

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 27, 2008

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #48__: ADDITION OF THREE FIRE DEPARTMENT SAFETY OFFICERS FOR FY 2009

Request:

The Alternative budget reflects the Fire Department's request for three new Safety Officers, with the rank of Captain, to provide round-the-clock coverage for all Fire and EMS incidents and to supplement the single Health and Safety Officer currently responsible for the entire Department. The cost for the three new positions is \$342,489.

Issues Addressed:

The August 25, 2007, 3-alarm fire at 6101 Edsall Road resulted in the injury of five firefighters, three of whom were hospitalized for dehydration and smoke inhalation, including one firefighter who was placed in intensive care. Fortunately, all five firefighters have recovered from their injuries. The Virginia Occupational Safety and Health (VOSH) agency investigated the injuries suffered by the firefighters and subsequently cited the Fire Department for not ensuring that self-contained breathing equipment was used by firefighters in fighting this interior structure fire. The VOSH citation did not impose a cash penalty for the incident, despite the authority to do so.

We also engaged J. Gordon Routley, a fire expert, to review the response to this fire. The consultant report, which was discussed with Council at its March 25 legislative meeting, recommends the addition of the on-duty safety officers.

Fire Department suppression, EMS, Code Enforcement and Emergency Management personnel must have more focused on-the-job safety training and direction to reduce the chances of another Edsall Road type of incident. The City needs to reduce and contain its financial liability for firefighter and EMS employee on-the-job injuries, especially when funding is limited. The three Safety Officers requested for FY 2009 will provide the Fire Department with the ability to contain and reduce on-the-job injuries.

Shift Safety Officers are one part of an overall approach to a comprehensive safety, health and wellness program. Safety Officers alone will not reduce the number of safety-related issues. Shift Safety Officers are critical to enhancing a safety culture within the Department. Safety is a 24x7 job that requires alignment with suppression and EMS

shifts and provides needed resources to shift Battalion Chiefs, Officers, Firefighters, and Medics. For incidents such as the Edsall Road fire, the shift Safety Officers will provide the needed incident scene support as part of the incident management team and will be the “eyes and ears” for the Incident Commander and his or her on-the-scene personnel.

Safety Enhancement Results: The enhanced Safety Officer complement (plus backup when any one of these three officers is on leave) will provide 24x7 responses 365 days a year to incidents, accidents, and other related events within the City. Each fire suppression shift shall have assigned one qualified Incident Safety Officer; this shift Safety Officer will provide coverage for all on-duty Fire Department personnel, regardless of their division/role (i.e., EMS, Code Enforcement, Emergency Management, Communications, Maintenance, Logistics or Administration). As a member of the Incident Command staff, the Safety Officer-Captain will be charged with advising the Incident Commander of unsafe acts or actions and with recommending alternative tactics.

The Safety Officers also will be responsible for enhanced and recurring health and safety training for new recruits and employees as well as for on-board staff. They will interact with other City, regional and state agencies on safety matters as liaisons to the Fire Department, including the Metropolitan Area Council of Governments.

Other duties include processing employee injury claims, investigating health and safety issues within the workplace, following up on accidents and crashes and overall investigation of liability claims as they relate to the Department, employees and/or equipment. The Safety Officers will manage limited duty employees and will also be responsible for scheduling, maintaining, and coordinating required vaccines, inoculations, and disease screening as well as managing the Fire/EMS annual medical examination program.

Program Costs: Estimated costs for the three Safety Officers are:

Salaries (Fire Captain, \$61,364.72 each)	\$184,094
Benefits	79,160
Vehicles	32,633
Cost to outfit vehicles	18,000
Mobile Data Terminal and access	6,135
Laptop computer	2,000
Communications (cell phone, pager, radio)	4,761
Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA)	4,462
Gear	5,064
Office Furniture	3,000
Uniforms	<u>3,180</u>
Total	\$342,489

We expect to reduce the number of accidents and injuries with the safety officer program.