

Policies and Procedures
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During my tenure as chief of our department, I always dreaded walking through the door and finding someone looking through our big green policy manual. Now some of you are out there thinking “what’s wrong with that”? “After all don’t we want our people to read the policies”? The answer to those questions is of course, YES, we do want our members to read and understand our policies. The problem is I knew most people read them either after they did something wrong and they wanted to find out just how much trouble they were in, or when they were mad at another member of the organization and were trying to figure out how to get someone in trouble because they did not follow a policy.

NFPA standards require us to have a risk management plan and policies to cover the dangerous functions of our jobs. So here we go again, another one of those darn standards and someone else telling us what to do. Is that a good reason to have them? Sure it is, but it is not the best reason. The best reason to have policies in your organization is so that everyone is on the same page, doing the same task, the same way, every time. Without policies our members get complacent, confused and yes, even downright lazy sometimes. A good set of policies will reduce the confusion, build teamwork and will most likely cause your organization to become more efficient and a safer place for all of us. As emergency services organizations shouldn’t we be most concerned with safety?

If you are like our department, many of your policies have become outdated. Just looking at the task of reviewing them and making necessary changes can seem like a huge task. It is easy to let this slide to the bottom of the task list, but we must move ahead and get it done. One way is to assign the task to several people, have them review, bring suggestions and then finalize the revised policy with the leader of the organization. Not only does this help to spread the work load, but it also helps to get “buy in” from the group when they are presented. We tend to accept things better that we all had a hand in helping to develop.

After you have your revised policies, present them, train with them and most importantly enforce them. When something goes wrong in your organization, one of the first documents that will be asked for by outside agencies is a copy of your policies and procedures. If written properly and followed they can be your greatest ally. However if they have not been followed they can be used build a case against your organization.

Policies are one of the most important tools in your organization and often one of the most neglected and underutilized tools that you have. Get them out, dust them off, make revisions, distribute and follow them. I have talked to far too many leaders of organizations who wish they had done all that only after it was too late and something went wrong. In the long run well written, enforced policies will make everyone’s job easier and safer at a fraction of the cost of most of the other tools of our trade.