

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Survey Results

“Military Reserve Call-Up Effects on America’s Fire Departments”

IAFC Member Survey

January 23, 2003

Overview

A survey was sent electronically to more than 8,500 members of the International Association of Fire Chiefs on Wednesday, January 15, 2003, to assess the potential impact of a military reserve or National Guard “Call-Up” to active duty and its effects on the Fire Service, particularly in the U.S.

The survey was intentionally brief; only 3 questions. A private, third-party vendor hosted both the web-based questionnaire and provided real time tabulation of results plus the capture of text responses to two of the three long response or “comment” questions on the survey.

The intent was not to obtain data for purely statistical purposes. The intent of the survey was to obtain the most accurate picture possible of whether or not the leaders of the fire service felt that their departments might face any effect at all from a military “call up” – and to try to assess to what degree the absence of fire and emergency response personnel might be expected to impact departmental budgets, staff/coverage, or other issues.

Within the first 24 hours after launching the survey, more than 700 fire and emergency services departments had responded. By the end of the third day, the survey had received more than 1,200 individual responses including more than 725 detailed “verbatim.” The final tally as of this summary was 1,271 total respondents or a 15.2% return rate with 861 additional comments.

A review of the numerical results on a question-by-question basis is provided below.

Summary of Findings:

The numbers show very clearly that a military call up, if it were to occur on a major scale across the United States, would have a modest affect on most departments. In terms of sheer numbers, the overall impact on fire department personnel *taken as an aggregate* will be small. However, it is also clear that such a call up could potentially have a very large affect on the smallest departments who are the least able to absorb either the loss of trained staff or likely to have the budget to replace them.

Simply stated: the larger the department, the more likely they will be able to withstand the loss of personnel in almost any category for indeterminate lengths of time.

Overall, 81% of the departments responding stated that they would suffer the loss of no more than 5% of their staff overall. Thirteen percent of the respondents stated that between 5% and 10% of their staff could be affected, and the remaining 6% of departments are anticipating a greater than 10% loss of staff coverage.

Of the personnel who might be affected, the vast majority (in 82% of the cases) will be firefighters followed by paramedic/EMS providers in 46% of the cases. Of significant concern is the fact that more than 11% of the staff losses reported by respondents are anticipated to involve the loss of chief fire officers.

Key Conclusions

Most Fire Chiefs were very clear as to how a call up might affect their departments; they already know who might be called, what duties would have to be transferred, and have a fairly solid idea of the ultimate financial impact on the department and municipality.

Most Chiefs have already put some kind of response plan into action, whether it involves the addition of temporary hires, leave policy revisions, the implementation of mandatory overtime or staffing/service changes.

The vast majority of respondents acknowledged a financial impact of some kind on the fire service resulting from the loss of Reservists. The severity of that impact had less to do with actual numbers of personnel involved and more to do with the size and type of the department affected.

Many departments noted that municipal budgets are under pressure right now from multiple directions. A Reserve call up is one more potential pressure.

Of those Chiefs who expect to be impacted by a Reserve call up, the most frequently cited concerns include loss of critical emergency skills, (training and expertise), impact on apparatus staffing, service response times and overall operations.

Several Chiefs noted that much has been asked of America's Fire Service since September 11th, and that many of these requests have resulted in additional financial burdens, just as a military call up will. They are already struggling to find ways to pay for all the new services that are now expected of them.

However, without exception, respondents indicated a desire to support any military call up request in any way possible if asked - even those departments who felt that a call up would have little affect on their operations.

Survey Responses:

Question #1: "What percentage of fire and emergency personnel in your department are members of a military reserve or national guard unit?"

None 28%

0-5%	52%
5-10%	15%
10-20%	3%
20-30%	1%
30-40%	1%
More than 40%	1%

Question #2: Assuming those reservists could be called to active duty, what are their roles in the fire department? (Please select all that apply.)

Fire fighter	82%
Paramedic/EMS Provider	46%
Chief fire officer	11%
Other (see examples below)	27%

Technical/Heavy Rescue
 HazMat Specialist
 Senior Fire Inspector
 Dispatcher
 Training Officer
 CPR, First Aid Coordinator
 Arson Investigator
 Safety Officer
 Special Teams – Dive/Ice Rescue, Rope Rescue
 Paramedic and Healthcare Director
 Mechanic
 Non-Uniform Support Staff

Question #3: “If you expect members of your department will be called to active duty, what are you and your department doing to handle potential staffing issues?”

**Sample responses:
 (Adverse financial impact)**

“Fill with overtime”

“We will maintain the same staffing level even if we must work personnel and pay them overtime”

“OVERTIME and callbacks”

“Temporary employees”

“Mutual aid”

“Our only choice is to backfill using overtime personnel when staffing is reduced below minimum.”

“It will cost us money because the city holds the position open while the individual is gone.”

“The city is currently in budget crisis, and no extra manpower will be provided.”

“As with the 1st Gulf War in 1991, and again in 2001-2002 immediately following the terrorist attacks, we covered our staffing shortages with overtime that was not budgeted. The downside, as you know, is that to meet our budget bottom line, other programs, projects and purchases were deferred. While we support our reservists, the impact is certainly felt in our organization.”

“It’s not a staffing problem- it’s a financial burden only.”

“Because of mandatory staffing levels per apparatus, calling of overtime personnel will be used, at a substantial cost to the fire department budget.”

“No budget support has been obtained to implement our staffing plan”

“The loss of one person would cost the city \$40,000 to \$60,000 in overtime costs to replace him/her.”

“We will pay the overtime to staff the station just like we did last year with Afghanistan. Where was your survey last year??”

(Reassign personnel to maintain coverage)

“We have only 2 paid firefighters- both have been called”

“Raising the staff number and hiring an additional firefighter”

“Planning to add more part time staff to cover openings”

“Qualified temp personnel from the approved list”

“We have only 1 staff member who is currently an active reservist in a department of 183. We expect no staffing issues due to his activation”

“Our department has a reserve, part-time force that is utilized for staffing problems such as these. This does take some coordinating as we often have to adjust the full time officers’ schedules to allow for the availability of the part-timers”

“Restrict leave of other personnel”

“We may have to appoint an acting Assistant Chief for the interim which will necessitate putting another radio, siren and lights in that person’s POV. “

(Loss of personnel may affect service)

“One of my three volunteer Asst. Chiefs reported for active duty today.”

“We have to do without some services; reorganize staff to relieve absence burden”

“We will have to run one short”

“Shift / company will run short.”

“We have 2 paid on-call firefighters. Both have been called.”

“Our Fire Inspector is leaving today (1/17/03) for active duty, he will probably be in the service for at least one year. I do not see a major problem in our inspection department but it will cut down on the number of inspections.”

“It would cause problems with staffing and response time here in the Homeland.”

“In the big picture, the impact on our department would be minimal since it will affect only 1 firefighter – but he is the only other fulltime member besides myself.”

“We’re all volunteer.. That should say it all.”

(Call-up will affect skill level of squad)

“I recruit for temporary firefighters to fill the void. Although this puts a “body in the space”, I lose valuable experience and expertise when the reservists leave.”

“The officer most likely to be called up cannot be replaced due to his training and assignment, so we can only put up with it. It is my opinion that active police officers and firefighters should be exempt from such call ups.”

“We are attempting to get the budget office to allow us to overhire to cover the losses. However, this brings in new people to recruit school and does not truly fill the void left in the stations. We lose rank, experience, specialty skills and capabilities with the activation of reservists.”

“Our department has already had our Assistant Chief and a Captain called to Bosnia- a loss to our department of a combined 45 years of experience, a major hit to say the least.”

“I think there are 2 problems:

1) Do we hire a new firefighter? Hiring a temporary firefighter can take several months; providing there is no union objection. Training is now an issue as all our new firefighters must meet and certify to NFPA standards for FIREFIGHTER I and II. They must complete the 11 week recruit training program. At times it can be 3 to 9 months before a recruit slot becomes available at the Fire Academy. Also in most union contracts in this area (including ours) there are clauses restricting the hiring of temporary firefighters, therefore all new firefighters hired are considered permanent. The individual may or may not return to the department that hired him/her. The community has now lost an investment in this individual, that is- training cost and equipment that must be purchased for the new firefighter.

2) Do we cover the position with overtime? This presents a major concern for us, as we are already staffed with less than sufficient (13 scheduled and maintaining 11 personnel on duty for emergency response, a combination of any 4 pieces of apparatus for response from 3-engine, aerial and 2 Basic Life Support ambulances. Staffing is needed to provide FIRE and EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS) to a 150,000 service area population in 12 square miles. Recently, due to loss of revenues in the community, we are now being faced with budget reductions which translates to personnel, whereas the fire budget is 95% personnel related with overtime accounting for 11% pf the salary budget. There is very little that can currently be done to maintain our staffing levels and

we are being faced with reducing on duty staff to 10 or even 9 before filling with overtime. Our current volume of calls averages 16 plus a day for fire and EMS combined. To handle the current calls we are using mutual aid now.”

(Aware of the issue, but impact yet unclear)

“Unknown at this time- Board is working on it.”

“At present, no action taken”

“If I lose firefighters, we will simply handle through overtime. If a Chief Officer- I have no good answer!”

“We are preparing for further staff suffering in an already understaffed department. Overtime eliminated and positions frozen. HELP!”

“What will I do? Punt.”

(Not a major issue for my department)

“Not a big issue since only 2 members are Reservists. Could generate minimal overtime to backfill unless authorization is given to hire temporary staff.”

“Not an issue”

“N/A”

“We have only one member in this situation out of a total 183 personnel.”

“We won’t be affected since we are presently overstaffed at the firefighter position.”

“We will get by. We have 103 firefighters out of 5 stations.”

“One we can live with, more will cause problems.”

(We want to support our country, but it’s a difficult issue)

“Although we currently have no reservists in the department, we have always strongly supported any and all military action. We will make sure we have the resources to fulfill all manpower needs.”

“We suck it up. It’s a real problem, but it’s the patriotic thing to do.”

“We already have 3 in the field with one more due to leave in February. The potential is there for 5-6 more being called up....”

“We will support our nation and make do as best we can.”

“Staffing is a problem, but there’s another issue: Reservists are being given smallpox shots. Other personnel on shift working with them are having issues such as communal sleeping and exposure. How do we address that?”