

vestigation services that never keep emergency responders tied up waiting too long are ways to demonstrate an effective prevention program and ensure support from other members of the department.

A good leader can garner the support of the community for fire prevention efforts—to help obtain funding, support of materials, and influence to protect prevention efforts when budget cuts are considered.

There are no easy ways to select a good leader, but a beginning would be to select those who are competent and have at least worked in prevention for some time, even if they have not actually achieved some type of professional certification for their field. That, combined with the good qualities of any leader, will help to ensure that prevention programs are professional and respected inside the department and out—and have a chance of survival during tough economic times.

BUY-IN OF DEPARTMENT AND ELECTED LEADERS

It is worth noting that the best leadership for prevention efforts will be ineffective if those efforts are not backed by departmental or elected decision makers. Effective leaders do in fact attempt to obtain that backing. Without it, funding and support for fire prevention efforts will languish and may even die. There are some anecdotal examples across the nation of fire prevention programs being eliminated entirely because they did not have the support of department and community leaders. One such case occurred in Marion County, Oregon—ostensibly because of budget cuts. And although that cut was made in part to make a point for elected leaders, it nonetheless threw the prevention efforts temporarily into disarray.

Staffing, training, and funding considerations for fire prevention efforts are interrelated according to how those efforts are organized. Staffing may consist of paid personnel, either emergency responders working part time or fully dedicated prevention specialists. It may be made up of volunteers, either inside or outside the fire service. In any case, staff should be qualified for the programs they are conducting—whether that is plan review, fire code enforcement, public education, or fire investigations. Training is therefore a critical issue regardless of where the staff is obtained. Training at one level, and certification at another, both should be based on reasonable professional qualification standards that outline the job performance requirements: the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by those doing the job.

Case Study

Christmas Valley is a medium-sized community in central California with a population of about 160,000 people. The community has some industrial base, but it is largely commercial and residential occupancies, because it is a “bedroom” suburb for a larger jurisdiction. Recently, the city council in Christmas Valley decided to sever their relationship with the larger jurisdiction and to provide fire prevention services on their own. The larger jurisdiction will continue to provide emergency response, but the city council felt that fire prevention services were lacking and have withheld a portion of the funding to provide services on their own. Beginning with nothing, they are soliciting ideas about how best to construct a fire prevention program and what types of services

Funding fire prevention programs is often difficult given tight economic times and is usually limited to a few options. Whether via tax dollars, fees, or donations, the money must be available if programs are to have a reasonable chance to succeed. Fire prevention programs must fit within community needs and may be blended with other community efforts in order to develop the relationships necessary to maintain programs when tight budgets force cuts. And good leaders are as important for fire prevention as they are for any other function in the fire service. Good leaders are the best argument against the myth that prevention efforts are largely the purview of the sick, lame, or lazy who could not make it elsewhere in the fire service.

will be needed. There are many business occupancies in their jurisdiction that have never been inspected. The city typically refers plan review of new construction to the building department in the county. But now they are creating a building department of their own as well and are considering the best configuration of building code and fire prevention services to meet the needs of their citizens and the development community.

The larger jurisdiction is not happy about the arrangement—and though they have provided company inspections in the past, they recently had to discontinue that service because of the high call volume for emergency responders and the training requirements associated with code compliance inspections.