



# COUNTY OF ERIE

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## **2013 TRAINING RESOLUTION FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions**

A collaborative effort between the Erie County Department of Emergency Services and our county's volunteer fire departments has created huge successes in volunteer firefighter recruitment as well as challenges in training the more than 1,300 new recruits who have joined the Erie County Volunteer Fire Service since January, 2012.

While these numbers certainly buck the national trend of a decline in volunteerism and speak highly of the good people of Erie County, this sheer volume of new volunteers exceeds our ability to provide them with their basic Firefighter 1 training in a timely manner; creating a situation that is counter-productive to our ongoing recruitment and retention efforts.

For several years, the NYS Office of Fire Prevention & Control has struggled to satisfy the total demand for training that our fire service seeks. Our volunteer firefighters already wait extended lead times for the opportunity to attend basic and advanced level training courses, despite Erie County having the highest number of State Fire Instructors assigned to any county in the state.

While having so many new volunteers requiring training is a good problem to face, this creates a huge challenge in that they must be trained before they can participate in firefighting operations. If they can't participate, they're likely to lose interest and quit the fire service, and/or fail to meet their volunteer fire department's training requirements, possibly resulting in termination from membership. Nobody wins when this happens.

This situation has a direct and negative impact on the operations of our volunteer fire departments. Investing all of our state fire instructor hours in teaching basic Firefighter 1 courses in turn cripples our ability to train our more experienced firefighters in advanced techniques. This "vicious cycle" of trading off continuing education for basic training frustrates our fire service leadership, creates conflict and puts our firefighters at risk, jeopardizing their safety and that of those they serve and serve with.

As a result, in full cooperation and support of the Erie County Fire Advisory Board, County Executive Poloncarz and the Erie County Legislature; a legislative resolution was created, which passed in November 2013, to address several of these critical training and operational issues simultaneously.

This "FAQ" document serves to address many of the common questions related to this legislation. Please don't hesitate to contact our office should you have any questions or require further information after reviewing it.

# 2013 TRAINING RESOLUTION FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

## General Resolution

**Q.** What are the major elements of the resolution?

**A.** There are three (3) essential components to the resolution, each of which supports the other:

1. Created a framework that will allow local volunteer fire departments to reimburse the Department of Emergency Services for County Fire Instructors to deliver the Firefighter 1 training program to meet national standards.
2. Allows the Department of Emergency Services to generate revenue from outside sources for classroom usage, instruction and hands-on training for unaffiliated businesses, organizations and other government agencies; as appropriate.
3. Reinstates a no show/no call penalty assessment for fire departments that reserve Erie County Fire Training Facilities and County Fire Instructors but fail to show for or cancel the scheduled training without reasonable notification or just cause.

## County Delivered Firefighter 1 Training

**Q.** Are these fee-based County provided Firefighter 1 courses going to replace the free courses that the State provides, or are they in addition to?

**A.** These courses would be offered to supplement *but not replace* the free Firefighter 1 training courses currently taught by State Fire Instructors – if fire departments choose to take advantage of the additional training offerings. Participation is strictly voluntary.

Keep in mind that each seat filled in a reimbursed County-delivered Firefighter 1 course opens up a seat in a *free* State delivered Firefighter 1 course.

**Q.** What is the cost to a fire department or fire association for hosting a Firefighter 1 Course?

**A.** The total cost of delivering a single Firefighter 1 course is approximately \$5,000 or \$200 per student based on 25 students.

**Q.** What does that fee include and where does the money go to that is collected by the County for delivering the additional Firefighter 1 courses?

**A.** The reimbursement fee covers County Fire Instructor time and any supplies, material and disposables related to course delivery. The reimbursement collected offsets the county's budget for fire training.

**Q.** Does paying for taking a County provided Firefighter 1 course guarantee that the student will pass the course and get a certificate?

**A.** No. As always, the instructional and academy staff is dedicated to assisting any and all students in successfully completing the course. However, the student is still required to pass all skills and written evaluations as delivered in the current State-only run Firefighter 1 training.

**Q.** Will I get a State Firefighter 1 certificate for completing a County Firefighter 1 course?

**A.** Not currently. While we continue discussions with the New York State Office of Fire Prevention & Control (NYS OFPC) regarding this, we plan to issue an Erie County Firefighter 1 Certificate that should be equally accepted in any fire department across Erie County as the training will be delivered by County Fire Instructors certified to deliver the State training program, many of whom have already been assisting in the State delivery for years. Furthermore, for those who decide to take advantage of it, we plan to offer National Certification testing after students have successfully completed the Firefighter 1 course.

# 2013 TRAINING RESOLUTION FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

## No Show/No Call Policy

**Q.** What is the reason for the No Show/No Call policy?

**A.** If a fire department does not cancel their scheduled training at least 2 hours prior to the start, the County is obligated to pay each scheduled instructor for 2-hours of work. Consequently, this robs other fire departments of critical training opportunities twice:

1. When they wanted to use the same facility at the same day and time but it was already reserved by the fire department that did not show and did not call to cancel.
2. When County Fire Instructor hours are wasted by no show/no call incidents, and the regular training budget dollars are exhausted and no further funds are available to satisfy outstanding training requests.

**Q.** Where do the fees from the No Show/No Call policy go to?

**A.** Fees collected from the No Show/No Call policy are returned to the County Fire Instructor budget so that we can continue to satisfy requests for training throughout the season.

**Q.** Are there exceptions to the No Show/No Call policy, allowing it to be waived?

**A.** Absolutely. The notice of policy violation includes blank space for the chief or training officer to explain the reason that their fire department did not show at the scheduled date/time and why they weren't able to call within the requested 2-hour window prior to the start of the training.

All reasonable excuses will be considered for waiver from the fee such as: responding to an emergency call just prior to the scheduled training. We simply ask that, where and when possible, a phone call is placed to the lead instructor informing them that you'll be unable to show for the scheduled training.

However, a lack of planning to determine if you'll have adequate staffing attending the training is not an acceptable excuse as it negatively affects those departments who make the effort to post a sign-up sheet to determine interest level, but were denied use of the facility on that date and time.

Also keep in mind that although your department may not have a sufficient number of interior firefighters and support/command personnel to conduct training using live fire, there are alternatives. The training can be modified to use artificial smoke or to practice other tactics that require less manpower. We ask is that you inform the lead instructor so that they can make adjustments prior to your arrival at the training center.

Under the original program, virtually all no show/no call policy violations were waived after excuses were submitted when the policy was previously in effect prior to 2006.

## Revenue Generation

**Q.** Does this mean that fire departments and other emergency services agencies will be charged for use of the County facilities and instructors?

**A.** No. A significant demand already exists for utilizing our county's state-of-the-art facilities and professional instructors and prior to this resolution; there was no mechanism in place to reap the financial benefits of offering these training opportunities to outside ventures.

**Q.** Where does the generated revenue go to?

**A.** The revenue generated from renting our facilities and instructors goes directly back into the Fire Safety Division operating budget for purchasing, maintaining, repairing and replacing props, equipment, facilities and supplies and/or providing additional training and recruitment opportunities. This positively impacts our abilities to improve our facilities and training services.