

Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS **Health & Safety/Building Committee**

Thursday, August 5, 2021

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse
105 Coles Road
Cromwell, CT

Present: Commissioners Robert Donohue (Chairman), David Colligan, Robert McIntyre and Allan Spotts. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Water Operations Manager Joseph Palmieri, Health & Safety Advisor Chip Darius, AFSCME Member Local 1303-475 Brian Petrocelli, IAFF Member Local 4662 Brett Hallden. Mechanic Chris Logan and Maintainer Russ Johnson were absent.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM, by Chairman Donohue.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted.
- III. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- IV. New Business
 - A. Preparation for Possible Update on State COVID Mandated Protocols. Chief Balletto discussed items that should be implemented going forward in terms of COVID protocols for the community and surrounding communities. Some mandates will be issued going forward. In 2020, the Department was quarantining everyone and shifts. The Chief would like to come up with new strategies. He submitted an SOP with the assistance of the Firefighters' Union. The SOP mandates masks whether vaccinated or not. Firefighters will need to wear masks on the apparatus at all times. The SOP will specify mask wearing responding to the scene, while at the scene and returning from the scene. If crews are responding to medical calls, they will be wearing masks, or any time that they may come in contact with a patient.

The Chief did not mandate masks in the Firehouse again because the State has not mandated it. He is holding back on that for now but wanted to discuss how to proceed going forward. The CDC has reported that the Fire Department does not have to quarantine. If people are asymptomatic, they will need to wear a mask and will be allowed to work unless they show signs or symptoms. The Fire Department cannot afford to have shifts of people unable to work. He is putting responsibilities on the Officers. If he sees a significant uprise, he will have to issue a protocol where the

officers will have to interact with a patient at a distance. They will have to dictate their questions to the patient and add people to the call based on that.

- B. Discussion on Updating CFD Personnel's Annual Physical Requirements. The Chief reported that the standards for physicals have changed. The Department is using NFPA Standard 1582 from 2018. Soon there will be NFPA Standard 1582 with a 2021 edition. The new edition is lengthy, and the Chief feels that this will create a significant monetary hardship with the Department. The Chief is in favor of physicals and is supported by the Union. He would like to have a meeting with the Union, the Executive Director, himself and the future Assistant Chief of Training to discuss the new requirements for annual physicals. Right now the physicals are "a la carte." The Chief would like to keep the "a la carte" status going forward. He wants to take items from the 2013 and 2018 standards and "a la carte" them so they are beneficial for the firefighters.

There was a question about agility testing. Agility testing is a different piece of the physical standards. For 2021 agility testing is called stress testing. It would be a significant monetary hardship for the Department. If a stress test is needed, it should be ordered by a person's personal PCP.

- C. Update on Status of OSHA Recommended Corrections. Chief Balletto reported that when he first began his job in Cromwell, Health & Safety Advisor Chip Darius gave him a list of all the things found by OSHA with recommendations for corrections. They worked on the list and resolved a lot of the issues; specifically, the Infection Control Policy and Respiratory Policy. The Chief created a Hazcom Policy for the Fire Department. He is working on other issues as well at Court St. and West St.

The Chief reported that Mr. Palmieri had requested an Infection Control, Respiratory and Hazcom Policy for the Water Department. He worked with Joe and created policies that will be for all the Water Division buildings. He is also starting a process with Joe to assist with inspections at those buildings. The Chief's office will be working on training for the Water Division personnel. Mr. Palmieri also reached out to the Chief to inspect their chains, slings, cables, etc. which Fire personnel have begun.

The Chief has been working on all the training documentation. If the Acting Assistant Chief position is approved, that person should be able to take over that role.

OSHA is due to come back in October/November to start the second phase of recommendations. The Chief's goal was to get ahead of OSHA and correct the problems that were identified. That process has begun, and they are working hard at it.

Chairman Donohue noted that a couple of years ago a punch list for each building was created. There are still some items that were not completely addressed and hopes they will be getting attention. OSHA would like to see a plan in place for things to be fixed.

There was a question about ladder testing. The company Cromwell is currently using is Top Rung. There are ladder testing companies that will do slings, cables, chains, etc., but Top Rung is not one of them. Mr. Darius recommended Lift All who will do those for free and do all the inspections. Commissioner Colligan mentioned East Shore Cable from Vernon.

- D. Status of Quantities of COVID PPE. Lt. Hallden was at Coles Road today doing inventory of the PPE. Most of the masks they have need to be thrown out. The CDC has made a recommendation that anything that was made in China has to be thrown out. They are not OSHA approved. They cannot be used by employees during their course of employment, but the employees can bring in their own if they wish. Commissioner Colligan thought they should be set aside for distribution to the public if needed. The Chief will follow up on that request. However, they cannot be used by fire personnel.

Regarding the COVID PPE, the Chief is working with Ass't Chief Brade, Mike Alibrio, and Lisa to establish a PO that is COVID related for materials only and equipment. They want to be prepared by having multiple vendors in case the COVID situation gets out of control. If the District is able to get reimbursement from the Town for COVID related expenses, it will be documented through the PO's. Ass't Chief Brade was working with Commissioner Epstein and an outside company to get COVID-related materials. Ass't Chief Brade will work with Executive Director Neto to offer these supplies to the community.

Ass't Chief Brade is working with the Executive Director and Rep. Carpino on doing a push to get back into the community. There was a significant donation from a private company offering an abundance of supplies for the Fire Department, townspeople and businesses. He was able to obtain a lot of bacterial soap to be used at the firehouses. A supply of N-95 masks were dropped off at the West Street firehouse. Lt. Hallden also recovered approximately 25 thermometers. They were brought to the firehouse to be checked to see if they are usable. They need to be healthcare grade otherwise they are indefensible. Lt. Hallden gave a breakdown of what was inventoried. The Chief added that there is an option to have approximately 200 masks steam cleaned if necessary that the State will pay for.

There will be a meeting next week with emergency management staff looking to establish their protocols and engaging part of the Fire Department/EMS staff early on with discussions about COVID ramping up. Weekly conference calls had started a year ago.

Mr. Darius wanted clarification on the mask cleaning program. The program has been discontinued, but there are indications it can be reinstated if needed. It is up to the Governor as long as CT is in a State of Emergency. As long as there is an adequate supply of US made respirators, the cleaning program will not be brought back.

- E. CFD Personnel COVID Vaccinations. Chief Balletto sent an email to all the officers that if there were any personnel that were interested in the vaccination to submit their names to the Chief's office. He has not received any feedback. The reason the Chief is starting this process again is to prepare for the possibility of booster shots for those individuals who had received Moderna or Pfizer vaccines.
- F. Newly Appointed CFD Infection Control Officer. Chip Darius was the original Infection Control Officer for the Fire Department. The Chief announced that the Chief's Office including the Chief will be the Infection Control Officer. The decision was made by the Chief. If any of his personnel are injured while on duty, the Chief wants to be the first to be notified to get the process started. The Infection Control Officer has a lot of personal information of employees that comes from the Chief's Office. In other fire departments the Infection Control Officer is the Company Officer, Chief Officer or Chief of the Department. He felt everything should be handled through the Chief's office. This also

includes workers compensation issues. The Chief will be maintaining all Infection Control, Workers' Compensation and training records in his office. Mr. Darius had no issues with the Chief's decision.

- G. Status of CFD Firefighter PPE. The Chief has most of the Department personnel sizes and dates issued for PPE. The PPE includes jackets, gloves, boots, masks, etc. and includes equipment information such as date manufactured, serial numbers, etc. He replaced 5 sets of gear already. Those sets are not coming in until the last week of December. Leather boots are going to be designated for career personnel until they can receive a better allotment of them. The part-timers will receive lined rubber boots. After December career personnel will receive a second set of gear and leather boots. There are 50 sets of gear that need to be discontinued. Old gear can be used by other countries for training. They cannot be sold because of the liability attached to used gear. The only other option to donating to other countries is to destroy the gear. There was a discussion about use of the gear if the Junior program were to get started again. There is the possibility of renting gear if needed for the Junior program. The Chief's goal is to allocate funding every year of \$10,000 to \$20,000 and start a PPE replacement program for 10 to 15 sets of gear. There has been a significant increase in pricing.

The Chief added that all scheduled and unscheduled firefighters have their own SCBA. He is looking into using APR's and getting T bars and filters. EMT's will have N-95's only. As of June 30 Scott discontinued the manufacture of the 742 series adapter and filters. They were replaced with a new adapter that is more expensive. Mr. Darius was checking to make sure the Department is not sharing face pieces anymore.

- H. Status of Updated Annual OSHA & NFPA Mandated Training. Tomorrow the Chief should have an idea of how many people have their mandated training and how many do not. The scheduled personnel and personnel working the floor that have not completed their mandated training will be receiving an email from the Chief's office advising them they will have 3 weeks to complete their training requirements. If it is not completed, those individuals will have to come offline. The Chief discussed the training classes that need to be done. He plans on dedicating 4 Saturdays in October for Hazardous Materials Operations refresher training. He will add some "Confined Space" material to the course. The schedule should come out tomorrow or the end of next week. Once this has been accomplished, the Department will be ready to do annuals. Live fire training should be done within the next 4 months. If not, it will be done between February and April of next year. January will be the month for OSHA/NFPA mandatory training. The training will be done at Coles Road. It will consist of the Infection Control Policy, Fit testing, Hazardous Materials and Confined Space. Everything will get done during the month of January. All the career firefighters' physicals have been completed. The Chief will establish a training schedule before the Acting Assistant Chief starts.

- I. Communication Center Update. Mr. Lonergan was not able to attend this meeting. Mr. Petrucelli filled in for Mr. Lonergan. On behalf of Mr. Lonergan, he thanked the Committee for all their support in getting many of their issues resolved. He asked about the status of building access. It seems to have been on this agenda for the last couple of years. He asked if this has come before the regular Fire Operations Committee meetings. It was thought that a report was given, but there may not be any funding available.

Mr. Neto stated that a report was received, and it came in 60% higher than anticipated. The quote includes all the buildings that are part of the Cromwell Fire District. The cost

was approximately \$200,000. They could not introduce it into this year's budget. There was a mil rate increase, but that was not enough to cover this cost.

There were other factors to consider. There was a discussion about relocating the Chief's Office to Coles Road. If that happens there may be some dollars available to use for the building access project. There is also discussion about relocating two administrative assistants in the Water Department to the first floor of West St., minimizing public access to the rest of that building. The need for security is still there, but the funding is not. A game plan needs to be created for building security and public access and the cost associated with it.

- J. Local 1303-475 Dispatchers Union Update. Mr. Petrucelli reported that they have had lengthy discussions with the Union, the Chief and Mr. Lonergan. They would like to include Mr. Palmieri and staff on Water Department safety. As the Communication Center, they are involved in calling the Water Department out for calls. They do not know if the Water Department has radios in their trucks or what the policies and procedures are. He wanted to advise this group that they would like to sit down with the Chief's Office, the Communication Center and Water Department to come up with Safety policies and procedures in an emergency. This will provide the Water Division with a direct line to the Communication Center. They would like to be able to put all Water events into the computer to keep track of the call outs and the safety of the personnel. The radio project was designed to incorporate the Water Division calls and communications with them. There are extra radios and portables for that purpose. This would also keep the Water Department OSHA compliant. This issue should be carried over to the Fire Operations Committee. They could install a bay station at the Water Garage, Chemfeed or the District Office.

Mr. Petrucelli discussed the 5-gallon water coolers throughout the District. One was installed in the Dispatch office 5 or 6 years ago. They do not have any type of service on them. They have not been cleaned. The recommendation through safety was they be checked or cleaned every so often. Mr. Neto agreed that they need to be maintained or discarded. Mr. Neto thought that there needs to be an inventory done of the water coolers and charge each department for the maintenance of the water coolers.

As time goes on it is hoped there will be more conversations and discussions about issues between division heads so others can understand each other's needs and how to work as a team to address them. There will be monthly management meetings and division meetings.

Regarding the water cooler situation, Commissioner Colligan wanted a breakdown of cost per year, and to find out why the District has water coolers because the District sells water. There are devices that are made that are attached to a water source that can produce hot or cold water through the faucet.

Mr. Petrucelli asked about a schedule in place to clean or replace HEPA filters. The Communication Center does not know whose responsibility it is to keep them clean. Assistant Chief Brade had put a schedule in place for those things. They are checked every 6 months. The Chief added that every single filter in Court St. except Dispatch was cleaned.

The cleaning of the pre-standing units and the pre-filter HEPA filters were discussed. The pre-filter is a screen that can be rinsed. The HEPA filter functions on the efficiency of use as 6 months to a year if it is used properly. The pre-filter should be replaced by usage. Russ has spare HEPA filters. It sounded like the responsibility for cleaning would fall on the Communication Center.

Mr. Petrucelli asked about cleaning the duct works. Duct works were inspected by Mr. Darius including the air conditioning at Court St. to see if they can use HEPA filters. The Communication Center wanted to know if anyone had looked into Duct cleaning. The cost is unknown. Mr. Neto will look into the cleaning. There are duct cleaning companies out there that specialize in that type of cleaning. He will follow up with Russ Johnson tomorrow to determine if this is included in the District's maintenance contract.

Mr. Palmieri added that for the Water Department, the Chemical feed building has electric heaters and does have an air conditioning unit.

Fire ground frequency fix was a topic Mr. Petrucelli was asked to bring up again. There were several instances where the fire ground frequency has been utilized to try to contact communications from the scene. The policy needs to be reviewed. The previous Chief did not want fire ground talking on that frequency. The current Chief is used to talking to Dispatch from fire ground one. He feels Dispatch should have the ability to talk to fire ground one. With the new system it seems there are some issues with this. Dispatch has to go through other channels to get a message through. It is starting to create a safety issue. The Communications Manager was part of this program. The people on the radio side of the new system say it is capable of handling the frequencies.

Mr. Petrucelli discussed the postponement of hiring any new Dispatchers for over a month and a half after the request to be placed on the agenda. It is creating a safety issue in the Dispatch center. There are two open positions and one that is FMLA. They had two incidents where they potentially could violate the CBA for safety by allowing the dispatchers to work 20 hours straight without relief. There was a situation where they had no one available to work and one dispatcher on duty with no relief. Rather than violate the CBA, Mr. Petrucelli came in to work for 4 hours to relieve that dispatcher. They also had a similar situation last week. This issue cannot be left off the agenda any longer. They are ready to hire and have people ready to work. It was agreed that this issue will be on the next Personnel Committee meeting agenda for August 10, 2021.

Mr. Petrucelli gave an update on Local 1303-475. The union officials meet regularly with Labor Management meetings. They do a safety meeting along with that at the local level as required per labor law. There were 13 agenda items that were brought up. 12 of those were addressed immediately. They wanted to thank those involved in making those things happen. The auto dialer was the one issue that was not addressed. The phone system is an issue that still needs addressing. It is thought that they will have one District wide phone system that is interchangeable. It is hoped that once the communication project is closed out, there will be leftover funding to address the telephone issues. A temporary fix regarding emergency calls was to add a message to the voice mail message alerting the caller to call 9-1-1 if an emergency.

- K. Local 4662 Firefighters Union Update. Lt. Hallden was present and also discussed the issues with the fire ground channel. The staff were advised it would involve a small hardware change and a programming upgrade that would cost approximately \$50,000. It

was in violation of NFPA standards to have dispatchers be able to talk to fire ground. It would be helpful and increase safety. It is not realistic to have someone monitoring two radios while doing 2 or 3 other tasks when you don't get enough people to a call minus the fire police. There isn't even a person to stand out front of a scene on some minor calls. Commissioner Colligan would like to have the facts checked in terms of NFPA standards for fire ground. It seems they are being told that by other sources but would like to find out what the standards actually say. Commissioner Colligan agrees with having the capability. They discussed putting in a crossband repeater if need be so that if they were out of town they could still talk back to dispatch. Lt. Hallden noted that some of the issues were the standards and funding. It would be a good feature to have in emergencies.

Lt. Hallden discussed gear. When gear gets wet or is contaminated with something, the Department needs to have something for the firefighters to wear. The Chief is working on this situation. NFPA states that the Department needs to have something for the members to wear and be willing to replace them. Currently there is not a plan in place as to how they are going to handle safety equipment that cannot be worn. Lt. Hallden reminded the Committee that the Department needs to have this for the career staff. Whenever they have gear that gets contaminated or damaged, there is an issue. He also discussed cross training, and those that are not cross trained could create a safety issue as well as an operational issue.

Regarding A/C at Court St., a month ago a wall air conditioner at Court Street failed. The replacement was put in at the incorrect angle, and the condensation was leaking inside the building. They did not know how long it had been leaking but the ceiling above the north stairwell where it was taped had started to separate and sag. Lt. Hallden wanted to provide a heads up to an old issue. The Executive Director will follow up on this issue tomorrow. Chief Balletto was not aware of this situation. It was something that was handled by Lt. McKnight and Mr. Johnson. The Chief plans on addressing this tomorrow.

- V. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Colligan will be going through his notes on the radios. The former Chief Terenzio had advised that they used two radios in Stamford. The Chief had produced studies about May Day's and having Dispatch on those frequencies in those situations of fire ground communication. At the time it was determined that a policy needed to be drafted. The Chief agreed that this was something that needs to be looked into.

Commissioner Spotts commented that tonight's meeting was very informative. He thanked everyone for their presentations.

Commissioner Epstein was thankful that the water coolers are being cleaned. He would suggest that we use our own water to fill those 5 gallon jugs when they need it.

The Executive Director suggested that the water coolers be cleaned. The next step would be to forward this issue to the Personnel Committee or the full Commission to evaluate the system of past practice and whether or not to provide a different option, maintain the same or stop. Commissioner Colligan would like to come up with a different system that would use Cromwell water. It was suggested to keep the cleaning of the water cooler container in house. It will be determined if Mr. Johnson is able to clean them.

Mr. Darius discussed the sinks in the restrooms. They are currently manually operated. There should be a long or short term look to switch those to sensor faucets. He added that this should not apply to kitchen sinks, just restrooms.

Mr. Darius mentioned that the Chief has a plan to do a lot of training. The current projector is a BGA connector system. It is time to upgrade the system to HDMI. The Chief has started to look into this already. It is a safety issue and we are in the business of doing safety training.

- VI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Spotts, seconded by Commissioner Colligan and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:13 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Donohue, Chairman

Nancy Deegan
Recording Secretary
8-24-21