

# South Dakota Fire Chiefs Handbook



# SOUTH DAKOTA

## FIRE MARSHAL

**Investigations • Prevention • Education • Enforcement**

Sponsored by the South Dakota Fire Marshal's Office

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## SOUTH DAKOTA FIRE CHIEF'S HANDBOOK

Whether elected by the department or appointed by the elected officials of your city, you, the new fire chief, are faced with some challenges. As a former chief put it, “there’s only one person who is more lonely than the greenest recruit on the department—the new chief.”

That white helmet of yours is a heavy piece of headgear. When you put it on, you assume ultimate responsibility and accountability, for how well your firefighters are trained: their safety on the fire ground; code enforcement; fire prevention and public fire safety education in your community; interaction with local, county and state officials; and daily department administration.

This information booklet provides basic information and contacts for critical programs. IT IS NOT INTENDED TO BE A COMPLETE RESOURCE MANUAL FOR FIRE CHIEFS.

### Administration of a fire department, a team management approach

- Former chief
- Training officer
- Secretary/treasurer
- Safety officer
- Maintenance officer
- Water supply officer
- Public education officer

### Meetings

Your first meeting as the new Fire Chief will set the tone for the rest of your appointment. At this first meeting your leadership skills will be of utmost importance. Some of the following suggestions and guidelines will aid you in preparing for the first meeting.

- Prepare a detailed agenda.
- Follow the agenda and try not to deviate from it.
- Make sure your meetings are in accordance with the South Dakota Open Door Law (SD CL 1-25-1)
- State your goals for the department.
- Let them know what your priorities are: Firefighter safety, Customer Service, and Trust.
- Listen to your employees ideas and be open to new methods.

### Public relations

- Develop a public relations program
  - Easy to start.
  - Local Newspaper, Don’t limit your contacts to the local media.
  - Stop in and introduce yourself.

### Good relations with government

- Every fire department relies on local government for support.
  - County, Municipal, Independent, Fire District

- The local government is responsible for establishing the “level” of fire protection in a community. They decide on how much money is going to be spent on personnel and equipment.
- As the fire chief, you must establish good relations with your elected public officials as well as your fellow municipal officials.
- The desire to be kept up-to-date is particularly strong in local government officials.
  - Keep them informed
  - Report to them periodically on department status
  - Personally distribute a summary of your annual report and see to it that it reaches the public.
  - Know your individual board or council member and make sure he knows you.
- Other Public Officials
  - Chief of Police
  - County Sheriff
  - County Emergency Manager
  - Public Works Director
  - Other providers of city/town services
  - County Highway Superintendent
  - Highway Patrol
- The city manager or finance officer
  - Responsible for “holding down costs”
  - Create a good active working relationship between you, your council or board, your manager/finance officer and other official.
  - In a tight spot, they can be valuable.

## Fire Protection Contracts

- Agreements between local government bodies or with property owners to furnish fire protection.
- If your department provides protection under contract, it is your job to make specific recommendations as to the terms of the contract. It should provide for a fair share of the costs of providing services from your fire department.
  - Allow the fire department to increase personnel, equipment and other resources if necessary to meet contract protection requirements.
  - 3 to 5 year contracts are common
- There is no “Standard” fill-in-the-blank contract for fire protection.
- Legal assistance is always advisable in contract preparation.
- Individually negotiated instruments
- There are several considerations that should be included in all contract negotiations for fire protection. These include:
  - Authorization for the fire department to respond outside the city or town limits.
  - Geographic description of the area to which the department will respond. Include a Map.
  - Minimum number of firefighters and type of equipment that will respond.

- Circumstances under which the department will not respond. (Weather, fire in jurisdiction etc.).
- Beginning and expiration dates of the contract and whether it is automatically renewed in the absence of a non-renewal notice.
- Dates when either party must file a notice of non-renewal, with a provision for continuance of service for a specified period the contract is not to be renegotiated.
- Method of fee computation (so much per run, flat rate per year etc.)
- Date when parties are billed. Payment Due. Procedure for disputes
- Provision for Audit or arbitration.

## Mutual aid

- A mutual aid agreement is a formal contract among cities or towns that calls for aid in the form of personnel and equipment to be furnished to the other on request. The elected officials of participating cities or towns sign the agreement. You may not have the authority to send personnel and equipment out of your jurisdiction unless the governing board approves it.
- A department must have the necessary personnel and equipment to protect their jurisdiction first and participating in mutual aid agreements as a second priority.
- Mutual aid drills are essential to effective mutual aid operations.
- Mutual aid is planning.
  - Which departments will you call
  - List of other department's equipment
  - Plan for local resources
  - How will you respond to a call for help

## Planning

- Fire protection planning involves the analysis of current fire problems and available resources that leads to a plan to reduce these problems.
- The key to "Master Planning" is recognition that fire is a community problem – not just a fire department problem.
- It is the community and its elected officials who must decide what level of risk is acceptable.
- Community input is necessary to define the problem and establish the means to minimize or solve those problems.
- One source of planning is the Insurance Services Office (ISO) ISO grades community fire protection by assigning point values to various resources as well as fire department operations and equipment.
- Your Manager, finance officer or local governing body can request an evaluation or you may use a previous evaluation to determine the methods for upgrading your ISO rating.
- ISO Ratings and Grading's
  - Classifications from 1 to 10
  - The lower the rating the lower the fire insurance ratings in your community.
  - Ratings from 1 to 6 effect commercial properties only.

- Implementation may cost more than local government is willing to spend.
- Another aspect of planning is hazard evaluation and preplanning.
- Why Plan???? NOBODY LIKES SUPRISES.
- If you react to problems on a day to day basis, the best you will ever be able to do is to attempt to keep up – or to react to a crisis.
- Your job will be much easier if you are proactive rather than reactive.
- Anticipate your problems before they occur.
- You can evaluate hazards and preplanning in your protection area by examining the following fire protection “factors”
  - How many fires occur each year?
  - Where do they occur?
  - What is causing them?
  - What are the “target” hazards in your area? Have these hazards had problems in the past.
  - Are there target hazards in your community that your department could not effectively control in the event of a fire? (Notify the owner and the governing body of this fact)
- What are your resources?
  - Personnel, Equipment, Water Supply
- Preplanning
  - Sophisticated Drawings with floor layouts, utility shutoffs, exits, etc.
  - Simple tour of the facility by members of the department
  - Written preplans are becoming more common.
- Good planning and the Budget Process
  - If you’re local governing body knows you have a plan to replace your 1975 pumper in 3-5 years they will react more favorably than if you announce you need a new truck tomorrow.
  - The same principal applies to adding new hose, SCBA’s etc.
  - **Good short and long range planning allows you to deal with your problems on your own terms.**

## SOP and SOG/Best Practices

Operating a fire department without written rules, regulations or bylaws is difficult. Written rules and regulations in the form of administrative and tactical standard operating guidelines help to make clear to all members what is expected of them in terms of day to day administration as well as emergency operations.

- Examples of activities that could be covered under administrative standard operating procedures:
  - Organizational Chart
  - General conduct of members
  - Wearing of a uniform
  - Duties and responsibilities of officers and firefighters
  - Compensation

- Meetings and Drills
- Maintenance schedules etc.
- Examples of items covered in Standard Operating/Best Practices Guidelines:
  - Response to fire calls
  - Fire ground operations
  - Rescue procedures
  - Mutual aid procedures
  - Placement of apparatus

## Budgets

Budgets are prepared annually

- Generally broken down in two categories: “capital expenses” and “operating expenses”
- Capital Expenses may include:
  - Apparatus, Buildings, SCBA’s, Hose, Turnout Gear
- Operating Expenses may include:
  - Paper, Fuel, Utilities, Repairs, Consumable items
- Regardless of the size of the fire problem, most departments have to carry out five separate programs or activities if they are to control their problems effectively and efficiently.
  - Pre-emergency planning, Fire Prevention, Training, Public safety education
- The money spent, and in what priority, is a decision that must be made by each fire department.
- Two key points to preparing a budget are:
  - Detail
  - Justification
- A good budget itemizes the anticipated costs and explains why each item is needed.
- Capital improvement budgets require the greatest detail and justification simply because they involve the greatest expenditures.
- The budget should remain stable through the years and should contain no surprises for the local governing body.
- Effective planning for the replacement of fire apparatus is a relatively simple task.
- If plans indicate an apparatus capital expenditure of \$100,000 over the next 10 years, then \$10,000 must be built into the budget each year to meet that requirement.
- You should be able to answer the following 6 questions in order to effectively plan for apparatus replacement
  - Original cost of apparatus
  - Estimated replacement cost of apparatus
  - When will it be replaced (Retirement date)
  - How much will it depreciate each year
  - What is its anticipated trade-in value
  - Purchase or Lease
- You will need to set up records to accumulate the cost of operating and maintaining each piece of apparatus for given yearly period.

- The day you receive a piece of apparatus, set the retirement date.
- Then set up depreciation record for each year.
- Try to stagger the retirement dates of various pieces of apparatus so that many pieces need not be replaced at the same time.
- The replacement of capital items can be accomplished by depreciating these items over their useful lives, charging this depreciation as a expense item each year and setting aside amounts equal to the depreciated amounts in a “capital improvement fund”.
- The same procedure can be used to replace hose, SCBA’s or other equipment items.
- Do not “Pad” or Overestimate the budget.

## Records and Reports

- A Records system should be provided to supply the fire chief and officer with data indicating the effectiveness of the department in its operations. It is essential to maintain records on:
  - Incidents
  - Investigations
  - Inspections
  - Training
  - SCBA Maintenance
  - Pump Testing
  - Hose Testing

**Each year more fire departments are involved in litigation where records and reports provide the “written history” of the event.**

- There are basic reports, which are essential to fire department operations. These include:
  - National Fire Incident Report (NFIRS)
    - All fire departments are required to report all incidents within 30 days of incident.
    - The State Fire Marshal requires reports on all fires to insure accurate data can be maintained for the entire state.
  - Training Records for your department
    - Subjects taught
    - Dates and names of participants
  - Maintenance Records:
    - Detailed record of work performed
    - Who did the work
    - How much did it cost
  - Personnel Records: Separate file for each member
    - Certificates, Application, Dates of service, Medical history, Accidents/injuries, Exposure to toxic chemicals etc.
- Annual Report:
  - Statement of what activities took place
  - Who participated
  - How much money was spent

- The Fire Department certification form is to be turned into the State Fire Marshal's Office by May 31 of every year. These are sent out in March of each year.
  - Purpose of fire department certification is for departments meeting qualifications to receive a monetary payment from Fire Insurance Premium Tax Money.
  - This will also include a roster which is used by DMV for firefighter license plates.

## Fire Reporting

- Fire Report information can be found on the State fire marshal web page [www.dps.gov](http://www.dps.gov) this will also have a fire incident reporting system quick reference guide that can be looked at, or directly go to fire reports at <http://ps02firelogin.sd.gov/>
- All Fires:
  - Reported within 30 days of fire to Fire Marshal. Wildland: Fire reports will automatically be sent to SD Wildland Suppression. To meet NWCG and IQS reporting requirements.

## Fire Investigations

As a Fire Chief, you will most likely, at some point be tasked with the responsibility to perform origin and cause investigations for your jurisdiction. Not all fires are accidental. You may call your local Deputy Fire Marshal to assist you with those fires that result in a **loss of life, serious injury and/or a significant community impact/loss; or any fire considered more than just a nuisance fire.** By contacting your local Deputy Fire Marshal questions may be answered on whether an investigation is needed and should be done before the fire department releases the fire scene.

Paul Coon	South East	605-685-4672
Kyle Moser	North East	605-881-2247
Damon Hartmann	West River	605-381-0716
Mike Jones	Central	605-280-8165
Doug Hinkle	Central	605-280-5864
Fire Marshal's Office		605-773-3562

\*After regular office hours: State Radio Communications 650-773-3536

## Training

- Without good training for all department personnel, the money spent for equipment and buildings is poorly spent and the community receives low quality services.
- The Chief is responsible for the training of the department members. A good training program requires such a substantial investment of time and effort, that a training officer may be appointed.
- Delegated Function
  - Enough independence to get the job done
  - Enough management from the Chief
  - All officers should advise on subject matter, hours and other aspects
- The Training Officer is responsible for getting training input from officers and firefighters and plans, conducts and coordinates the department training efforts.
- The Training Officer should have a cadre of instructors to work with.

- The Chief and his officers should evaluate the general effectiveness of the training program at least once annually.
- Personnel who participate should offer evaluation and suggestions.
- A Fire or a major drill is a poor place to test training. Observing work activity can help make determinations of whether training has increased skills and performance levels.
- Training Opportunities:
  - South Dakota State Fire Marshal's Office
  - South Dakota State Firefighters Association
  - NFA - National Fire Academy
  - State Fire Schools
  - District/Regional Fire Schools

## The Fire Chief and the law

- Laws that affect the fire service in any state are promulgated to the federal, state and local level in the form of United States Codes, Statutes, County and Municipal Ordinances. [http://sdlegislature.gov/Statutes/Codified\\_Laws/](http://sdlegislature.gov/Statutes/Codified_Laws/)
  - The Chief has a responsibility to himself, department members and the community to become familiar with these laws.
  - Laws at these levels have an impact on your job and the operation of a fire department
- Municipal Ordinances:
  - Ordinances that establish and govern your department
  - Source of your authority
  - You only have the powers set forth in those ordinances.
  - **State law also governs municipal liability in cases of torts to others, workers compensation, unemployment compensation and hazard substances.**
- Recent court decisions show a trend towards holding municipalities liable for the negligence of their employees. Some examples of actions that have resulted in lawsuits against municipal fire departments include.
  - Failure to use proper firefighting tactics.
  - Failure to enforce building/fire codes when an official was aware of a violation and took no action to correct it.
  - Negligent operation of fire apparatus involved in an accident.
- Municipalities may and do purchase liability insurance to protect themselves and their employees against damages as a result of court decisions. This does not relieve you or your firefighters of the obligation to fulfill your responsibilities with DUE DILIGENCE and to the best of your ability.
  - Where is your insurance policy
  - What does it say? Exclusions, How broad is it.

## Fire prevention

- Many volunteer departments provide outstanding inspection programs
- Firefighters are trained in basic inspection technique and each member trained conducts several inspections per year.

- A medium sized community has all of its buildings inspected at least once annually using the firefighters.
- A good fire prevention program also includes public safety education.
  - Learn not to burn
  - Exit Drills in the home (EDITH)
  - Stop Drop and Roll
- Contact the South Dakota State Fire Marshal, State Fire Fighters Association or the Public Safety Education Library for detailed information on these programs.

## Fire Ground Management

The Incident Commander (IC) is the individual with overall responsibility for incident command. The role of the IC is one of a professional manager and commander. The term “professional” refers to training, dedication and the desire to perform to the best of one’s abilities and composure. It has no bearing on whether the IC is a career or volunteer officer.

Fire ground activities are either “strategic” or “tactical”.

- Strategic decisions are usually made by the IC and include whether the fire will be attacked from the outside (exterior attack) or attacked by personnel operating lines inside a building (interior attack).
- Mutual aid requests and major logistical decisions are included in strategy.
- Tactical decisions are those made by the IC’s subordinate officers (operations section chief) and include ventilation; hose line placement; sector command; etc.
- Numerous courses in fire ground management and tactics are available at various locations throughout the state.
- An effective chief has a thorough grasp of tactical concepts and trains subordinates in their application.
- NIMS training is available locally and on line at [www.DHS.gov](http://www.DHS.gov).
- The fire chief is responsible for all the activities that take place on the fire ground; crew safety; rescue, fire control and property conservation, in that order.
- A thorough analysis of operations at recent fires can be very helpful in improving firefighting techniques, strategy and tactics. An honest and frank post-fire critique can pay big dividends for any department.

## Summary

- It does not matter how you became the Chief. What does matter is how you represent the position.
- Remember, ALL FIRES WILL GO OUT EVENTUALLY. It is a matter of time and conditions as to when.

## Thank you for your time

### References:

Fire Marshal web site [www.dps.gov](http://www.dps.gov) under links has a variety of information.

OEM Information at [www.dps.gov](http://www.dps.gov) under Emergency Management.

Fire Chiefs Association [www.sdfca.com](http://www.sdfca.com)

South Dakota Firefighters Association [www.sdfirefighters.org](http://www.sdfirefighters.org)

Check us out on Facebook for training information, <https://www.facebook.com/SDFireMarshal>

Contact your local Emergency Management director for your county's emergency plan.

South Dakota Wildland Fire <http://sdda.sd.gov/wildland-fire/> 1-605-393-8011

ISO (Insurance Services Office) information, email Rob Holso at [rholso@verisk.com](mailto:rholso@verisk.com) or call 1-605-390-5944

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