

Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association, Branch No. 30
Westfield Fire Department
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TOWNSHIP OF WESTFIELD DECREASES ITS FIRE DEPARTMENT MINIMUM MANNING, RESULTING IN THREE FIREFIGHTER INJURIES AND A POTENTIAL INCREASE IN INSURANCE PREMIUMS FOR RESIDENTS OF THE TOWNSHIP OF WESTFIELD

This Press Release is a follow up to the appearance made by Westfield Fire Department employees at the Council meeting on April 10, 2007. At that time, a protest was made by members of Westfield Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association Branch No. 30 that insufficient minimum manning levels in the Fire Department has caused dangerous safety conditions for the residents and Firefighters. Since no change as yet has occurred so that manning levels meet minimum safety standards, another protest has been made before the governing body of Westfield about manning on April 17.

The unsafe manning levels, reducing manpower from seven to six Firefighters have continued since November 2006.

The Township of Westfield and its Fire Chief have improperly reduced the minimum manpower from seven to six firefighters, which includes fire officers, during a given tour. This improper reduction in manpower has created, and continues to create, a safety hazard for the Township's Firefighters, the residents of the Township of Westfield and all contiguous municipalities where the Township's Firefighters, are required to provide mutual aid. Westfield provides mutual aid to the following municipalities: Cranford, Garwood, Roselle, Springfield, Scotch Plains and Mountainside, to name a few.

The reduction in manpower has led to three serious injuries of Firefighters in Westfield.

Specifically, on December 9, Firefighter Aldo Tammaro was seriously injured while using the jaws of life to extricate a victim who was involved in a car accident. This injury resulted because, Firefighter Tammaro was required to operate the jaws of life by himself, without the assistance of another Firefighter, which is standard practice, because there were not enough firefighters available to render aid to the victim of the incident because the Township only had six Firefighters on duty at the time of the incident. The lack of manpower is related to the fact that on December 9, 2006, two of the six firefighters were required to respond to a separate incident in Westfield. As a result of the injury, Firefighter Tammaro injured his lumbar muscle and also sustained a serious hernia injury, which required him to remain out of work for over two weeks.

During the same tour, on December 10, 2006 at 4:51 a.m., the Westfield Fire Department responded to a serious structural fire in Westfield. Because there were only six Firefighters on duty during that tour, only two engines were available to respond to the fire. There was not enough manpower to respond to the incident with a ladder truck. Approximately eighteen minutes after the incident occurred, a ladder truck responded to the scene, with mutual aid responding shortly thereafter. Prior to the arrival of the ladder truck, there were only six Firefighters available to respond to the scene. This lack of manpower, on December 10, 2006, was the direct result of serious injuries sustained at this fire scene by Firefighters Rick Jergens and Craig Manning. Firefighter Manning was required to undergo surgery for a tom muscle in his stomach. Firefighter Jurgens incurred an injury to his lower back. Firefighter Jergens, except for two shifts, remains out on sick leave because of the injuries. Firefighter Manning was out of work because of the injury for about 2 ½ months but is still being treated.

This minimum manning safety issue not only creates safety concerns for its Township's Firefighters and the citizens of the municipality, but is in violation of accepted National Fire Protection Association guidelines and standards which may result in increased insurance premiums for its residents. Specifically, if the ISO determines that the Township is not meeting its required obligations for the level of fire service provided to its citizens, the insurance rating for the Township could be increased, which will result in increased costs for residents of the Township.

Part of the manpower problem involves the National Fire Protection Association requirement that, at a fire scene, two Firefighters remain inside the burning premises and two Firefighters remain

outside the premises to allow for proper supervision and fire suppression. Typically, no Firefighter should enter a building unless this requirement is met. Firefighters, do however, enter these buildings without proper manpower, endangering the residents within the building and the Firefighters themselves.

The violations have been reviewed by the State agency known as the Office of Public Employees Occupational Safety & Health, and citations have been issued against Westfield for violation of the two in and two out rule.

The Westfield Fire Department protects the interests of approximately 30,000 residents.

Unfortunately the Chief of the Fire Department, Chief Kelly, is reported to have stated after the April 10 Council meeting, in an article in the *Westfield Leader*, that the manning of six is “higher than neighboring towns.” This is inaccurate. For instance, the population of Westfield is in excess of 30,000. As a result, it has two firehouses which must be fully manned and now are less than the adequate and previously accepted manning of seven. Public safety should not be jeopardized because of a desire not to fund full and safe manning. The neighboring community of Cranford only has approximately 20,000 residents and one firehouse. The neighboring community of Springfield only has a population of about 15,000, and one firehouse. Accordingly, manning in these communities can and is properly in some situations less than the required manning in Westfield.

Contrary to the comments of Chief Kelly, proper manning can avoid injuries and reduce absences from work due to such injuries.

We expect to meet on April 20 at 9 a.m. with municipal officials and representatives from the State FMBA, attorneys and others, to try to resolve these issues.