



International
Association
of Fire Chiefs



National
Fire Protection
Association

Fire Officer

Principles and Practice
THIRD EDITION



Chapter 12 Handling Problems, Conflicts, and Mistakes (Fire Officer I)

Fire Officer I Objectives

- Describe the interrelationships among complaints, conflicts, and mistakes.
- Describe the general decision-making procedure.
- Discuss how to manage conflict within the department.

Fire Officer I Objectives

- Discuss how to recommend and implement policy changes.
- Describe how to field and resolve citizen complaints.
- Describe the difference between customer service and customer satisfaction.

Introduction

- Problem: difference between the current situation and the desired situation
 - Fires and emergency incidents require special problem-solving skills.
 - Nonemergency situations require conventional problem-solving skills.

Introduction

- Decision-making skills are used when a problem requires a response.
- Decisions should be guided by:
 - Organizational values
 - Guidelines
 - Policies
 - Procedures

Introduction

- Some solutions are better than others.
 - Problem-solving techniques are designed to identify and evaluate potential solutions to a problem and determine the best course of action.

Complaints, Conflicts, and Mistakes

- Complaint: expression of grief, regret, pain, censure, or resentment
- Conflict: state of opposition between two parties
- Mistake: error or fault resulting from bad judgment, deficient knowledge, or carelessness

Complaints, Conflicts, and Mistakes

- Four problems a fire officer may encounter:
 - In-house issues
 - Internal departmental issues
 - External issues
 - High-profile incidents



© Glen E. Ellman

General Decision-Making Procedures

1. Define the problem.
2. Generate alternative solutions.
3. Select a solution.
4. Implement the solution.
5. Evaluate the result.

Define the Problem

- Pay attention.
- Ask basic questions.
 - What is the value of the activity?
 - Which activities can be changed, improved, or updated?



© Jones & Bartlett Learning. Photographed by Glen E. Ellman.

Define the Problem

- How quickly do you get bad news?
 - Create a work environment that encourages fire fighters to report bad news immediately.



© Jones & Bartlett Learning. Photographed by Glen E. Ellman.

Define the Problem

- Fear versus trust
 - Foster a trusting relationship with fire fighters.
 - If trust is absent, information will not be passed to the fire officer.

Generate Alternative Solutions

- Involve anyone with direct knowledge of the problem.
- Try brainstorming.
 - Write down the problem.
 - Give the group a time limit.
 - The officer should function as the scribe.

Generate Alternative Solutions

- Try brainstorming (cont'd).
 - Tell everyone to bring up solutions.
 - Have the group select the five ideas they like best.
 - Write out five criteria for judging which of these solutions best solves the problem.
 - Have every participant rate the solutions.

Generate Alternative Solutions

- Should the fire chief participate?
 - The best ideas emerge from the fire fighters directly affected.
- Do fire fighters feel comfortable?
 - Fire fighters may be reluctant to share ideas.

Generate Alternative Solutions

- Is the process legitimate?
 - Fire fighters should anticipate that their decision will be implemented if it meets the criteria.

Select a Solution

- One factor is the core value system of your department.
 - Example: participation in local neighborhoods

Implement the Solution

- Buy-in is required.
- Who does what and when?
 - The fire officer must assign tasks.
 - Use a project plan.

Fiscal Year 2018 Capital Improvement		12/15/2017	
Training Room			
Goal	Due Date		
Repair and update fire station classroom	05/01/2018		
Task	Assigned to	Due Date	Status
Complete Learning Center design	Station Commander	08/16/2017	Done
Issue RFP for instructional technology	Logistics	09/04/2017	Issued 9/15
Review RFP responses	Resource Management/Station Commander	10/18/2017	Done
Award RFP	Procurement	11/06/2017	Award 11/3
Remove old furniture, tables, and carpet	B shift	11/13/2017	Done
Strip wall coverings and prepare to paint	A shift	11/20/2017	Done
Install fiber optics and intranet	Technical services	12/04/2017	Done 11/27
Order chairs and tables	Procurement	01/08/2017	
Install learning center system	Contractor	01/15/2018	Started 12/4
Paint and wallpaper party	C shift and volunteers	01/27/2018	
Install carpet	Facilities maintenance	02/05/2018	need to confirm
Wire projector, podium and speakers	Technical services	02/19/2018	
Move new furniture into training room	A shift	02/26/2018	

Courtesy of Mike Ward

Implement the Solution

- Plan B
 - Extended implementation schedule
 - Modified plan
 - Completely different solution

Evaluate the Results

- Assess whether the solution produced the desired results.
- Change the plan if necessary.
- Get feedback.

Managing Conflict

- The fire officer is the first-level representative of the fire department administration when dealing with subordinates and enforcing policies and procedures.

Personnel Conflicts and Grievances

- A fire officer might be faced with complaints about:
 - A co-worker
 - The work environment
 - A fire department policy or procedure
 - The fire officer's own behavior, decisions, or actions

Conflict Resolution Model

- Listen and take detailed notes.
- Practice active listening
- Paraphrase and receive feedback.
- Do not explain or excuse.



© Jones & Bartlett Learning. Photographed by Kimberly Potvin.

Investigating the Conflict

- Conduct a detailed examination.
- Investigate.
- Obtain additional information.
- Complete an investigative report.

Investigating the Conflict

Municipal City Fire and Rescue Department Internal Memorandum

Date: May 08, 2017

To: Assistant Chief James Arrow, A Platoon Commander
Thru: Battalion Chief Frank Johnson, 3rd Battalion
Thru: Captain Jean Davis, Fire and Rescue Station 100
From: Lieutenant Taylor Williams, Quint 100
Subj: Civilian property damage
Ref: Incident #201705051473, 437 Western Way

On Friday, May 05 Quint 100 was dispatched for "smoke in the building" at Exotic Food Emporium. Municipal City was experiencing a severe thunderstorm and there was no electrical power in the neighborhood.

I observed a white haze in the store. While completing my size-up, Firefighter James Grynski started to force open the front door of the store. Swinging the flathead axe shattered the storefront window.

The white haze was from fumigation. The notice was posted on the front and back doors of the store. With the release of the fumigation gas, requested a haz-mat, EMS and chief response to our location.

There was no notation in the dispatch that the store was undergoing fumigation. Quint 100 staged at the A/B corner on arrival. I headed to Side C to complete the size-up while Grynski and Kinders headed to the Side A front door. My goal was to determine if there was a working fire in the store.

Investigation

Neither Grynski nor Kinders recall seeing the bright orange fumigation sign that was hanging on the front door. After the window shattered Kinders located the rapid entry keybox that was located to the right of the door.

Action Taken

Once the event was stabilized, took statements from Grynski, Kinders and Rollo.
Took pictures of the damage.
Acquired contact information for the store owner and shopping center representative.
Placed plywood over the window and secured the front door.

Follow-up

Referred to Chief Johnson

Courtesy of Mike Ward

Taking Action

- Present the findings to a supervisor.
- Four possible responses:
 - Take no further action.
 - Recommend the complainant's action.
 - Suggest an alternative solution.
 - Refer the issue to the office or person who can provide a remedy.

Following Up

- For many conflicts, the fire officer needs to follow up with the complainant to see whether the problem is resolved.

Handling Emotions and Sensitivity

- Fire fighters are passionate.
- They live, breathe, eat, and dream about fire operations.
- They are often emotional when making a complaint.

Handling Emotions and Sensitivity

- Four-step model for conflict resolution when emotions are high:
 - Drain the emotional bubble.
 - Understand the complainant's viewpoint.
 - Help the complainant feel understood.
 - Identify the complainant's expectations for resolution.

Policy Recommendations and Implementation

- The fire officer is in direct contact with fire fighters and citizens.
 - The officer is in a good position to recommend new departmental policies.

Recommending Policies and Policy Changes

- Understand the procedure for adopting new policies within the department.
- Identify the problem and develop supportive documentation.
- Use problem-solving techniques to develop the best alternative.

Recommending Policies and Policy Changes

- Develop a written proposal.
- Present the proposal.
- If the proposal is accepted, a draft policy is developed.
- Once comments are addressed, the final policy is signed by the chief.

Implementing Policies

- Follow departmental procedures.
- Communicate the policy to subordinates.
- Require fire fighters to read the policy.
- Evaluate employees' actions.
- Regular review of policies should occur.

Citizen Complaints

- Citizens might complain about:
 - The conduct or behavior of a fire fighter
 - The fire company's performance or service
 - A fire department policy

Citizen Complaints

- The fire officer should take notes and be an active listener.
- The problem may have to be forwarded to a supervisor.

Customer Service Versus Customer Satisfaction

- Customer service:
 - Focuses on fixing problems
 - Straightens out procedural glitches
 - Corrects errors of omission
 - Provides information

Customer Service Versus Customer Satisfaction

- Customer satisfaction focuses on meeting the customer's expectations.



© Jones & Bartlett Learning. Photographed by Glen E. Ellman.

Complainant Expectations

- Ask the civilian what could be done to resolve the situation.
- Do not make promises or imply that actions will be taken.

Municipal City Fire and Rescue Department
Headquarters

May 24, 2017

Mrs. Caroline Marks
Exotic Food Emporium
437 Western Way
Municipal City

Mrs. Marks

We have completed our investigation into the fire and rescue department response to your store on May 5th. During an investigation for smoke in the building, the fire department damaged the front door, interrupted a fumigation service, and destroyed a storefront window.

The initial actions taken by our members were not consistent with departmental policies and procedures. The city will pay for the repairs to the storefront and a second fumigation. Cynthia Bowers from the Mayor's office will continue to be your point of contact during this process.

I apologize for the actions taken by our members. The members involved in this incident are receiving appropriate training and disciplinary actions. We are making sure that all of our fire fighters know how to properly respond to a building with a rapid entry key lock-box that is undergoing fumigation.

Sincerely,

Fire Chief
Municipal City Fire and Rescue Department

Courtesy of Mike Ward

Complainant Expectations

- Keep the complainant informed.
- Follow up.
 - By following up, the fire officer reinforces the impression that the complainant's issue is important.

Summary

- Fire and other emergency incidents call for specialized problem-solving skills.
- High-quality decision-making approach:
 - Define the problem.
 - Generate alternative solutions.
 - Select a solution.
 - Implement the solution.
 - Evaluate the result.

Summary

- The best people to solve a problem are usually those involved.
- Implementation is often the most challenging aspect of problem solving.
- Determining whether the solution solved the problem requires some type of measurement.

Summary

- The fire officer is the initial contact in dealing with a wide variety of problems.
- The conflict resolution model can be used in situations where interpersonal conflict is a factor.
- All complaints should be investigated.

Summary

- The fire officer may take or recommend four actions after an investigation:
 - Take no further action.
 - Recommend the action requested.
 - Suggest an alternative solution.
 - Refer the issue to the office or person who can provide a remedy.

Summary

- With many conflicts, the fire officer needs to follow up with the complainant.
- A citizen might complain about a fire fighter, the fire company's performance, or a fire department policy.
- The fire officer is often the best person to recommend new policies.

Summary

- A fire officer must understand the procedure for adopting new policies.
- Customer service is an important part of customer satisfaction.
- The fire officer should not promise or imply that certain actions will be taken.