

PA FIRE POLICE

Respect Must Be Mutual: Part-1

By Tony Riccardi - PA State Fire Academy Approved Fire Police Instructor

To those of you who have contacted the office of the PA Fireman inquiring about the lack of fire police articles in the last three issues, we thank you for your concern and provide reasons for the omissions.

I developed some serious health issues which required surgery and rehab that will take some time to resolve. However, there are other reasons as well that might be important to identify.

The articles had been appearing for the better part of two years on a monthly basis, and the attempt was to cover material that would be helpful to fire police officers throughout the Commonwealth. Sounds good but, sadly, we discovered that very few fire police officers were actually reading the articles and many others had no idea they were appearing in the PA Fireman magazine at all. This despite the fact that most every firehouse in the Commonwealth receives a copy of the magazine every month.

We also discovered that attempting to write an article each month with fresh material becomes a difficult process given that fire police are charged with three major responsibilities by law, traffic control, crowd control and security.

We are, however, grateful to those who not only read the articles, but became concerned when they failed to appear. Thank you, but also keep in mind that we are always looking for readers to provide input on topics they would like to see addressed in these articles. Sometimes it takes longer to come up with a topic than it does to write about it. Suggestions can be submitted to me via email (riccardit@verizon.net) or to PA Fireman magazine itself 717-581-5465 or pafireman@lcfa.com.

To get back on track, we decided to address an old but sorely needed discussion regarding the issue of lack of respect for fire police officers by the motoring public, fire chiefs and firefighters.

It's a topic that concerns just about every fire police officer, I am aware of, and has been addressed in previous articles.

One of the factors I have always incorporated when teaching fire police and/or firefighters is to "tell it like it is". That pleases some folks while

bothering others who apparently don't relish hearing derogatory comments. It puzzles me how we hope to improve if we don't know what the problem(s) are that need resolution.

Consider the fire police officer from the standpoint of who they encounter each time they respond for duty, motorists who are running late, aggressive drivers, traffic law violators, and the list goes on. How does the fire police officer deal with these problems given they lack the authority to issue a traffic citation which the public is well aware.

First, in officer training programs one point that is heavily stressed is, no one can realistically understand someone else unless they first understand themselves. So let's take a quick look at how this might apply.

One thing we tell students in fire and/or fire police is that "human nature is predictable". Some of you may recall that this was illustrated by indicating students returning for the next session would sit in the exact same seat they sat in during the first session. There are exceptions of course, someone may choose to sit with certain people, some may arrive late and their seat is already occupied, but the major number of students invariably will return to the same seat. This is referred to as "Being a slave of habit".

The difficulty here is that students enjoy a laugh at themselves when they realize the prediction proved true.

If you noticed the statement said human nature, which essentially implies all human beings possess the same traits. This means motorist also have the same desire to do things the way they always do and when the fire police officer interferes with this tendency, problems occur. This does not mean the fire police officer should allow irate motorists to do what they want, certainly not. However, to return anger for anger accomplishes very little. A suggestion, look in the mirror and argue very vehemently with the image. Notice that when you argue your mouth is going a mile-a-minute but,

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when you stop talking both your mouth and the mouth in the image also stops. Moral? You can't argue with someone who won't argue back.

But we have heard fire police officers threaten to bang their flashlight against the windshield of an offending motorist or use foul language when addressing such a person. Does anyone honestly believe this earns respect for the fire police officer? When you conduct yourself in this manner, respect goes down the drain.

You might win the battle but, you will lose the war. Unfortunately, this occurs all too often and contributes to the lack of respect fire police receive from the traveling public.

The one factor that has always been bothersome is the notion that anyone can be a fire police officer. Forgive me but that is just plain bovine cow products.

If an individual is prone to lose their cool at the slightest problem, relies on profanity to express themselves, cares very little about their appearance, uses improper hand signals when directing traffic, or provides little or no guidance when directing motorists around an emergency scene, that person

may be better suited for other activities. Keep in mind it is not just the fire police officer who is being judged but the entire fire company image is being jeopardized.

We have often heard fire police officers threaten to quit if they are required to attend training programs. The sad thing here is they continue to "perfect their mistakes" instead of improving their capabilities.

When I was a fire chief, if one of the fire police officers made such a threat I would have been holding the door open for them to hasten their departure.

Such individuals seem to want full police authority so they can arrest, issue traffic citations, and other law enforcement responsibilities. Law enforcement officers are required to attend over 700 hours of training before they can be assigned to duty and must attend a 24 hour-refresher program every year in order to retain their position. You cannot convince some fire police officers to attend a 16-hour training program yet they want full arrest powers.

We will continue this discussion in the next issue. ***Until then, stay safe.***

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