



Coffee Break Training - Management Science Program

Fire Service Communication

No. MS-2011-5 July 13, 2011

Learning Objective: The student shall learn why it is imperative for fire service personnel to correspond and communicate with the public.

Although correspondence with the public may not be the most frequent form of written communication in the fire service and emergency medical services (EMS), it is certainly one of the most important. Effective replies to letters from private citizens project a positive image of the fire department. If people feel good about their fire department, they will be more likely to cooperate in observing the rules and precautions necessary to prevent fires and medical emergencies.



All responses should be individually written or typed.

Since correspondence from the public falls rather easily into categories, it is inevitable that a fire department would develop and use a certain number of standard replies. You may for instance, compose a basic cover letter to accompany materials sent in response to a request for literature. Even standard responses must permit flexibility for inserting words, phrases, or whole sentences pertinent to the individual situation.

It is important that all replies, even standard response replies, be individually typed. There is nothing more calculated to alienate a member of the public than a duplicated form letter whose recognition of the recipient as an individual is confined to the blank filled in with the recipient's name and address.

Even if you are prepared to answer every citizen's letter individually with a tailored response, you must still confront the question, "Just who is that citizen"? We should take advantage of any information provided and design our response to meet the character and circumstances of that individual.

Keep in mind that we cannot know how many other people our reply will be shown to or who those other people might be. It is imperative to project a positive image of the fire department any time you are corresponding with the public.

Possible Letters From Citizens

- Complaints
- Suggestions/Recommendations
- Requests/Inquiries
- Reports/Notifications
- Commendations/Appreciation
- Congratulations/Condolences

Principles of Effective Letters

1. Identify with your audience.
2. Address the issues raised.
3. Give concrete information.
4. Omit irrelevant details
5. Eliminate jargon.
6. Organize content logically.
7. Use correct grammar and spelling.
8. Say it tactfully and courteously.

For archived downloads, go to:

www.usfa.dhs.gov/nfa/coffee-break/