

Fire Chief Guide

Summary of the Roles and Responsibilities

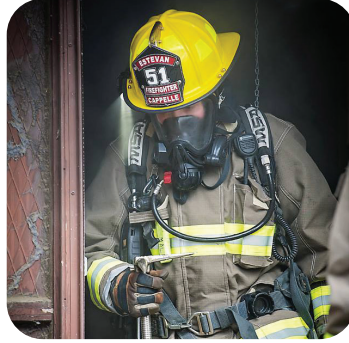


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Introduction

Saskatchewan local authorities have considerable latitude to determine the type of public safety services they will provide and the level that service will be provided at. This is often commensurate with the size of the local authority and the resources available. Saskatchewan requires local authorities to undertake some specific actions, but the rest are at the discretion of the council.

The fire chief plays a crucial role within the fire department and the community. The fire chief is responsible for fire and emergency response management, personnel management, administration of the fire department and meeting the Fire Chief's obligations under *The Fire Safety Act*.

The additional responsibilities required by the Council may include community and government relations, consultation with other councils, coordination with regional partners, delegation to deputies, emergency planning, and engagement with external contractors.

The following is a summary of the roles and responsibilities typically associated with the role of a local fire chief. Some communities and fire departments may not require all actions listed and some may have additional responsibilities that are not listed. This document serves as a guide and is not meant to mandate or require actions or tasks to any fire chief.

Emergency Manager vs Fire Chief Roles

In some communities a Fire Chief may assume the role and responsibilities of an emergency manager and in others they may be different individuals. If the Fire Chief assumes the roles and responsibilities of both Fire Chief and Emergency Manager, then many of the items included below will be relevant.

If the Fire Chief and Emergency Manager are different people, then some activities below may be the primary role of the emergency manager unless otherwise assigned and delegated.

It is important that appropriate conversations about delegation of authority and responsibilities be completed and communicated between all pertinent individuals in a community that include but may not be limited to administrator, fire chief, and emergency manager. There are emergency management activities outlined in a specific section below. This section includes activities but is not all encompassing.

Administration

The Fire Chief, as head of the fire department, has several administrative responsibilities that come from operating a vital public service.

Record Management

The development, evaluation, completeness, and accuracy of records are an integral part of the administration of a fire department. A record management system that allows for efficient data entry and processing may need to be acquired, implemented, and trained in.

Records are not only at times legislatively required but they also contribute to effective budgetary and planning processes with numerous other options limited only by the accuracy and amount of information input into the record management system.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data that is provided through a record management system encourages the understanding of trends and gives validity to anecdotal themes and gaps. The interpretation of this data supports reporting, development, and budgeting processes.

Resource Allocation

Resources of all kinds are limited for fire departments. Appropriately allocating resources will ensure programs and projects are sustained or developed, existing facilities and equipment are repaired, new facilities and equipment are acquired, and training is delivered.

Without appropriate resource allocation budgeted amounts and resources could be wasted and maximum efficiency and effectiveness of fire departments will not be reached for the community's overall safety and security.

Request for Proposal (RFP) Process

Fire departments may have their own RFP process to solicit and award bids on service or equipment contracts. If they have their own process the fire chief will need to ensure that there are policies and procedures in place and that the specifications of those policies and procedures are followed to ensure the integrity of competitive bidding is maintained.

Other fire departments will utilize their local council's RFP process. If they utilize their local council's RFP process a fire chief will need to begin with a strong proposal and request that can be submitted to the local administration for review and next steps in the process.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a vital part of the fire chief's role for the fire department. Strategic plans are developed to determine resource needs of the fire department to enhance capabilities and preparedness for emergencies given the community characteristics and expectations.

These strategic plans incorporate information from the community risk assessment, the status of the fire department, local demographics, response time benchmarks, provincial and federal legislation, bylaws, policies, procedures, and contractual agreements.

Strategic plans for fire departments are meant to develop comprehensive long-range plans that will guide their projects, work, and budget considerations for the duration of the strategic plan.

Organizational Improvements

Continuous improvement is necessary and often expected by communities and councils. Developing a model or plan for continuous organizational improvements will assist in implementing change and facilitating the reporting on key performance indicators.

Development of the organizational improvement plan should consider policies, procedures, physical characteristics of the community, local hazards, geographic characteristics, community plan, staffing requirements, response time benchmarks, contractual agreements, recognized best practice programs, local bylaws, and provincial and federal legislation.

This plan will contribute to maximum resource utilization and support the idea of required capital improvements.

Capital Improvements

Develop and manage a plan for capital improvement projects or programs that address the unmet needs of the community.

Ensuring that community residents and council understand the importance of the capital improvement requires education from the fire department using strategic planning, budgeting, facility planning, and a comprehensive capital improvement plans and information.

The communication and delivery of this plan will need to be presented appropriately for the various audiences that need to be a part of the decision-making process.

Budgeting

Fire chiefs may oversee the fire department's budget. Overseeing the budget can involve securing adequate funding and managing expenses. Additional fire department budget work may involve the acquisition and maintenance of a budget management system, submitting grant applications, and soliciting bids.

Councils, communities, and other regions have different policies and procedures regarding the development and reporting of a fire department budget.

These policies and procedures include schedules and guidelines and involve costs associated with capital, operating, and personnel costs. Budgeting is a key aspect of resource allocation.

Policies & Procedures

All fire departments should have appropriate policies and procedures. Policies and procedures should include but are not limited to providing guidance on reporting, finances, RFP processes, compliance, response activities, human resources, continuing education, investigations, media relations, and membership accommodations and assistance. These should be developed and then reviewed regularly and updated, as necessary.

Regulatory Compliance

Fire departments have compliance requirements that fire chiefs need to understand and adhere to. These compliance requirements are set forth by relevant federal and provincial legislation, best practice organizations, and standards.

In addition, there are fire safety codes, building regulations, and occupational health and safety requirements that ensure the fire department meets all legal and regulatory obligations.

These requirements are updated regularly, and fire chiefs need to ensure they remain current and adjust their policies, procedures, programs, and projects accordingly.

Local Assistant

Saskatchewan's *Fire Safety Act* states that a "local assistant", within a municipality that has a fire department is the fire chief or acting fire chief.

Notifying Saskatchewan's Fire Commissioner in writing of the full name and address of the local assistant is required.

The Fire Safety Act outlines the powers and duties of local assistants as well as activities that could be delegated to local assistants.

Project & Program Participation

There are fire programs or projects that fire departments can actively participate in. These programs or projects may include surveys, standards, feedback mechanisms, and other requests for engagement and participation.

Fire chiefs may wish to participate actively in all, some, or none of the projects or programs offered to them. One such program is the SPSA's *Fire Service Minimum Standards (FSMS)*.

FSMS is a program that is encouraged by the SPSA and assists local authorities in establishing fire department service levels for firefighting competencies based upon a declared service level.

Fire and Emergency Response Management

The fire chief plays a critical role in emergency response and all aspects associated with fire and emergency response management.

Coordinate & Direct Firefighting

Rescue efforts and emergency response management are coordinated and directed by the fire chief. Chiefs may establish incident command systems and consult with other emergency response agencies to effectively manage incidents.

As fire chiefs coordinate and direct firefighting activities the safety of firefighting personnel and the public are top-of-mind.

Pre-incident Surveys

Fire chiefs play a pivotal role in the systematic and effective implementation of pre-incident surveys. These surveys are fundamental for ensuring that firefighters and emergency responders have the information needed to oversee incidents safely and efficiently.

Personnel Safety

The safety of firefighting personnel during firefighting and response activities is paramount. Fire chiefs are required to make decisions directing firefighters to ensure that their personnel remain safe while completing life or value protection work.

Public Safety

Protection of persons is not limited to firefighting personnel but extends to the safety of public during a response. This could be members of the public that they are supporting, onlookers, and from secondary hazards surrounding an emergency response.

Action Plans

Develop, maintain, and evaluate action plans to respond to incidents and events that may occur within their community. These plans will ensure that all required resources are identified and that the resources are assigned and placed appropriately.

This planning will consider all policies and procedures, standards, and sources of emergency operations controlling authority, including emergency medical services protocols, responsibilities, authority of support, capabilities, responsibilities, and other considerations.

Mutual Aid Agreements (MAA)

Comprehensive plans may need to be developed, maintained, and evaluated to support the fire department operating at a hostile event, emergency, or other event, which allows for integration with other agencies' actions and provides for the safety and protection of personnel and the public.

These MAAs should consider all major incidents for the local and surrounding fire departments as well as the resources available to each.

Additional considerations that may want to be considered include plans, policies, procedures, programs, physical and geographic characteristics, demographics, incident management systems, communications systems, contract agreements, bylaws, provincial and federal legislations, and other available resources.

Post Incident Analysis

Following a multi-agency or a local incident post-incident analysis should be conducted. These analyses involve the completion of forms and critical elements identified and communicated in accordance with policies, procedures, legislation, and other requirements.

Post-incident analyses may consider elements of emergency management plans, critical issues, involved agencies' resources and responsibilities, dispatch response, strategy tactics and operations, and customer service.

Extraordinary Needs Resources

There may be times when fire departments are expected or requested to deliver emergency services that exceed their resources.

Fire chiefs may wish to develop, maintain, and evaluate a plan for the fire department that outlines unmet resource needs to build capacity and minimize the number of times when extraordinary needs are requested to be performed and delivered.

Pre-work to identify where resources may be readily accessible will contribute to response capacities.

Fire Inspections

A fire inspection program should be either developed, managed, and evaluated or contracted out if necessary. The fire inspection program should be supported by the council, program goals, department objectives, performance data, and resources.

Results of fire inspections may be evaluated to determine the effectiveness of policies, procedures, accepted practices, program evaluations, and applicable bylaws, fire codes, standards, and legislation.

Fire Investigations

A fire investigation program should be either developed, managed, and evaluated or contracted out if necessary. A fire investigation program should determine a preliminary cause of fires in the community.

Fire investigations support future police reports, insurance claims, and overall reporting.

Internal Incident Investigations

The fire chief should conduct investigations into incidents and accidents involving the fire department to identify lessons learned and implement corrective measures. Fire chiefs should analyze data and reports to improve operational effectiveness and prevent future incidents.

A measurable accident and injury prevention program, including relevant local and national data, evaluates incidents to determine effectiveness of the program, considering policies and procedures, accepted safety practices, and applicable codes, standards, and legislation.

Personnel Management

The fire chief plays a key role in managing personnel within the fire department. This includes but is not limited to recruitment, selection, and training of firefighters and support staff as well as establishing performance standards, conduct evaluations, and promoting professional development to maintain a skilled and motivated department.

Health & Safety

If a fire chief encourages an environment of health and safety for personnel, it will contribute to a reduced requirement for personnel management activities in the future ultimately leading to reduced costs and administrative requirements.

Health and safety can be encouraged during a response, during a non-response activity, and includes the mental and emotional health of firefighters. Health and safety involve developing, managing, and evaluating a health and safety program for fire department personnel.

This system will provide leadership for a risk management program that will, if successful, reduce injuries and property damage. These programs will take into consideration risk management concepts, occupational requirements, occupational hazards analysis, disability procedures, as well as other regulations and legislations that impact all aspects of health and safety.

Member Benefits & Assistance

A fire chief may appraise current and potential member benefits and member assistance programs. Developing a new program may include reviewing available data, other program usage, feedback from members of the fire department, strategic direction, and potential incentive options. Potential benefits and programs will likely need to be proposed and include information on the need of the benefit or assistance to justify the request.

Current benefits and programs should be reviewed and reported on as often as deemed necessary. Reporting may include use of the benefit or assistance program, if the benefit or program achieved the desired result, and opportunities for modification or improvement.

Support Accommodations

Members of the fire department may require support accommodations. These accommodations may require policies or procedures to ensure that a member's needs are met and adhere to applicable legislation.

Foundational policies for accommodation will assist in providing adequate information to justify and support the decision for the requested accommodation.

Recruitment

Develop a plan for recruitment of an appropriate level of personnel and key positions. The recruitment plan should take into consideration procedures, policies, staffing requirements, programs, strategic plan, and legal requirements. Recruitment may include formal recruitment for paid positions, volunteer recruitment, or a combination of both.

Selection

In some fire departments selections need to be made for the most appropriate candidate for paid or volunteer positions.

The selection of personnel following the recruitment process involves establishing and following procedures as well as legal requirement for hiring, assigning, and maintaining personnel within the fire department.

This ensures that the process and selection is valid and reliable. Selection should also be based on council approved requirements for staff as well as the ability to manage, train, and oversee.

Succession Planning

At times selection for a role may be done through succession planning. Succession plans may be developed and maintained with consideration being given to fire department resources, policies, procedures, and internal capacities. Succession plans may identify internal persons for roles and the necessary training required to make them the best possible candidate.

Succession planning may involve the promotion of members. Ensuring that the promotion process is valid, reliable, job-related, and non-discriminatory may require the creation of procedures and programs that take into consideration overarching policies and legal requirements.

Training & Education

This duty involves establishing procedures, guidelines, and requirements for continuing education and training. A fire chief prioritizes training and education programs within the fire department.

They develop and implement comprehensive training plans to enhance the skills and knowledge of firefighters, keeping them updated on the latest firefighting techniques, equipment, and safety protocols.

Developing and managing an ongoing continuing education and training program will assist personnel in meeting the mission of the fire department.

The encouraging of professional development of firefighters within the fire department may increase the capacity of the individual members and the overall service of the fire department to the community.

A framework for professional development may be created to support the work and assist the members in fire departments in achieving their personal and professional goals.

The framework should be consistent with the SPSA's *Fire Service Minimum Standards*; the SPSA's *Certification, Evaluation, and Endorsement Guide*; or other council approved training framework that meets their performance standards.

Performance Standards

Each role within the fire department may have a stated performance standard that outlines the job performance requirements. These standards should be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary with the advancement of projects, programs, equipment, techniques, protocols, or training capacity within the fire department.

Attention to the performance standards may contribute to the evaluation of fire fighters as well as improving the fire department and the services it provides.

Evaluations

Regularly completing evaluations of firefighters' skills and knowledge will contribute to a greater appreciation of the gaps within a department or for an individual, future training that may need to be delivered, compensation decisions, and overall staffing requirements.

Retention

A positive environment for firefighters within a fire department is important for the successful retention of firefighters which in turn often leads to successful projects, programs, and service delivery to the community.

In addition, the successful retention of firefighters also minimizes the overall costs for the fire department by limiting the costs associated with onboarding, training, and developing a firefighter's knowledge and skills and maximizing the active participation of fire department members.

Active participation of members can minimize the number of hours required by all members of the fire department which may, in turn, decrease the level of volunteer or employee burnout.

A positive environment can be developed through efficient communication, effective negotiations, analyzing current member/management relations, developing individual interpersonal relationships, and conducting program implementation.

All work with member relations should consider contractual agreements, provincial and federal legislation, as well as any other local considerations.

Community and Government Relations

The fire chief serves as a liaison between the fire department and the community, other local governments, and Saskatchewan. Fire chiefs engage in community outreach programs, public education initiatives, and partnerships with other organizations to enhance fire prevention, safety, and awareness within the community.

Community Outreach

Community outreach involves creating and delivering programs that improve and expand services and build partnerships with the public. Part of community outreach may include attending, participating in, and assuming leadership roles within a community.

This may include but is not limited to participating in community functions, supporting an outstanding community need, and projecting a positive image of the fire department to the community.

Community needs will likely take into consideration community demographics and socioeconomic matters, community and civic issues, effective customer service methods, and formal and informal community leaders.

Community Risk Reduction

With the support of risk assessment data, community demographics, resource availability, community needs, customer service principles, and program development, fire chiefs may develop a community risk reduction program. Community Risk Reduction programs support the overall community outreach work of a fire department through public education.

Media Relations

Dealing with the media may be a part of the work of a fire chief. Policies and procedures should be developed in advance. These policies and procedures would make up a larger Media Relations Program.

The Media Relations Program would support the dissemination of information that is accurate and accessible which includes techniques of public relations, communications, and crisis management.

Fire Safety Plans

Fire chiefs may be asked by council, businesses, or organizations in the community to develop a plan given an identified fire safety problem.

The plan can increase the overall safety and security of the community and may result in a new program, bylaw amendment, form of public education, intervention, and/or fire safety legislation.

Collaboration and Coordination

The fire chief fosters collaboration and coordination with other agencies, such as law enforcement, emergency medical services, and municipal authorities.

Fire chiefs participate in mutual aid agreements, regional emergency response planning, and inter-agency coordination to ensure a unified and effective emergency response system.

Emergency Management

The emergency management activities below are not all encompassing and there may be other activities that should be considered. It is the responsibility of the local council to delegate emergency management responsibilities to a local role. In some communities this will be the local fire chief and in others it may be a specific emergency management role.

Emergency Plan Support

By default, emergency plan support is the responsibility of the local council. This responsibility could be delegated to the fire chief, emergency coordinator, or other local role. Whomever has the responsibility will develop, maintain, and evaluate the disaster plan.

Using policies and procedures, fire chiefs may support the development, maintenance, and evaluation of a comprehensive disaster plan. The support will outline and provide context for the role of the fire service in the community's emergency management plan as well as the roles of local, provincial, and national emergency management agencies.

These plans integrate local risks, level of vulnerability, capability data, and other agencies' resources to ensure that the fire department can mitigate the impact of events to the community.

Risk Assessment

Complete and manage a written, comprehensive, all-hazards risk and value analysis of the community. This assessment should include community development features, local demographics, assessed valuation of properties in the community, and community priorities and critical infrastructure.

The assessment should take into consideration the appropriate features of the service area of the fire department to ensure that decision-making while delivering services considers the real risks, hazards, and the value analysis. This should be completed in partnership with a local Emergency Measures Coordinator (EMC).



Closing Remarks

Overall, the fire chief holds the responsibility for steering the strategic course, ensuring operational effectiveness, and safeguarding the well-being of the fire department. Their crucial leadership and specialized knowledge play a pivotal role in safeguarding lives, property, and the community from the potential hazards and crises associated with fires and other emergencies.