

Cross Training: The Risks and Rewards of Consolidating First Responder Skills

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Abstract

As those who work within the fire, law enforcement, and EMS fields know, there is very little middle ground between those who favor cross training—often referred to as “consolidation,” or the act of training one professional group with some combination of the other two groups’ skills—and those who oppose it. Voices on both sides of this debate make cogent points. Though the practice has recently come into vogue as a cost-cutting measure, communities may also utilize it as a talent- or staffing-optimization tool, among other uses. However, several potential risk factors and the need for a highly tailored deployment make initial success anything but guaranteed. The purpose of this report is to provide an objective overview on the topic, including relevant facts, comparison of success and failures, and takes on the opinions first responders have expressed regarding this contentious topic.

Introduction

Cross training remains a highly polarizing topic among first responders and industry experts. Initially coined in the 1980s, when major sneaker companies first endeavored to design multi-sport athletic shoes¹, the term has become popular in a wide range of industries, disciplines, and situations. If a professional in one role is learning a skill typically associated with a different (but often related) station, they are likely cross training in some capacity.

In the public safety sphere, the sheer number of specialized roles, responsibilities, and tasks responders satisfy, combined

1. Though it doesn't pre-date the business trend of training in related areas, cross-training emerged as a sports term because designer Tinker Hatfield was “tired of packing four pairs of shoes” to the various sports he participated in (Santora, 2013).

with the financial and service needs of the communities they serve, mean this basic concept can be molded effectively to fit any situation. The simplest explanation of the practice is training law enforcement officers, firefighters, and EMS professionals with some combination of the other two disciplines' skills, though paramilitary training and other non-first response skills may also be implemented. For the purposes of this study, the primary focus will be on cross training programs that integrate law enforcement, fire and EMS training.

At first glance, any training that adds to a professional's skillset would seemingly be a good thing in any industry. In most hiring markets, a skillset touching multiple interrelated disciplines is an extremely marketable and in-demand commodity for applicants to display. Reasonably, a person with a broad collection of professional traits would be better equipped to handle anomalous situations (including talent shortages in areas in which they have cross trained), or emergent challenges, than someone trained in a singular job function. Following this logic, the cross-trained first responder could ostensibly provide a useful presence in a broader range of tactical situations than a single-skill counterpart, thereby increasing response time and improving safety for everyone involved in a given situation.

The actual benefits are not nearly as clear-cut as they might appear on paper, however. Alongside less-than-favorable—and, often, resoundingly negative—opinions from first responders themselves, research suggests that implementing a cross training program is a touch-and-go affair, with published results that run the gamut of possible outcomes. Where some cities have successfully introduced programs that blend various aspects of first response work and flourish at their assigned task, others have tried, failed, and abandoned them altogether. Although successful cross training programs tend to operate at less financial/manpower cost than their “single”-purpose counterparts, high upfront costs mean failures can quickly become expensive mistakes.²

2. This is especially problematic since municipalities looking to save money with cross training have likely “already tried several other cost-cutting initiatives,” leaving them with a smaller margin of error than they might have otherwise (Wilson, et al., 2012).

Fiscal concerns play predictably large role in cross training decisions

Hard figures on the number of agencies practicing meaningful levels of cross training are difficult to uncover. Wikipedia's list of "Departments of Public Safety with fully cross-trained personnel" numbers at 106³, for instance, but provides little or no information regarding which skills are cross-trained. Even so, the practice is undeniably popular as a cost-saving move, considering its tendency to spread throughout regions (with varying results) when financial difficulties loom. East Grand Rapids and Rockford, for example, are two of several Michigan cities to consider and ultimately implement a merger of law enforcement and fire services due to shrinking tax profits, state budget cuts, and other fiscal concerns. The move saves the cities \$200,000 and \$1,000,000 per year, respectively.⁴ Overall, the entire state of Michigan appears to have significantly more agencies with cross-trained personnel than any other state.

Indeed, cost savings and financial retooling seem to be near-universal reasons communities adopt cross training, largely because the practice, when successful, has been noted to bear outcomes civic leadership universally desires. Whether a local government adequately funds its responders or its law enforcement, fire, and EMT services must struggle under a thin budget, every governing body is keen to get more mileage from its money. When a cross-trained "generalist" unit can carry workloads that would require nearly twice as much manpower from standard specialized departments⁵, it is easy to see why those entrusted with a city's financial health might be inclined to jump at the premise when neighboring municipalities show favorable results.

Nevertheless, upfront costs have a high potential to undermine a community's attempts to adopt cross training as a cost-cutting measure. There's little question the restructuring and retraining necessary to any consolidative effort can require an overwhelming initial investment, particularly in conjunction with other costs more aligned to the community's individual needs. Equipment, severance packages for surplus personnel, fact-finding (for one example, analytical

3. (Department of Public Safety, n.d.).

4. Officials say the moves are made in the interest of creating a "cost-effective, streamlined" local government. Rockford Law enforcement Chief David Jones also says mutual aid pacts with neighboring counties will shore up any potential service deficiencies created by the consolidation (McMillin, 2012).

5. One author posits that "a group of cross-trained personnel can perform the same tasks that would require 60% to 80% more personnel to perform as single-discipline personnel" (Miller, 2016).

research to see the number of cases in which the city's law enforcement and fire teams showed up to the same scene over a given time), and innumerable other context-dependent requirements can add to the initial financial burdens of cross training. Any one of these might make a merger financially unadvisable despite projected long-term savings.

Staffing needs, federal requirements may further necessitate cross training

A factor closely linked to financial expenditure, namely the desire for efficient labor usage, is another common reason communities consider cross training. Today's first response landscape is quite different from the world emergency service professionals worked in even two decades ago. In firefighting, building and vehicle fires have reduced by over 50 percent since the 1980s, while minimum staffing requirements and other factors keep fire service census numbers up.⁶ This has left state and local governments to wonder what their fire teams should do with the time spent not fighting fires—a consideration that may not be fully understood, given the additional services the average fire department and its professional staff provide in the community.

In a city where fire calls are characteristically low and law enforcement staffing or response times are not at acceptable levels, cross training may make sense, if only at the hypothetical level. Idle time is diverted, manpower is better aligned with the city's needs, and leadership ideally gains more value for money they are already obligated to spend. This is similar to the reason most cities run fire and EMS services in tandem; and why many fire departments require that their career firefighters have some level of EMT certification. With fire calls dropping and an "all-hands-on-deck" philosophy underlining all emergency response disciplines, it makes sense that firefighting professionals bring as much utility as they can to the medical calls to which they increasingly respond.⁷

The same idea applies to other common staffing issues. From a certain perspective, multi-tool professionals make adaptation to labor woes easier by decreasing issues associated with unplanned absence, illness or injury. When both firefighters and law enforcement officers are trained on the same basic

6. Vehicle fires decreased by 64 percent between 1980 and 2013, while building fires dropped by 54 percent. Better construction materials, automated fire defense systems, and safer vehicles are all said to contribute to the precipitous drop (McChesney, 2015).

7. EMT-Basic certification requires 100 hours of training, including practice in real working conditions. EMT-Intermediate requires another 1000 hours yet (Alyson, 2017).

principles, a law enforcement officer can easily substitute into an injured firefighter's role, or vice versa. This could lessen the burden of being down an employee for the duration of a shift, or allow for more efficient incident response.

Moreover, departments with elastic hiring needs—for example, a city that hosts major events requiring public safety presence throughout the year—could leverage cross-trained manpower to avoid the costs of temporary staffing, or the problems that come along with understaffing. In this sense, the organizational benefits of cross training for first responders largely mirror skill consolidation in private sector workplaces, where employers in information technology and other fields encourage the practice to keep a consistent stock of skills available and avoid what one author calls “single points of failure” in talent.⁸

Cross training has also become a necessity from a regulatory standpoint. Spurred by the man-made and natural catastrophes of the last 15 years, federal laws mandating National Incident Management System (NIMS) adoption as a qualifier for federal disaster preparedness funding have placed added importance on combined response and interdisciplinary training.⁹ Specifically, in 2004, Hurricane Katrina exposed major gaps in the readiness of New Orleans responders that were further compounded by their inability to easily and rapidly deploy and arrive on scene.¹⁰ One wonders how the initial response may have been different had law enforcement and fire been trained in each other's basic roles or even in EMS, something that wasn't proposed in the city until 2014—nearly a decade later.¹¹

Can cross training soften longstanding mental health woes in first response?

Further, cross training may hold health and career benefits for the individual first responder, this despite a generally—and at times extremely—negative attitude toward the practice by many responders themselves. Considering the complex links between health and career factors like job satisfaction, job stress, and work-life balance, it is reasonable to assume the same primary and secondary benefits that draw municipal governments to the practice may “trickle down,” so to speak, to reduce unhealthy aspects of the job for individuals.

8. In other words, these advantages may keep private-sector businesses—and presumably public-sector entities in some cases—from becoming too reliant on an individual employee (Granier, 2005).

9. HSPD 5, Section 20, NIMS federal funding requirement, 2/28/03: “Beginning in Fiscal Year 2005, Federal departments and agencies shall make adoption of the NIMS a requirement, to the extent permitted by law, for providing Federal preparedness assistance through grants, contracts, or other activities. The Secretary shall develop standards and guidelines for determining whether a State or local entity has adopted the NIMS.”

10. “We were heartened by acts of initiative, perseverance, and heroism by local responders and the U.S. Coast Guard but, to add bewilderment and outrage to our sense of tragedy, we were horrified when the response to the Katrina catastrophe revealed – all too often, and for far too long – confusion, delay, misdirection, inactivity, poor coordination, and lack of leadership at all levels of government.” Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared. Special Report of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

11. The proposal came on the heels of a shooting event in which an officer showed within moments — but an ambulance took 10 minutes to arrive (Mackel, 2014).

If anything, these findings are worth exploring for their potential to offset the heavy physical and psychological demands fire, law enforcement, and EMS work places upon their respective ranks. Burnout and stress, primarily fueled by negative interactions with the public they serve, and work-policy decisions beyond their control, contribute to extremely high incidences of mental disorders such as depression and suicidal ideation in EMS workers.¹² Workplace stress and culture concerns contribute to inordinate rates of unhealthy habits among career firefighters and other longstanding concerns;¹³ law enforcement work is notorious for above-the-norm rankings in almost every job-stress outcome imaginable, including depression, PTSD, stress, and suicide.¹⁴

To be sure, little direct research on the intersection of cross training and first responder mental health has been undertaken. Perhaps the most exhaustive study directly examining the two, a doctoral thesis by a then-graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, suffers numerous self-disclosed limitations in terms of scale and sample size.¹⁵ Despite this, some of the study's findings mirror common sense, or at least align with what researchers know about burnout and its health effects. If a sense of "role overload" is partially responsible for causing burnout, a flexible roster means superiors can reduce departmental and individual strain with the added flexibility the practice grants. First responders may also feel, somewhat paradoxically, less "role conflict," another factor in burnout that occurs when duties are officially and explicitly divided. At the very least, an officer who knows they are formally expected to act as a firefighter will likely be more comfortable with the dichotomy than one who is informally pushed to perform parts of the role by current departmental need, policy, or legislation.

Then there is the complex link between excessive work time, job stress, and all the maladies the two might potentially inflict on law enforcement officers and others when experienced in conjunction. One would be remiss to reduce the legitimate trauma first responders face into a problem so simple it can be completely solved by off-time or downtime, but research indicates time away from the workplace—and the freedom to choose one's longer stretches of off-time, within reasonable limits—can reduce the incidence of common work-inflicted ailments.¹⁶ Here, the inherent flexibility cross training brings

12. One common factor in EMS burnout: 911 abuse, in which unethical or uninformed callers use emergency phone systems to "game" emergency rooms and get preferential treatment for sprained ankles and other minor ailments (American Addiction Centers, 2017).
13. Though the author claims that some firefighters may laugh at the "scientific definition of binge drinking," there's little question alcohol and other substance abuse is a problem for many career firefighters (Jahnke, 2015).
14. Law enforcement officers are at increased risk for cumulative PTSD, in which a collection of "smaller" traumas build to a larger disorder (Skeffington, 2016).
15. The study was conducted on first responders from eight cities in three states. None of the cities had a population over 75,000, among other limitations (Starr, 2009).
16. Experts also recommend reducing the amount of overtime officers and other first responders subject themselves to, where possible — another aspect of first response life cross training may be able to help with (Bond, 2014).

could allow for adequate decompression and debriefing time following stressful events, more freedom to temporarily assign traumatized or overworked responders to calmer-stakes work, and other individual benefits an understaffed agency may be unable to meet.

To reiterate, cross training should not be viewed as a panacea for the very real risk of cumulative mental and physical health problems in first response. On the inverse, it makes sense that a responder forced into a role they never wanted to work may experience certain types of workplace stress, as would first responders facing looming layoffs in the face of a consolidation vote. But in the right conditions, with the right attitudes in place, it may be fair to say the practice has some potential to take the edge off aspects of the work that are known to cause burnout¹⁷—something for individual responders to consider as they refine their stance on interdisciplinary training.

Cross training addresses regional concerns, may promote professional growth

Cross training may exhibit beyond addressing personnel matters and physical/mental health concerns, however. The ability to adapt cross training policies and practices to highly specific needs grants municipal decision-makers near-infinite freedom in how they build or rebuild their rosters. In turn, this can be a program's biggest asset or tallest hurdle.

Here, geography will likely inform a city's final choices, just as it guides the services its responder organizations offer and tasks they carry out. In the western United States, frequent wildfires may result in more fire calls and larger need for fire personnel, making hybrid law enforcement-fire professionals a potentially wise choice in certain areas. The eastern United States' dense urban centers may necessitate a training focused on events that affect large groups of people living closely to one another. The above-mentioned city hosting multiple large events per year, for instance, may benefit from staff trained in some combination of law enforcement and EMS skills.

It is also important to note that cross training does not stop at full-on mergers of a city's first response organizations, even at its strictest definition. By considering their needs, community

17. The three most common types of burnout (overload, wearing-down, and a lack of challenge) could all ostensibly be offset with a smartly implemented cross training strategy (Lesonsky, 2015).

health histories, and any commonly committed crimes, cities mulling over a consolidation of skills may choose to take a different route altogether. One government may choose to employ a handful of “switch hitters”—a group of officers who’ve expressed a willingness to fight fires, for instance—to reduce scheduling or response time concerns, while another may decide to impart a specific skill across its entire responder corps and nothing more.

Two recent trends in policing and firefighting illustrate this idea. First is the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) model. This is an increasingly popular avenue for policing organizations wishing to better handle mental health calls, and a prime example of cross training that goes beyond law enforcement, fire, and EMS skills. By giving some percentage of their officers enhanced skills and tools to deal with potentially mentally disturbed citizens, communities cross train officers in the mental health field and directly address an issue that can flummox even highly competent departments and individuals. In the event of a mental health call—a common occurrence in communities with large homeless populations—dispatchers can call for officers with CIT or broader mental health training, potentially lowering the incidence of problems like unnecessary use of force.¹⁸

If CIT represents giving select officers an expanded skillset, the recent tendency for law enforcement and fire departments to carry the anti-overdose drug naloxone shows the benefits of giving wide swaths of responders a specific, limited skill in response to an obvious community need. As with other emergency health events, minutes can mean the difference between life and death in an overdose; further, law enforcement officers are often first to arrive at medical calls, making the ability to administer the drug another way to render aid immediately upon securing the scene. Although officers and firefighters desiring a sharper division of skills have criticized this growing tendency, cross training to administer the drug has certainly grown from “emerging trend” to “best practice” because of these two facts. Nearly 1,000 law enforcement stations stock the medication and train officers on when and how to use it ¹⁹, with many fire departments following suit.²⁰

18. One study claims that “CIT officers used force in only 15% of encounters rated as high violence risk.” Further, officers tended towards low-lethality options when force became necessary (Watson and Fulambarker, 2012).

19. As of July 2016, 971 departments in 38 states stocked the drug, which is often referred to by its brand name, Narcan (Bean, 2016).

20. For example, New York State’s board of health makes naloxone available free-of-charge to all “non-EMS fire departments” in the state. Administration training is easily taught and can be given by supervisors on-shift, illustrating the versatility and utility of cross training for addressing specific concerns within the community (New York State, 2013).

Correspondingly, individual responders may realize the benefits of cross training in two high-level areas: professional growth and variation of tasks. With the practice seeing increased adoption in many areas of the country, first responders with consolidated training could find themselves at better odds to match the skills required by open staff positions. Meanwhile, responders who work in fully merged workplaces that do not mind switching roles to suit departmental needs could foreseeably enjoy the ability to approach scenes from a variety of “angles,” depending on their current appointments.

A tale of two cities

To this point, we have largely discussed the potential benefits of and causes for a cross-trained first responder pool. As previously noted, however, the realities of such a system are complicated, and consolidation has no guarantee of “sticking” once implemented within a community. There are numerous examples of longstanding and short-lived cross training programs alike—often referred to under the blanket term of “public safety departments” (PSDs)—folding, and for a broad variety of reasons. Funding and equipment issues, political malevolence, infighting between responders, and many other causes can all contribute to a cross training initiative’s demise.

In many ways, recent events in the city of Alamogordo, New Mexico exemplify the ways cross training can backfire. Founded in 1967, the city’s Department of Public Safety (DPS) was something of a forerunner in terms of consolidation. Although several public safety departments existed prior to its formation, the practice was certainly less common when it first opened its doors than it was at the time of its disbanding. Per a report from the Community Oriented Policing Service (COPS), city leadership called upon outside consultants to examine the department following allegations of misconduct by its interim leadership. The subsequent report those consultants released identified several negative trends, including:

- “Infighting and factionalism,” as well as a growing sense that certain personnel within the department—specifically, dedicated fire operations staff—were treated as “second class citizens,” or servants to higher-ranking, cross-trained public safety officers (PSOs).

- Allegations of corruption and a lack of integrity within the department’s leadership.
- Jurisdictional bickering and other disagreements with the county sheriff’s office, all of which damaged the relationship to a near-breakdown of communications.²¹

Inefficiencies also seemed to plague the Alamogordo DPS in its twilight years, particularly where its fire services were involved. The city-commissioned report seemed to indicate an untenable level of bureaucratic interference and—contrary to the tenets of cross training—overspecialization. The Community Oriented Policing Service study, for instance, claimed certain stations were staffed with personnel (dubbed “equipment officers”) whose only job during fires were to hook firefighting apparatuses to a hydrant, while others had full-on Fire Safety Officers (FSOs) or PSOs. This resulted in a suboptimal system in which the equipment officers drove to fire calls, attached hoses to hydrants, and waited for better-trained and -equipped officers to arrive and fight the fires. On paper, this flies in the face of the improved response times and more efficient procedures many cross training practices reportedly offer.

Though it is always easier to judge a situation with hindsight and degrees of separation, the tale of the Alamogordo DPS’s failure seems to mirror the criticisms responders, unions, and other experts have levied at the practice of cross training. Specifically, inefficiency, a tedious (and even illogical) division of skills and services, an unofficial-but-impactful workplace caste system, lack of employee buy-in, and issues with chain of command. As the COPS report notes, the newly individual fire and law enforcement services appear to have benefitted from the split in terms of the training they receive and the quality of services they provide.

Alternatively, consider another longstanding—and, in this case, still active—cross training effort. The Sunnyvale, California Department of Public Safety has long been heralded as a model of combined EMS, fire, and law enforcement training, having successfully and effectively operated all three under the same metaphorical and physical roof since 1950. During

21. Other concerns included problems that could befall most any department, including specialized law enforcement and fire organizations: “Perceptions of favoritism” and slow response to queries and requests from management, for instance (Wilson, et al., 2016).

this time, the city's population and corresponding DPS staffing levels have both risen substantially.²² With the department's glowing reputation, it should come as no surprise that the city they serve tends to boast low crime rates and impressive response times.²³

From a distance, it is hard to discern why cross training efforts could dissolve so thoroughly in Alamogordo and flourish in Sunnyvale. The two cities' circumstances even fly in the face of what little "common knowledge" exists about the practice. While research suggests cross-trained departments are more prone to failure in larger cities with high diversity and population density, Sunnyvale's population as of 2010 was over four times that of Alamogordo's; with quadruple the number of residents per square mile. Further, cost savings do not appear to be a primary motivation behind either entity's inception.

As possible answers go, simple internal-external harmony may be one of the biggest differentiators between the two. Where the Alamogordo DPS's final years were reputedly fraught with scandal, external conflict with other agencies, and internal squabbling between the ranks, at least some of the Sunnyvale DPS's success is attributed to the organization's reported "elimination of [...] competition and jealousy" between fire and law enforcement, two organizations with a well-known reputation for just those problems in many communities.²⁴

Organizational structure likely plays a role here as well if the systems ascribed to both departments mirror their real-world practices. Compared to the bureaucratic problems present in the Alamogordo DPS's former procedures, the Sunnyvale DPS's division of responsibility is best described as a simple hybrid. Officers in Sunnyvale remain officers and firefighters remain firefighters, with a standing expectation and ongoing training that make change a possibility at a moment's notice. Standing changes that do occur come at regular intervals and rely on responder input: PSOs in the department perform an annual "bid" for various roles, with experience and training playing a role in final assignments.²⁵ Compared to Alamogordo's system, whereby people who unlock the hydrants may live and work apart from the rest of the actual firefighting team, it is possible

22. Departments looking to implement full mergers or other intensive, exhaustive types of cross training often reach out to Sunnyvale's department for tips, guidance, and best practices (Romney, 2013).

23. The city's crime rate is lower than most other California cities and most other cities of comparable size nationwide (Neighborhood Scout, accessed 2017).

24. Other growth-friendly factors cited in the document include "a 20 to 25 percent cost saving in personnel and equipment cost," consistent with other estimates on the manpower cross training may be able to save in the right circumstances (Wilson, et al., 2012).

25. As in many firehouses and law enforcement stations, seniority is respected in this "bid" system: PSOs with 15 or more years of experience are largely free to choose between fire and law enforcement work in three-year stretches, with no need to "win" their position of choice (City of Sunnyvale, 2015).

the Sunnyvale DPS's natural division of duties lends itself to better work, happier responders, and less potential for error.

Ultimately, it may simply be a matter of service quality that shuttered one organization and continues to keep another going. Though public scandals and governmental inquiry may have pushed Alamogordo to dissolve its Department of Public Safety instead of attempting to repair it, its residents, decision-makers, and responders clearly made the decision in an attempt to improve law enforcement and fire services, the COPS study says. Regardless of the reasons for their successes, this is not a problem Sunnyvale's DPS has had to worry about on the same scale.

What responders think

If other factors surrounding first responder cross training (disciplines trained, the extent of the merger, the reasons a city considers the change, etc.) depend on context, one aspect remains consistent: As a rule, individual first responders and the organizations that represent them seem to be against the practice, or at least highly suspicious of it.

Much of this opposition seems to build upon fundamental differences in the natures of fire, law enforcement, and EMS work, particularly where fire-law enforcement consolidations are involved. Because the vocations are so different—and because people who choose one field or the other tend to view it as a calling instead of a job that can be switched in and out at will—detractors say there are very few legitimate reasons to combine the two. Just as the professional chef would not perform well in a job that forced them to spend appreciable time as a waiter, a dedicated officer or firefighter might not have the motivation and interest sufficient to perform well within the other role, or desire to take a job that forces them to.

This basic idea manifests itself in most every aspect of the anti-consolidation argument. Detractors say the differences—again, centering mostly on law enforcement and fire services—start from the first day of academy, with the gulf in required skills, knowledge, and experience only growing from there.

By that logic, trainings the two camps must complete vary so much as to be incompatible, and the experience it takes to acquire veteran proficiency in either field can take years of real-world practice; a cross-trained responder forced to act in another role loses time that could be spent honing skills in their preferred field, in other words.

Because of these differences, detractors see attempts to consolidate as little more than cost-saving measures, which, in turn, may be seen as cynical attempts to trade service quality for dollars saved. This is one of several positions taken by the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), for instance.²⁶

The IAFC's stances against cross training appear to match what the average firefighter feels about the practice. Though a relatively broad (if still mostly negative) sample of opinions can be found in other branches of first response, firefighters seem to voice the largest and loudest opposition when the topic is broached. This is at least partially due to the decline in fire calls, viewed through the lens of tasks a newly merged law enforcement-fire entity might assign: officers may occasionally be asked to "pick up the hose," as it were, but firefighters in most cities will almost certainly see a comparatively disproportionate amount of time behind the badge.²⁷

Other potential points of concern for law enforcement and fire professionals include administrative matters, like seniority and pension. Although some cities (Los Angeles, for instance) have long held combined fire and law enforcement pension funds, communities with separate funds would likely have to consider a new solution once their forces were merged. On the seniority side, a merger could have a troublesome impact on the way certain benefits are handled when law enforcement and fire are all moved to the same equivalent ranks. More concerning, roster cuts due to a reduced need for manpower could cause low-tenured firefighters and law enforcement officers to lose their jobs in the shuffle, as has happened in Michigan and other states.²⁸

26. Other concerns raised and positions held by the IAFC include:

- The fact that cross training does not reduce the number of fire calls made, or the response organization's need to respond to them.
- The dangers inherent to firefighting and the training needed to avoid them: While both law enforcement and firefighting work have obvious dangers, a lapse in judgment or education by a firefighter ostensibly has greater chance to immediately harm more people, calling again to the training differences between the professions.
- The fact that many cross training moves seem to be made in response to diminishing fire calls, a position the IAFC claims could put people in fire situations at greater risk.
- A "dangerously narrow" public assumption that firefighting stops at fire suppression and EMS work, when the services offered by modern firefighting organizations go far beyond these two functions.

(International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2009).

27. This very concern has ignited considerable disagreement where potential consolidation is put on the ballot. In Michigan, where cross training between law enforcement and fire resources is most common, firefighters and city decision-makers engaged in the equivalent of a political fistfight in at least one city (Harper Woods), complete with yard-signs and finger-pointing from both parties; other cities in Michigan, feeling intense opposition from firefighters and at times the public, have instead taken to consolidating multiple fire stations into singular, multi-municipal units (Jamieson, 2011).

28. Ten firefighters were laid off in Bay City, Michigan's 2013 merger (Vela, 2013).

Conclusion

Though long and in-depth, the examples of potential cross training uses cited in this report are far from exhaustive. In reality, every community adopting or attempting to adopt the practice will likely have to forge their own path, at least to a degree. Even the city attempting a comprehensive merger of law enforcement, fire, and EMS resources will need to address issues that arise from their current first response structure, desired near-future results, and larger long-term goals. Cities attempting more hybridized approaches to consolidation, as Chicago did when developing its widely known adaptation of tactical EMS (TEMS), will undoubtedly need to tailor and refine both their stated needs and end processes even further to find success.²⁹

In every event, however, communities considering cross training would be well advised to perform their due diligence. The practice may appear to have several benefits, in theory. Successful consolidations in various areas of the country do provide compelling arguments and good examples for other cities—particularly those facing fiscal difficulty or inefficient manpower usage—to model; even then, cities that treat consolidation as an instant solution or an easy fix to complex problems are likely to find steep opposition prior to implementation and unforeseen challenges during.

In other words, cross training remains a controversial and highly discussed practice in first responder and government circles for a reason. If it is not quite a wild guess in terms of predictable gains, its history proves that past successes are no guarantee of future survival. For a practice often deployed when other measures have failed, that makes a cautious approach even more important—for the sake of responders and for the communities they serve.

29. Chicago's model focuses mostly on tactical response and interoperability in highly dangerous events. A fire department EMS team member would be able to "support [Chicago PD] missions" in a mass-casualty situation after taking the training. One author calls the cross training approach "uniquely Chicago" (Richards, et al., 2016).

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