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LAFD vs. CFD

By Richard Schulte

It's no secret that the City of Chicago has major budget problems. One of the proposals put forth to reduce spending by the City is to reduce the budget of the Chicago Fire Department. Given this, it would seem that a comparison between various large city fire departments would be of interest.

Such a comparison is provided in an article titled "*In Tough Times, [Chicago] Fire Department Untouched*" written by Dan Mihalopoulos and Michael Lipkin of the Chicago News Cooperative on May 13, 2011. The following is an excerpt from a table included in this article comparing the Chicago Fire Department with various large city fire departments in the United States:

Los Angeles Fire Department vs. the Chicago Fire Department

	Population (2010)	Number of Firefighters	Number of Fire Stations	Total Area Protected	Resident/Firefighter Ratio	Average Area Protected per Station
Los Angeles	3,792,621	3,588	108	470 square miles	1,057:1	4.35 square miles
Chicago	2,695,598	4,233	97	234 square miles	637:1	2.44 square miles
Ratios: LA/Chicago	1.407	0.8476	1.1134	2.0085	1.6593	1.7828

Source: "*In Tough Times, [Chicago] Fire Department Untouched*", Dan Mihalopoulos and Michael Lipkin, Chicago News Cooperative, May 13, 2011.

<http://www.chicagonewscoop.org/in-tough-times-fire-department-untouched-2/>

Based upon the above, it would appear that the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) does more with less when compared with the Chicago Fire Department (CFD). Of course, one major difference between Chicago and Los Angeles is the harsh winter weather in Chicago.

One of the major differences between these two departments is the LAFD's commitment to fire prevention. If the Chicago Fire Department will be downsized, the CFD can still provide a high level of safety for the citizens of Chicago by emphasizing fire prevention.

The key to the LAFD's fire prevention efforts is the installation of sprinkler protection. In other words, sprinkler protection can be used to offset reductions in staffing levels.

The concept of the use of sprinkler protection as a substitute for fire department staffing has been around since the 1970's. The data included in the article referenced above shows that the cities of San Jose and San Diego have been particularly aggressive in their use of sprinkler protection as a substitute for fire department staffing.

With more than 30 years of experience under our belts, we know that substituting sprinkler protection for increased fire department staffing works. Essentially, the concept is the substitution of private fire protection for public fire protection.

Sprinkler protection doesn't get overtime, nor does it require health and pension benefits. When a sprinkler is damaged, it is simply thrown in the brass recycling bucket and replaced. Over the long haul, providing private fire protection is less costly than providing public fire protection and the response time of sprinklers is far less than that of fire fighters.

Providing sprinkler protection in a building is like providing a fully staffed fire station in the building. If the substitution of sprinkler protection for fire fighters works in other cities, it certainly ought to work in the City of Chicago.

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