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Ipsos Public Affairs

Public Release Date: May 19th, 2009, 9:00 am EST

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A Majority of Fire Departments Believe that if the Economic Crisis Continues, It Will Negatively Affect Their Ability to Serve their Community

Over Half Already Feel that Their Funding Is Insufficient, and Roughly a Quarter of Departments Say They Are Lacking Adequate Equipment and Training

New York, NY – Fire departments across the country face a variety of challenges – from budget cuts to staffing issues – and the current economic crisis is only exacerbating these problems, according to a new study conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs on behalf of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. The study, "Supporting Safer Communities: A National Firefighter Survey," found that a majority of departments (56%) fear that if the economic crisis continues into next year, that it will negatively impact their ability to serve their community. Fortunately, though, only 17% of departments feel that the quality of service that they provide has declined due to the economy.

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll available online from February 13th to March 31st, 2009 on behalf of Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. A total of 17,475 firefighters from 9,449 fire service organizations across the country were interviewed. Firefighters were invited to complete the online survey via email invitations through various state, local and national fire service organizations and entities. The survey invitation was also promoted in fire service print trade journals, electronic newsletters and fire service blogs and Web sites.

The data included here is based on data at the department level rather than on all respondents. When multiple firefighters from the same fire service organization responded to the survey, the first individual to respond was selected on behalf of that department.

Lacking Adequate Funding

One of the most prevalent challenges that fire departments face is a lack of budget, as just a third of fire departments (34%) believe that they have sufficient funding that allows them to provide their services adequately, while over half of fire service organizations (54%) feel that they are under-funded. A majority of departments (56%) have had to increase their fundraising efforts and grant writing because of budget cutbacks.

Staffing and Recruitment Challenges

Staffing and recruiting are also becoming more difficult for nearly half of departments (48%) due to the economy. Volunteer fire departments are even more likely to say that the economic crisis has made it harder to recruit and/or retain personnel (55%).



Similarly, more than eight in ten (84%) feel that staffing, recruitment and retention is at least somewhat challenging, including three in ten (30%) who feel that this is an extremely challenging issue.

Inadequate Training and Equipment

In addition to the perceived lack of funding, many departments also feel that they are lacking sufficient equipment and training as well.

Though most departments (67%) report that they have enough training to enable them to do their jobs properly, nearly a quarter (22%) says that their training is insufficient. Departments are most likely to feel that they need more training with regard to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (76%), and over half (52%) report that they are not adequately trained to handle hazmat incidents.

However, when it comes to structural fires, 90% of fire departments believe they have adequate training and more than six in ten (62%) are confident in their fire service organization's disaster response capabilities.

In addition to needing further training in some areas, many departments also admit that they are ill-equipped. Nearly three quarters (75%) say that old or outdated equipment and gear is at least somewhat challenging. Four in ten departments (40%) report that they do not have protective equipment for all personnel to respond to wildland fires. This figure climbs to 56% when it comes to hazmat incidents. However, this is not because these resources are not needed; majorities of departments lacking this equipment say that they do in fact need it.

Additionally, a quarter of fire departments (25%) also say that they are not confident that they have the extrication equipment to extract accident victims from their vehicles in a timely manner and 13% do not have a thermal imaging camera at their disposal. Fortunately, nearly nine in ten departments (87%) do have at least one thermal imaging camera on hand.

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