

Introduction to the Fire Protection Fund (FPF) and FPF regulations

In early 2001, two rules were established pursuant to the Fire Protection Fund Act. Both rules were written with the intent of:

- 1) being guidance documents for use by local governments and the fire service;
- 2) allowing local governments and their respective fire departments as much leeway as possible while still complying with the Fire Protection Fund Law;
- 3) establishing a means of measuring minimum acceptable fire department response capabilities.

The Fire Protection Fund Rule (NMAC 10.25.10) is a rewrite of a rule that provides for expenditures of the fire protection fund. Sections that are new to the rule are:

- Definitions of Fire Protection Fund (FPF) and fire service terminology.
- Guidance on the accumulation of FPF.
- Criteria for the establishment, certification and funding of new departments.
- Requirements regarding Insurance Services Office (ISO) class 10 departments.
- Guidance on establishment of main stations and substations for funding purposes.
- Requirements on keeping an equipment inventory.

Additionally, the section dealing with purchases of equipment and supplies has been completely rewritten. Departments that are fully operational/functional (as defined in the rule) and are ISO class 9 or better have substantial more discretion when expending FPF monies than under the previous rule.

The Firefighting Qualification System (FQS) rule is new (NMAC 10.25.11). The objective of the rule is to ensure that all firefighters within New Mexico have the basic skills and knowledge required to perform as team members of a fire department during emergency operations. While we do not believe anyone who understands the complexity and danger involved with emergency operations would disagree with this objective, we do recognize the fact that there may be a number of people who are concerned with being able to comply with such a rule. That is why we took the approach of having representatives of the fire service (Fire Academy Advisory Board) help develop the program. We solicited input from both local government representatives and members of the fire service during briefings on the concept in several rural portions of the State. Several changes were made throughout this process. There are several critical aspects of the FQS that should be noted. First, the qualification process is based on performance; not training or hourly requirements. The objective is to ensure all firefighters have been evaluated and determined to be competent at the skills needed to perform in their assigned position. The objective is not to dictate where, how, or for how long to train.

The second aspect, which is critical to understand, is the FQS is a system approach. While it is not a requirement, a key part of the system will be the establishment of regional training associations. An association may not be needed everywhere, however we believe that in many parts of the state an association will play a fundamental role in ensuring that firefighters are adequately trained. We fully recognize and appreciate that within some

rural portions of the state the members of a single fire department may not, right now, have the ability to comply with this rule. However, as a group (region) several departments together would be able to pool resources. Due to limited number of staff, neither the SFMO nor Fire Academy can, as a general rule, provide training support to single fire departments, but we do have the ability to support a group of fire departments.

We also strongly believe that with the formation of regions the fire service as a whole would be in a better position to respond to emergencies, whether they are within a given fire department's area of responsibility or elsewhere in the state. Most fire departments within the State need assistance (mutual or automatic aid) to handle a large single structure fire within their area of response, much less any emergency that involves multiple buildings or victims. Yet as a general rule, we do not spend much time training or coordinating with these other departments. Additionally, on a state emergency level, we need to address lessons learned from the Cerro Grande Fire and other large emergencies. During the Cerro Grande Fire there were 50 fire departments represented at Los Alamos. While the majority of the personnel present performed admirably, there were several major areas of concern that cannot be ignored. The level of training or capabilities of some firefighters was not to a level that was needed to perform in a safe and appropriate manner. The level of training or capabilities of any given crew that responded was to a large degree unknown by both the requesting agency (SFMO) and the receiving agency (Los Alamos Fire Department). From both a safety and operational perspective this is not acceptable. During major emergencies like the Cerro Grande Fire there must be a way to order apparatus in groups and have them respond in these groups under the direction of qualified leaders (task forces/strike teams). Regardless of the type of emergency, we believe that in the future, regions can become the focal point for such deployments. Even the counties with several departments are hard pressed to deploy multiple apparatus outside their county without potentially degrading the counties response capabilities below an acceptable level. Under the regional concept a task force could be comprised of apparatus from more than one local government within the region. Furthermore, the region as a whole could develop backfill or response protocols to cover emergencies within the region during such a deployment. The requirements in the Resource Mobilization Plan (State Forestry wildland/urban interface fire response plan) could easily be met under the region concept.

The third component is a **Position Task Book (PTB)** for the position of Firefighter I. The PTB is part of the firefighting qualification system and is to be used as a tool by local government in conjunction with their respective fire departments to determine whether an individual has learned the skills and obtained the knowledge necessary to perform competently. The concept of utilizing PTBs is not new. The National Incident Management System (NIIMS) was used as the model for this program. While this is explained in the introduction section of the PTB, I want to point out that not everyone in a fire department must be evaluated against a PTB. A given PTB only applies to those individuals who are expected to perform in the assigned position (see enclosed PTB Evaluation Process Diagram). The PTB can either be reproduced locally or for additional copies contact the SFMO. We fully appreciate that the FQS is a new requirement and as such will take time

to be fully understood and implemented.

If you have questions or would like to have the concept briefed in your area (multiple fire departments) contact the State Fire Marshal's Office.