

July 2009 Newsletter

Year 4 Wrap Up

Look At Yourself - Then Make a Change



I have worked with hope that, as your Courage to Be Safe(sm) Program Manager, I could inject seeds of change into your hearts and minds to prevent line-of-duty deaths to firefighters. We have made great progress but this year's Fire Act Grant is coming to a close. It's time again to hope. Hope that the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and the Everyone Goes Home® campaign receives news that our Fire Act Grant is renewed so that we can continue to persevere. Hope is a word used so often. When the new presidential administration took office, we "hoped" that President Obama and his administration could reverse the

problems our nation faces. Also, when we see a new fire chief, fire officer or new member walk through the door - we "hope" he/she will be good for the organization.

» [Everyone Goes Home® Program - Year 4 Summary](#)

» [Newsletter Update: Editor's Year 4 Wrap-Up](#)

Vulnerability Assessments and the Impact on Firefighter Safety

How can you know where you are going in terms of safety and culture change if you do not know where you are at? As a leader in your organization, can you accurately quantify your risk level for a possible firefighter injury or line-of-duty death?

All Fires Go Out Eventually

So, when did it sink in with you that you had been given the position of department safety officer? Did you volunteer for it, or was it assigned? Has it really sunk in yet at all? I had been given the position several years before something rather extraordinary happened.

Think About It

I understand the fire service is one of the most complex organizations in the world. The fire service does a multitude of tasks; from emergency medical, to fire suppression, to technical rescue and even our favorite, hazmat. As I sit and read this list of the numerous things that the fire service does, I have to believe that as each of these domains were added to our job descriptions, it must have been accepted, or at least understood why it was brought into the many firehouses across our country.

Why Can't We, As Firefighters, GET IT!!!!!!

As a state advocate for the Everyone Goes Home® program, I was asked by a department and a good friend to come speak during the 2009 Fire/EMS Safety, Health and Survival Week. I was very impressed with how this department has made the steps to improve and adopt the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives.



INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT

Spotlighting one of the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives each month

Initiative #3 - Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management with incident management at all levels, including strategic, tactical, and planning responsibilities.

More on Initiative #3:

- [Preplanning for Your Life](#)
- [Emergency Management in the Major Tourist Environment](#)
- [Pre-Planning: An Important Part of Fire Prevention](#)
- [Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives Research Database](#)

More Information: [16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives](#) | **Share a Resource:** editor@everyonegoeshome.com

WEB WATCHING

[NFPA Journal: Lightweight Construction Meets Fire](#)

[CareerCast.com: Firefighter Ranks as the Most-Demanding Job](#)

FEATURED Events

Safety Through Leadership 1 & 2

Firehouse Expo - Baltimore, MD
July 25, 2009

Read More: » [About the Event](#)

Behavioral Science, Health, and Firefighter Safety: The NFFF Behavioral Health Initiative

Firehouse Expo - Baltimore, MD
July 25, 2009

Read More: » [About the Event](#)

Proceeds to Benefit
the National
Fallen Firefighters
Foundation

**Good Times,
Great Cause!**



Find Out More: www.doverspeedway.com/nfff09

Everyone Goes Home®: Where Are We Now?

Fire-Rescue International 2009 - Dallas, TX
August 25, 2009

Read More: » [About the Event](#)

Do you have an suggestion for the newsletter? Tell us about it! Please send your comments, articles, or news about what your department is doing to keep firefighters safe to editor@everyonegoeshome.com.

Look At Yourself - Then Make a Change

Robert Colameta

National Program Manager - *Courage to Be Safe(sm)*

I have worked with hope that, as your *Courage to Be Safe(sm)* Program Manager, I could inject seeds of change into your hearts and minds to prevent line-of-duty deaths to firefighters. We have made great progress but this year's Fire Act Grant is coming to a close. It's time again to hope. Hope that the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and the Everyone Goes Home® campaign receives news that our Fire Act Grant is renewed so that we can continue to persevere. Hope is a word used so often. When the new presidential administration took office, we "hoped" that President Obama and his administration could reverse the problems our nation faces. Also, when we see a new fire chief, fire officer or new member walk through the door - we "hope" he/she will be good for the organization. Over the short course of the *Courage to Be Safe(sm)* training program, we hope that our message will be so influential that every firefighter would see the importance of integrating the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives into their lives and avoid actions that lead to a line-of-duty death.

I have heard many reasons why our 16 initiatives are simply too much to deal with. I have heard that there are more important issues. All of these distractions are a form of peer pressure. Organizational peer pressure is designed to lull us into doubt about our mission. Let's take a moment and renew our advocacy for the [16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives](#). There are 16, so that means virtually any organization, whether with adequate funding or no additional funds, can select an initiative(s), develop them into an action plan, deploy a plan within an organization and then begin changing its path. They are valid, timely and important to the strength of a safety oriented organization. We know that the leading cause of preventable death to firefighters remains to be a heart attack and the second leading cause is apparatus related. Let me start with the latter.

Driving Apparatus & Seat Belts

We must operate apparatus with a higher level of situational awareness, stop at intersections and absolutely wear seat belts. It remains an absolute truth that the success of the seat belt campaign is solely depended on you. This issue does not require a union, a fire chief, attorneys or negotiations. With the seat belt issue, YOU reach over your shoulder and click-in. Why do we feel so uncomfortable wearing a seat belt? We are firefighters and have often seen the results of not wearing one. I think this is also a form of station level peer pressure. If the chief or company officer does not lead by example, what can you do? If you click-it and the officer and crew does not, why are you viewed as the person "rocking the boat," so to speak? Everything I have read, studied, and tried to emulate in life relative to creating change, states that change starts with each of us as individuals. I did not grow up a huge Michael Jackson fan, but one song that resonates with me is titled "Man in the Mirror."

Primary lyric:

I'm Starting With The Man In The Mirror - I'm asking Him to Change His Ways
And No Message Could Have - Been Any Clearer
If You Wanna Make the World - A Better Place - Take a Look at Yourself,
And Then Make A Change.

If you are a company officer, chief officer or senior firefighter with a following, then you owe it to your members to lead by example. If we want to make the organization a better place let's take a look at ourselves and then make a change.

Health and Wellness

This is a bit more of a challenge. Struggling with our health and wellness needs to be dealt with carefully and with medical supervision. I know that this issue may be more complicated when it comes to our working status but the alternative is sudden death around the age of 54. The statistics prove that. Rather than give up firefighting, we risk giving up our lives and leaving behind families. I struggle with the issue of weight even though I see my doctor semi-annually. Even I find ways to lull myself back into a status quo health and wellness mode. After all, odds are, I will not be an early death statistic since I just turned 55. If I continue to believe I am immune to sudden death as an overweight active line firefighter then I am only fooling myself. What do we do about it? That question leads me back to the lyric.

Here is how I would like to end this season as your *Courage to Be Safe(sm)* Program Manager, who struggles with this particular issue, like many of my peers. Do you have a competitive spirit? State Farm Insurance is sponsoring a national health and wellness campaign called the [50 million pound challenge](#). If my advice to you is to look in the mirror and then make a change then I too must set an example. Here is my challenge - Join my 50 million pound weight loss team called team "First Responder." Collectively, we can live the example and in addition support each other along the way. Our team will be ranked against the hundreds of other teams already participating. Can we lose enough weight to make the top 100 teams or strive to make the top 50 teams by the end of this year? How about the top 10 by this time next year? As my children were growing up, I used to tell them that "to try and to fail is to succeed but to never try at all is not knowing what could have been" (author unknown) If you can join me on this challenge please register at <http://www.50millionpounds.com/>
[First Responders](#)

Everyone Goes Home® - Year 4 Summary

As year 4 of the Everyone Goes Home® program of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation winds down, I am compelled to write a few words to summarize and thank. This year has been a great experience for me as I have learned a great deal about the Everyone Goes Home® program and the commitment that many have to its most simplistic mission - reducing line-of-duty deaths (LODD). I continue to meet many people with a passion to work towards the needed improvement regarding the LODD record within the United States fire service. While we are no where near our intended goal, I remain encouraged by our increased outreach and the growing awareness of the [16 Life Safety Initiatives](#). Clearly, progress is being made though we still have a ways to go. I continually remind myself of two things - we can't change the statistics overnight and we can't get complacent. Continued diligence is needed to send our message to more and more firefighters.

In the past year, there were many successes that will have a positive impact in the coming years. The Safety Summit held in Emmitsburg in March received great reviews by all the attendees. This year's training kit will be mailed to every department in the U.S. in mid-July. It is full of great training aids designed to address the areas most affecting firefighter safety. It will also be featured in the opening session of Firehouse Expo in Baltimore. The advocate program continues to learn and grow as it works toward developing a stronger grassroots effort to reach every firefighter with the Everyone Goes Home® message. The *Courage to Be Safe(sm)* program and our website both receive strong support and offer great resources to firefighters everywhere.

There are other components of the Everyone Goes Home® program, but none would be significant without the dedicated team members who work tirelessly on behalf of the program and National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. I especially wish to thank the following:

- Chairman Dennis Compton and the entire Board of Directors for their support and direction.
- Executive Director Ron Siarnicki for his guidance, leadership, and passion.
- Charles Jaster and Becky Nusbaum for their knowledge of the budget and commitment to the program and their patience with me.
- George Haddow and Jane Bullock for their unique perspective on the program.
- Billy Hayes for his leadership with the advocates program.
- Bob Colameta for his dedication to the *Courage to Be Safe(sm)* program.
- Jenni McClelland for her outstanding work with the website.
- Chief Shadd Whitehead for his stewardship of this year's kit.
- All the advocates for their contributions.
- The entire staff in Emmitsburg and Crofton. They are all extremely dedicated to the cause and always willing to help.
- Lastly to Linda Stone for keeping me on track and focused.

There is no doubt that I have missed someone but I hope that everyone knows how appreciative I am. I am hopeful that we will be successful with our year 5 grant application and continue with our work.

Sincerely,
Rich Marinucci
Everyone Goes Home® Program Manager

Newsletter Update: Editor's Year 4 Wrap-Up



Year 4 has been a successful year for the Everyone Goes Home® Newsletter. The number of subscribers has continued to increase and feedback has been very positive. We have maintained and added new contract writers to continuously bring original stories and articles to the newsletter.

As Editor, I have seen the newsletter grow and that is definitely a testament to the dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm of everyone involved. I would like to thank Rich Marinucci and Linda Stone for always being there to help ensure that we put out a great newsletter that truly reflects the Everyone Goes Home• Program. I also would like to thank the writers and contributors. Your ideas, stories, and heart have truly made an impact.

Recently I have had to make a very tough decision. As life does, mine is in a transition point and I have decided that this will be my last newsletter as the Editor. I cannot describe how much I have enjoyed my year-and-a-half as Editor. I have made many wonderful friends and I have learned so much. I truly thank you for allowing me to be a part of this wonderful organization. If you would like to reach me, my personal email is

junderwoodphoto@yahoo.com.

Vulnerability Assessments and the Impact on Firefighter Safety

By Captain Ryan Pyle

How can you know where you are going in terms of safety and culture change if you do not know where you are at? As a leader in your organization, can you accurately quantify your risk level for a possible firefighter injury or line-of-duty death? (LODD) This may sound like a daunting task or to some a needless activity; an activity that would eat up valuable manpower and time. In speaking with my colleagues, it appears to me that the vast majority of the fire service is stuck in the mindset that...if it has not happened in our department then we must be doing the right things in regards to a proactive approach to safety. That may be true, or maybe you or your respective department has been lucky thus far. I am not willing to take that enormous gamble and it is my hope that the issues discussed in this article will give the reader a framework for a conducting a vulnerability or risk assessment for their department. It is my belief that it is beneficial to cite an applicable Firefighter Life Safety Initiative in the articles that I write for this newsletter. To me, the obvious choice for this piece is initiative number three, which states: Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management with incident management at all levels, including strategic, tactical, and planning responsibilities.

Not a New Concept

Vulnerability assessments have become increasingly popular in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy. In light of that, a good portion of the more current research out there relates to security threats. However, there are numerous parallels that can be drawn between the frameworks that are utilized for specific security threats to a particular entity and those that could be utilized for the fire service. In researching this article, I located several definitions for Vulnerability Assessments. Most of the definitions were specific to the respective agency for which it was intended. However, I found a definition that simply states "A vulnerability assessment is the process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing (or ranking) the vulnerabilities in a system" (Heck, 2008). I believe that this simple definition could be applicable to many facets of a fire service assessment. I strongly recommend that as a leader in your department and community, that you look at your situation and begin a systematic analysis based on available resources and subsequently address the issues in an effort to minimize risk.

Organizing a Framework for Vulnerability Assessments in the Fire Service

"Vulnerability begins with the notion of risk and risk is characterized by a known or unknown probability distribution of events" (Alwang, et al, 2001). In order to effectively organize a vulnerability assessment for your department, there are a number of issues that must be identified. In the upcoming section, I will discuss numerous areas that directly affect firefighter safety. It is up to each individual department to assign the importance level of each system.

Ask anyone who knows me and they will tell you that I have an affinity for flowcharts. I believe they simply and accurately give you a framework to follow. As I typically do when addressing an issue, I visualize a flowchart as a framework for gathering data and implementing a project. Consider the following in respect to assessing your vulnerability to suffering a firefighter injury or line-of-duty death;

Identify ⇨ Prioritize ⇨ Analyze ⇨ Gather Outcomes ⇨ Develop Plan**Areas of Assessment**

There is simply no way to adequately address every possible system. I urge you to assemble a list that you and your department feel are important to a strong vulnerability assessment. The following points are not listed in any particular order and are not intended to be exclusive to every department, however, they are all or should all be utilized by every department in the nation.

Staffing:

- Does your staffing adequately support firefighter safety?
- What are you doing to assure that adequate staffing is a priority for years to come?
- Are funds being budgeted to maintain adequate staffing levels in the face of tough economic times?
- If you are not adequately staffed, are you prepared for the consequences? If not, are developing a plan to address this issue?

Response:

- Is your overall response to structure fires adequate?
- Are you getting enough help to insure firefighter safety?
- If you are not, are you aggressively looking at mutual aid agreements or alternative means of adequate responses to structure fires or other manpower intensive emergencies?

Departmental Policies:

- Do your standard operating guidelines support firefighter safety?
- Are you analyzing your guidelines on a regular basis to insure that they support firefighter safety?
- Is every member of your department intimately familiar with the guidelines and how they relate to safety?

Training:

- Do you have a regimented training program that supports firefighter safety?
- Is every member of your department committed to training in an effort to decrease risk?
- Is your training division adequately funded? If not, what are you doing to secure funding for the future?

Equipment:

- Is your equipment designed and purchased with firefighter safety in the forefront?
- Is your apparatus designed and maintained with firefighter safety in mind?
- Are you making plans for a revolving apparatus and equipment replacement plan?

Culture:

- Does your department demand that every member foster a culture that supports firefighter safety?
- Does your staff value culture as an integral part of its operations?
- Does your every member embrace cultural change and its impact on the future of the fire service? If not, what are you, as a leader doing to bring this to the forefront of your organization?

If I were ranking this list, culture would be heads and shoulders above the rest. It sets a foundation every operation that occurs within the fire department. Culture dictates the tempo in which your department and personnel operate

Accountability:

- Is your department actively using NIMS as the predominant accountability system for emergencies?
- If not, set a strict deadline for implementation and provide for intensive training on the subject.

The previous bullet points are just the tip of the iceberg. The list was compiled to give you, the reader issues to ponder. As you embark on vulnerability assessments of your department, there should be many more points and each section should be addressed using a consistent measuring tool similar to the flowchart mentioned above.

Closing Argument

Vulnerability assessments are being used in almost every major government agency. While they are typically grand in scale and extremely in-depth, there are varying degrees of assessments. You simply have to find a framework that suits your needs and finish it to completion. I believe that we, as a service, are at a perfect time in our history to honestly assess our situations in an effort to reduce needless line-of-duty deaths. I challenge each of you to take on this daunting challenge. While it could expose deficiencies in your organization, it will undoubtedly pay huge dividends as you embark on the future. Stay proactive and safe.

References:

Alwang, Jeffrey and Jorgensen, Steen L. and Siegel, Paul B. *Vulnerability: A View From Different Disciplines*. June 2001.

Heck, N (2008). *Best Practices for Vulnerability Assessments*. [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved <http://74.125.95.132/search?q=cache:ZsiplZmhd4IJ:www.purdue.edu>



Ryan Pyle is a Fire Captain at Station 71 in Shawnee Kansas. Ryan has been a part of the department for thirteen years. He holds an Associate of Arts degree in Fire Administration, a Bachelors degree in Management and Human Relations, and a Masters degree from the Edwin Stene School of Public Administration at the University of Kansas. Ryan is a graduate of the 2007 Virginia Fire Officers Academy, which is a program that includes leadership values associated with the *Everyone Goes Home*® Life Safety Initiatives Program. Ryan has been accepted into the Executive Fire Officer Program and will begin in September.

Think About It

Rick Best

Everyone Goes Home® Ohio Advocate

Essay submitted as a part of the Courage to Be Safe (SM) Trainers Essay Contest

I understand the fire service is one of the most complex organizations in the world. The fire service does a multitude of tasks; from emergency medical, to fire suppression, to technical rescue and even our favorite, hazmat. As I sit and read this list of the numerous things that the fire service does, I have to believe that as each of these domains were added to our job descriptions, it must have been accepted, or at least understood why it was brought into the many firehouses across our country.

You see, pride, courage, tradition, integrity and a strong work ethic are what the fire service is based on, and are the reason why we were given these tasks. It is also the reason why at two o'clock in the morning, a mother will hand you, a total stranger, her only child. This is also why families will leave their home and let half-a-dozen strangers go into that home where the families' most prized possessions are, and to know that they do not have to worry.

These are the good things we do and why we do them. I understand why we do all of these things. But, on the other hand, the same reasons that make us great are some of the same reasons why we have had brothers and sisters lost in the line of duty. Tradition is one of those reasons. The definition of tradition is a statement, belief or custom handed down in a non-written form from generation to generation. I think everyone would agree that this is the fire service; it is your station. I am not telling you we need to replace tradition. I am not insinuating that at all. What I am saying is, we need to think about it the next time a new guy/girl shows up and all they are told is to shut up and do the house chores. What happens when this new person sees something unsafe, will they speak up? Or let it go and hope no one gets hurt or even worse.

I mentioned earlier that we should not replace tradition and that is true. As a modern fire service, I feel we owe it to the firefighters who created the traditions through blood, sweat, and tears, and especially the ones who have made the ultimate sacrifice. We also owe it to ourselves, our families and the up and coming men and women of the fire service. We need to gather our courage and change the one traditional aspect of the fire service, the one tradition that no one knows why we do it that way. The tradition I am speaking of is the 3948 on duty fire fighter deaths from 1977 thru 2008 (USFA stats). Let me make myself perfectly clear, this is not a tradition that should be accepted, however, it has been. Everyone needs to come together and take a stand for yourself, your families your fellow fire fighters and their family. Let's create a tradition of everyone going home.

I want to leave you with one last thought, Confucius once wrote: Only the wisest and stupidest of men never change.

All Fires Go Out Eventually

**By Battalion Chief Steven D. Nash
Solon, Ohio Fire & Rescue Services**

So, when did it sink in with you that you had been given the position of department safety officer? Did you volunteer for it, or was it assigned? Has it really sunk in yet at all? I had been given the position several years before something rather extraordinary happened. Years prior, I had been on a committee within our city to determine the future of our Fire/EMS department. We were squarely in the middle of the largest expansion we would ever see. Several outside consultants were also brought into the process. We were to go from a single-career station operation to a three-station operation, covering about 25 square miles. All systems were go for having 21 people assigned to a shift with a minimum on-duty of about 15. Soon after the third station had been opened, the fire chief came under great scrutiny for the large overtime budget. The city administration never finished hiring the personnel we had all planned for, so, there was an abundance of overtime to make up the deficit. In addition, the chief was ordered to reduce manpower and cut his budget (sound familiar?). In an effort to do this, our command car, the glue that keeps things together, would be the first thing to go.

Now, being the department safety officer, this greatly concerned me. I asked for a meeting between the chief, the mayor, the human resources director and myself. I came armed with information: ISO requirements, NFPA Standards, ICMA efficiency reports. In the end, the administration asked, point blank, how many people we would need on duty to operate efficiently (though still below standards). I replied 14. He said you'll get 13. We are merely but a small piece of the proverbial municipal pie. No amount of feet stomping or fist pounding could change their minds. That was the end of the meeting.

First, I was rather stunned when we left city hall. I even attempted to resign the position of safety officer purely out of frustration, but the fire chief refused to accept my resignation. I said, "Fine, but please understand that from this day forward, we will start doing things differently than we have in the past." He said he understood, and to his credit, he has held true to his word.

My journey as safety officer did not truly start until that day. It was as if someone reached inside of me and turned on a light switch. I started culling over calls we'd had in the past...the risks we had taken, the firefighters that had been injured, and the grace that had fallen upon us because we had not killed anyone yet. I also thought of the many buildings that were torn down afterwards, despite our best efforts.

Being a safety officer in the current / future fire service means doing everything within your power to make certain your crew is able to return to work the next shift. To do this you must cultivate, not only in yourself, but in all of your members, the ability to perform a rapid risk / benefit analysis. Of course, if there are people hanging out of the second floor window with smoke pushing out hard behind them, all bets are off. You do anything humanly possible to rescue them. However, if the owner of the home is holding the door open for you stating that everyone is out, and "the fire is in there!" what do you do? Honestly, most of us would charge right in. That's just the way we have always done it. Well guess what? It's time to rethink that last part. Dead heroes tell no tales. If you cannot honestly say to the last person on your roster that there is no building in your district that is worth their life, then you had better rethink your current position. If somebody's "stuff" is that valuable, then they should have installed a fire sprinkler system long before the fire occurred.

You see, fires do not burn like they used to. Building materials are becoming more "lightweight" (meaning they fail faster), and interior furnishings are becoming more synthetic and less natural (meaning they burn hotter and

faster). Our gear is the best it's ever been, and can take us closer to the fire. What is the odd part of this equation?

Why do I tell you my story? I do so in hopes it reaches at least a few of you who have been riding the fence and struggling with tough decisions. I do so because someone might need to tell you that it's okay to look at things outside of the traditional strategic and tactical modes many of us have been immersed in over the past several decades. If that door is being held open for us, it's decision time. Do we rush in because it's what we do, or because we think the owner expects us to, or maybe because (I'll admit) it's fun? Sorry, none of these is a good enough reason. It must be the right balance of risk vs. benefit. Lives first (ours included)...always. Have you ever heard the old adage "fools rush in where wise men (and women) fear to tread"? Granted, this decision usually lies somewhere in between and is not so cut and dried. That's why we need to dig deeper into fire and smoke dynamics and take a look at what is happening to these buildings.

So if you are in need of a catalyst, or starting point, I have the perfect place. Underwriters Laboratories has produced, what I believe to be, the best educational piece for the modern fire service ever. It is truly an eye opener. It will soon be mandatory in my department that all members watch it. The link to their site is <http://www.uluniversity.us/home.aspx>, look for the tab on the right titled "Structural Stability of Engineered Lumber in Fire Conditions."

It's not all about you, the safety officer; it's also about building a team that understands, and is educated in 21st century strategy and tactics. And just remember this: All fires go out eventually, but we can't make one of our crew members "un-dead." Think about it.

Steve Nash entered the fire service in 1981 as a cadet at the age of 16. He has worked for several departments from volunteer, through combination to career. He was a paramedic for twenty of these years, a shift supervisor for a regional hazardous materials team for about ten, and a State Certified Fire Safety Inspector for nearly twenty five. Recently, Steve joined the group based in Washington D.C. known as [Vision 20/20](#). His task force is working on the enhancement of fire prevention within the fire industry. He holds a Bachelor Degree in Fire and Safety Engineering and is currently in charge of operations for "B" shift as a Battalion Chief for the Solon, Ohio Fire & Rescue Services. In addition, Steve was recently awarded his first U.S. Patent on a firefighter safety device. Steve can be reached at Bc129@sbcglobal.net

Why Can't We, As Firefighters, GET IT!!!!!!

By Captain Vincent Curry

Everyone Goes Home® Pennsylvania State Advocate

Originally Posted on FirefighterNation.com

As a state advocate for the Everyone Goes Home® program, I was asked by a department and a good friend to come speak during the 2009 Fire/EMS Safety, Health and Survival Week. I was very impressed with how this department has made the steps to improve and adopt the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives. Before the presentation started my friend and fellow instructor gave me a tour of his department and we got to talking. He said that a few of his neighboring departments probably wouldn't show up. I asked why and he said one department said "We had that class before" and another one stated, "That's our drinking night." That kind of hit a nerve for me knowing that some things seem not to change until there is a LODD or until it is a standard that is mandatory.

Over my 17 years of fire service I have seen a lot of unsafe acts on and off the fire ground. When I was the green horn probie, my Captain at the time told me training and safety are the key to the fire service. From that day forward, I decided to train all the time and I continually make sure that my crew and I are always safe so Everyone Goes Home.

Comments like "It's our drinking night" don't fly. So what if you had the class years ago, things and times change and you just might learn something new; especially from a different instructor. Why can't we, as firefighters, GET IT? Times have changed and the "do as I say, not as I do" motto doesn't sell anymore. Every year we lose over 100 firefighters in the line of duty but the number of fires we run has gone down. Technology gives us better equipment to be safe but we still hit 100+ LODDs a year. Most of us seem to accept that and most of us still think it won't happen to me. Well I can't accept that number and I know it can happen to me. I have lost several friends in the line of duty over the years, with the most recent this past August. For me, it's a reality.

We all need to understand change has come and it is going to continue. We have to adopt the changes and the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives and become safer and better firefighters, officers, and chiefs. Forget the drinking night until after training. If you had it before take it again and learn something new. Why are some of us afraid to lead from the front and get our departments on track with the cultural change in the fire service?

You don't have to be an officer to be a LEADER. I have heard a lot of excuses from "Well, I am just a firefighter, not an officer, I cannot help change anything;" to "Well, I just do as my officer says, no matter what, they are the officer;" or "I am a volunteer officer, I need their votes for next year." When I read about you because your officer said "run into a vacant structure because wimps only stay outside," then you become a statistic and not a solution to the problem. Officers, if I read that you didn't keep your crew in line and let them fight a car fire without an air pack and then one of them gets hurt or becomes a LODD because you were afraid you wouldn't get their votes next year to stay as an officer, all I will have to say is YOU JUST DO NOT GET IT!

Remember if we get hurt or lose our life in the line of duty, it doesn't just affect us, it effects the department, our family, and our friends. So, the next time you have the chance to make a difference so that Everyone Goes Home, DO IT. If you have the choice to train or go drinking, go to the training. A trained and safe firefighter is still the key to the fire service. But a firefighter, officer, or chief willing to adopt change, safety, and training is the master key to the fire service and is a great thing in the changing fire service. Stay safe, do the right thing, every day is a training day, and make sure that above all, Everyone Goes Home!

