been reached with the union allowing greater flexibility for acting rank situations

### **Outcome**

These actions have resulted in a significant decrease in overtime. The overtime budget is continually monitored to ensure conformance.

## **Scheduling and Coordination**

---

### **Background**

Richmond Fire/Rescue members were struggling to maintain training certifications, complete fire inspections, and conduct public education programs. All operational objectives needed to be identified, prioritized and incorporated into a comprehensive schedule.

### **Objective**

To review the existing calendar to ensure timely input for all interest groups, ensuring Department priorities are met. Produce a easily read format and improve accessibility to the final document.

### **Actions**

A review was undertaken to determine what needed to be done by division, shift and City department. The management team assessed and prioritized needs. The calendar format was revised, implemented and distributed to all members of the department.

### **Outcome**

The 2000 calendar was developed and distributed based on the department's prioritized goals. The 2001 calendar is presently being developed through input from the management team and will be distributed in December.

## **Service Levels**

---

### **Background**

Fire/Rescue needed to ensure it was doing what Council expected and supported, including the need to identify the service the department is responsible to provide for the citizens of Richmond. Council, citizens and other City departments were not aware of all the services Richmond Fire/Rescue provides and in the extent or level of certain services.

### **Objective**

To develop statements for existing Richmond Fire/Rescue service levels. To establish what services will be provided by Richmond Fire/Rescue and to outline issues to be addressed in a future Strategic Plan.

### **Actions**

An background paper was written explaining current service levels and any problems or concerns. Input was included from the management team, the union executive and members of the Community Services committee. The service levels were distributed to every Richmond Fire/Rescue staff members by the Fire Chief .

### **Outcome**

The comprehensive service level statements have been developed and distributed to all Richmond Fire/Rescue staff. The issues identified in maintaining these service levels will be reviewed by the management team in 2001, as part of the long term strategic plan for the department. At that time a mechanism will be developed to communicate service levels to the community.

## Technology

---

### Background

We are the last city division still using the old Wang computer system for records management. The system is out of date and difficult to maintain. We have an opportunity to modernize our computer system and use the current city standard systems to computerize many of our manual business practices. Our division could realize many efficiency improvements and increase management's access to information pertaining to daily operations.

When E-Comm assumes dispatching duties, some of the non-emergency functions performed currently by our dispatchers must be done by other means. There are computer applications that automate routine staffing functions, sick reporting and notification of off duty staff of assignment changes. These systems also assist in timekeeping and tracking and reporting staffing costs.

Our eight Fire Halls are in separate geographic locations, each hall has an office where information is captured and exchanged with other halls. This presents challenges in maintaining routine communication and business administration functions.

### Objective

To analyse our record management and business system needs. Evaluate available city systems, currently available commercial systems, and explore the feasibility of developing a custom solution. Develop an overall plan to meet our needs with the greatest fiscal efficiency.

### Actions

The various stakeholders; Fire Prevention, District Chiefs, Mechanics, equipment repair sections, and office staff were consulted. Discussions were held with The A.R.T Team from Public Works focusing on possible solutions. Available products were examined and a strategy developed. Recommendations are being prepared for the consideration of the Fire Chief.

### Outcome

Once the final recommendations are submitted to the Fire Chief's office a plan will be developed.

## YVR Operating Model

---

### Background

The current integrated staffing model for providing ARFF services at YVR does not adequately allow personnel to gain the experience necessary to perform their duties. A model needs to be developed that includes training requirements, duration of assignment, promotions, acting rank and seniority provisions.

### Objective

To identify a stable staffing model that is operationally viable and meets the needs of YVR and Richmond Fire/Rescue.

### Actions

The following actions have been taken to resolve this issue:

- The management team has developed a model to provide “stable staffing” at the YVR fire hall.
- An agreement in principal has been reached with YVR to introduce a “stable staffing” procedure. YVR has agreed to pay the premiums incurred for lost acting rank opportunities allowing the staff at the YVR fire hall to remain there for a two to three year tour.
- Members who will be part of the stable staffing complement have been identified and are currently in training, all of the members should be in place early next year.

### Outcome

Richmond Fire/Rescue are currently implementing the stable staffing model, which will provide YVR with a highly trained ‘crash rescue’ fire fighting force and provide the City with an operationally viable, cost-effective staffing model.



### **Next Steps**

The Year One issues will be reviewed to ensure that those issues which grew in scope from the original focus of the OAP are addressed in the new year.

The following issues were identified in Phase II of the Operational Action Plan:

- Accountability in Fire/Rescue
- Apparatus Purchasing
- Attendance Management System
- Training Program (including Career Development Program)
- Formal Communications Strategy
- Ensuring Inclusive Practices
- Equitable Access to City of Richmond courses
- Organizational Performance Measures
- Representation of Fire/Rescue on Corporate Strategic Teams
- Retirement Replacements (long term)

They will be reviewed by the management team early 2001 to determine relevancy and importance. Those issues which are retained for further action will be incorporated into the department work plan for the year and will help to form the foundation of Fire/Rescue's Department Plan.

Fire/Rescue's Department Plan will take into consideration the changes in the department's organizational structure, which resulted in the formation of a new management team, and the organizational changes at the corporate level with the formation of a new division, Community Safety. The Fire/Rescue Department Plan will also be linked to the forthcoming Corporate Plan.

50