

# *The Command Post*

## **President's Message : Pot Roast**

There's an old story about how people fixate on a solution and continue to repeat without any thought as to where that solution came from. The story goes that there is a mother and daughter in their kitchen and the mother is attempting to teach her young daughter some old family recipes. This day they are making pot roast and the first thing the mother does is cut the roast in half and begins searing all sides of the meat. The daughter asks, "Why do you cut in half?" The mother replies, "Oh, honey that's the way my mother taught me." That night over dinner the daughter asks her grandmother about slicing the pot roast in half. The grandmother looks her granddaughter in the eye and tells her that when she first cooked pot roast you had to cut the roast in half because, "I only had a small pot and that's the only way it would fit."

Now, we're not cooking pot roasts, we're fighting fires. But the analogy rings true in many ways and sometimes it's more than three generations of doing something in a set manner and seldom asking why.

Let's look at some new ways of solving old problems:

Attached in this issue you'll find a link to a report that proposes a change, forward by Chris Tuttle of Maywood FD. It's about a better way to carry a portable radio. Such a seemingly simple thing, but please take a look at this report and its suggestions. I had always thought the radio pocket on the chest of our coats was the idea operational solution for easily carrying my radio. It was easy to carry, you could just look down to see the controls and get to the speaker-microphone. This report will demonstrate the best way is to carry your radio in a shoulder strap carrier with your coat over the strap and the cable for the speaker-microphone. The radio itself needs to be below the coat with the radio and its antenna canted slightly away from your body. A simple change, rather than just doing the same thing over and over again, you know, because that's the way it's always been done.

Another change has come to us from the folks from the federal government's scientific 'Think-Tank' NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) along with scientist and researchers at Underwriters Laboratory (UL) and several fire departments around the country, including the FDNY, have for several years have been burning buildings and crunching numbers. These are some of our brightest minds backed up with some of our most tactically engaged real-world firefighters and they have some real world help for us. Help in the form a tactical change not and expensive piece of hardware but a new way of doing things.

Our association has a committee assigned that is working on providing feedback and insight concerning current and future users of the Public Safety Operations Center and ways for our current legacy radio system work more effectively. From the preliminary work already completed by the committee I'm hopefully that in the coming months we'll see a report that offers us all a better solution to our current situation.

We have all seen the changes in the 'environment' of interior structural firefighting; thirty years ago it took about twenty (20) minutes for a fire to flashover, igniting all the items in an area. Nowadays, it can take as little as four (4) minutes. Because, as we know, today's furniture and building materials are more typically made from synthetic materials that burn "hotter and faster." To learn more about these faster-moving fires NIST and UL have conducted more than a hundred experiments to examine the changes in the fire environment over time, and the effectiveness in suppression tactics. The NIST and UL studies

have produced tactical considerations which may change the way you view your standard operating guidelines.

FDNY Commissioner Salvatore Cassano said, "We're going to test many of our procedures, our ventilation tactics, coordination of ventilation tactics, opening the doors, windows, bulkhead, to see if we need to change any procedure we've put in place. What we hope to gain out here is a small advantage in how we fight fires."

John Drengenberg, an engineer with Underwriter Laboratory (UL), says that his team conducts numerous scenarios at their offices, but with these tests, "We're bringing science to the street and this is where the firefighters face their challenges... Fires today are hotter and faster today" than they have ever been "and it's because of the preponderance of synthetic products in our home. It's not a problem your grandparents never had, we do today. It's not necessarily bad, but it does make fires burn hotter and faster. So there's an evolution going and this will give us new information and data."

We are in the preliminary planning for a presentation of these changes later this year. As we receive more information we'll be passing it along.

Change is never a simple thing, but it is a constant in our lives and given the importance of the work we all do every day we have an obligation to explore every possibility. Traditions are important they are how we got here but we can't just keep cutting the pot roast in half without exploring all the alternatives.

Portable Radio link: [www.firefighterclosecalls.com/news/download/file\\_id/9468](http://www.firefighterclosecalls.com/news/download/file_id/9468)

Stay Safe,  
Peter Hodge, President

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#### COUNTY COORDINATOR CORNER

The Rad Pagers are in and will be given out to local Fire Officials with training. The County has received 50 Pagers and another 50 are on order. There is some UASI money coming for Detection and Decon and a Haz Mat coordinator for the region. Foam for training has arrived for Garfield and Teaneck Fire Depts.

Stay safe,  
Larry Rauch, County Fire Coordinator

#### Next BCFCFA Meeting

**Date:** Monday, Sep 9th  
**Time:** 1930 hrs  
**Location:** TBA  
**For directions visit our website under Meetings**



## HOTBOX : Detergent Suicide in Fair Lawn

This startling trend began in Japan, since 2009 over 2,000 Japanese have used a method known as detergent suicide to end their lives. There are websites devoted to providing instructions on how to mix common household cleaning items to create a deadly hydrogen sulfide gas. The websites advise that enclosed areas such as closets and cars are the most desirable locations and that these spaces be made as air tight as possible through the use of duct tape and plastic. This presents a dangerous situation for any first responder or family member who rushes to the aid of the victim without taking proper precautions. Available on the detergent suicide websites are warning signs for the user to post and warn who ever finds them of the danger. This trend is slowly creeping its way onto American shores. There have been over 80 reported detergent suicides in the U.S.

Detergent/Chemical suicides started in Japan and have made their way to the U.S. On January 7, 2013, Bergen County had its first one. It occurred in Fair Lawn and because of situational awareness and proper safety procedures, NO emergency personnel were injured or worse. The decedent had mixed lime sulphur spray and toilet bowl cleaner in a vehicle. The resulting reaction created hydrogen sulfide gas, estimated to be over 1000 ppm concentration, killing him. The IDLH level for hydrogen sulfide is 100 ppm. There were no warning signs posted on the vehicle.

Please train on this hazard and develop SOP/SOGs to handle the same so EVERYBODY GOES HOME.

Go to <http://ffsupport.org/training.html> and click on the TRAINING DOWNLOAD PAGE and then CHEMICAL SUICIDE for more information. If you have any questions or need additional information, contact me at 201-634-2798 or email me at [tbischoff@co.bergen.nj.us](mailto:tbischoff@co.bergen.nj.us).

Thomas Bischoff, Jr.  
Wood-Ridge FD  
Bergen County Haz Mat  
From NJ State Fire Chiefs Association  
Newsletter, The Relay (Modified)

### **Fair Lawn Rescue Response to Detergent Suicide**

On 1-7-13 Fair Lawn Rescue was dispatched to a residence to assist police in a hazmat situation. On arrival it was relayed that a male party had used chemicals in his car to commit suicide. We contacted Bergen County Hazmat to assist in finding what chemicals we were dealing with. They responded and through several tests it was determined that it was a sulfide based chemical, not a cyanide base. We then removed the body and decontaminated same prior to it being placed in the Medical Examiner bag. The body was stripped down to underwear and all clothes disposed of. The NJDEP was contacted and responded to the scene to decontaminate the vehicle and the area. Once the vehicle was opened up it was discovered the chemicals used were a lime sulfide spray and CRL cleaner, both are common household products. These products were poured into a five gallon bucket in the vehicle. A PPE Recon was conducted with SCBA and turnout gear, while the body removal from the vehicle was done in Level B suits and SCBA.

Important areas to be aware of from this incident:

1. Do not open the vehicle right away in a case like this. The concentration of chemicals is so vital initially that it could be life threatening to the first responder.
2. Call County Hazmat as they have the expertise to determine the chemicals you are dealing with. Also they have the ability to contact the DEP for further assistance in these cases. Their assistance includes decontamination of the area, vehicle, and more importantly disposing of any hazardous waste from the incident.
3. The victim in this case got his information from the internet, as it was still on the computer after looking in the house.
4. Initial reaction of the chemicals is volatile, however once the reaction takes place volatility diminishes.

Peter Yuskaitis, Chief  
Fair Lawn Rescue

**LEGAL BRIEFS FOR FIRE CHIEFS****Fatal Training Accident**

Issues: Did fire officials exhibit deliberate indifference to a dangerous training activity? Did the actions of training officers “shock the conscience”? What is the critical element to establishing a substantive due process violation by the fire department?

Rachael Wilson (“Wilson”) was a new firefighter recruit with the Baltimore Fire Department (“Fire Department”), when she took part in a live burn training exercise on February 9, 2007. The exercise involved intentionally setting fire to an abandoned three story building. Training officials removed all of the wall boards and ceilings. They then stiffed the walls with highly flammable excelsior.

Once the structure was ready, instructors set multiple fires on the different levels of the building. After letting the structure burn for a short while, Wilson and other recruits were instructed to enter the building and simulate looking for potential victims and then to conduct fire suppression exercises.

Wilson was directed to proceed to the third floor and, in doing so, to carry a fire hose to that level. By the time Wilson reached the third floor, it was apparent that “severe fire conditions” existed at that level, and the team of recruits realized that their “lives were in danger.”

The training exercise quickly turned into a rescue event. The team of recruits was ordered to evacuate the building from the second floor window that led out to the rear roof area.

Wilson managed to get to the second floor, and, with the help of other firefighters, was able to get through the window. However, she quickly became unconscious.

Wilson was taken to the nearest hospital where she was pronounced dead on arrival. An autopsy followed which revealed that Wilson succumbed to thermal injuries and asphyxia.

Representative of Wilson’s estate (“Plaintiff”) sued the City and named officials in federal court alleging that Wilson’s death was avoidable with adequate precautions and that the Fire Department “created unduly dangerous conditions in staging the exercise. Among the specific allegations, are that (1) the building was unsafe because the walls and ceilings were torn out and left in piles while highly flammable excelsior was inserted into the walls, (2) the recruits were not equipped with appropriate protective clothing, (3) the instructors were not equipped with radios and were not trained to supervise a live burn., (4) contrary to NFPA standards, multiple fires were ignited in the structure, (5) the instructors allowed the fire to burn too long before recruits were sent into the building, and (6) the water supply was inadequate to fight the fire.”

The pivotal issue when charging a government entity, as here, with a violation of substantive due process is whether there was any arbitrary action (s) which were intentional by the government entity against an individual [Wilson]. In this instance, Plaintiff does not allege any intentional acts. Rather, Plaintiff contends that the Fire Department officials demonstrated deliberate indifference.

Ordinarily, to establish a substantive due process violation there would be an intentional act resulting in injury or death. Here, Plaintiff attempted to demonstrate that the deliberate indifference is sufficient to establish a substantive due process violation.

Apart from cases involving custody, the deliberate indifference standard – the fire instructors created a dangerous condition – has never been successfully argued. Here, Wilson was not in custody at the time of the accident, nor was there any specific intent on the part of instructors that the accident and injuries would occur.

The federal district court found in favor of the City and named parties (“Defendants”). Plaintiff brought this appeal.

Decision: Affirmed.

Wilson was engaged in voluntary employment at the time of the accident. She was not in custody. Plaintiffs have not alleged arbitrary or conscience shocking conducts because they did not assert that Fire Department official intended to harm Wilson. Intent to harm is an essential element in establishing a substantial due process violation. *Collins v. City of Harker Heights*, 503 U.S. 115 (1992). There remain state court claims that must be litigated, and this decision will in no way affect the outcomes during these actions.

Citation: *Slaughter, et al., v. Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, et al.*, 10-2436, United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit (2012)

From: *Legal Briefs for Fire Chiefs*, Vol. 25, No.9, September 2012

FireChiefLaw (June 2012)

### COUNTY FIRE MARSHALL

We will be adding this new feature to the eNewsletter to keep our membership informed about any fire and life safety concerns for county facilities within their response district. Fire County Fire Marshal Hennig will be providing quarterly reports, such as below.

If a fire department has a county facility experiencing numerous fire alarms or any other fire safety issues, please notify me. Also, any fire department that has a county facility in their jurisdiction and would like to conduct a walkthrough of that facility, contact me at 201-832-9723 (mobile).

Any questions please contact him directly.

Bryan R. Hennig, County Fire Marshal  
201-785-5718 Office      201-785-6036 Fax

### MESSAGE BOARD



Sgt. Christopher R. Hrbek, U.S.M.C./  
Westwood FD Memorial Sporting Clays Shoot  
is scheduled for August 23rd.

More details to follow.