

**The Importance of SOP's**  
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SOPs are a vital component of fire service administrative and emergency response operations. In emergency services we have both a legal and a moral responsibility to protect our employees. Currently there are several laws, regulations and standards that apply to emergency services organizations that require a safe work environment for employees. It is also important to note that courts have ruled that volunteer members of an organization are considered "employees" of the organization when it comes to workplace safety requirements. Apart from these legal responsibilities; we owe our employees a clear and concise picture of exactly what their duties and functions are and how we expect them to perform those tasks. The ability to perform any job requires training, proper equipment and a clear understanding of how an organization completes a task. This understanding should be spelled out in an organizations standard operating procedures or guidelines. These SOP's are the roadmap to complete the same task the same way, every time by everyone.

The most challenging part in developing SOP's for most organizations is to design effective policies without strangling operations. The development of policies needs to be a well thought out process and not a knee jerk reaction when something goes wrong. A good SOP should clarify job requirements and expectations in a format that can be readily applied on the job for employees. Policies should be written to explain in detail what the organizations wants them to do in the most common situations. Often, the most effective policies are those that are prepared by a group of all those they affect. Organizations have found a better acceptance from employees if they have been involved in the development. It is also important to review the policies on a regular basis to be sure they are current in information and truly reflex the way a function is being performed. Policies must be also be reviewed on a regular basis to be sure the employees understand and follow them. Trainings should be developed around the current policies and policies must be followed completely in training evolutions.

There are many resources available to emergency service organizations to help in the development of proper policies. Sample policies can be obtained from Insurance companies, industry organizations like the International Association of Fire Chiefs and from neighboring organizations. It is however important that these samples are viewed as a template to start a unique set of policies for a single entity. Policies from another source should never be rubber stamped and a complete evaluation of how they will work in your organization must be preformed before they are adopted.

Standard Operating Policies are a vital component of emergency service administration and emergency response operations. It is impossible to operate safely or effectively without a comprehensive set of policies and management systems in place to be sure the goals and tasks at hand are understood by all parties involved. Organizations that fail to adopt a complete set of policies open themselves up to accidents, lawsuits, unnecessary costs and damage to their equipment and public image.