Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VI

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Identify methods to enhance research, training, education, and proficiencies.
2. Differentiate between short-term and long-term objectives for human resource plans.
3. Analyze recent legal cases applicable to future trends in the fire service.
4. Determine which of the 16 life safety initiatives are applicable to the fire department’s role in budgeting and financial management.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 6:
Human Resources

Chapter 7:
Legal Issues

*How fire chiefs can be better writers*
[https://www.firechief.com/2016/04/07/how-fire-chiefs-can-be-better-writers/](https://www.firechief.com/2016/04/07/how-fire-chiefs-can-be-better-writers/)

Unit Lesson

This unit familiarizes the student with changes and future trends that almost certainly will affect chief fire officers.

One of the most common and popular trends in the fire service and business world today is communicating in an electronic world. Some firefighters may use desktop computers, a notebook computer, an iPad, a blackberry, or any other wide variety of handheld personal devices. Regardless, they must be aware of some of the dangers of electronic communication.

The modern environment is forcing many chief officers to mull over policies regarding topics that were not even a consideration just a few short years ago. As a chief fire officer, you have a responsibility to yourself, and your organization, to stay abreast of developing trends that have an impact on communication, information technology, changing demographics, generational changes, etc.

Education and training is another area of change and emerging trends. The importance of education and training in the fire service cannot be overstated. The tools and opportunity for training and education in the fire service has grown much over the years. The use of technology and its rapidly advancing ability to provide a variety of learning venues has created a great number of opportunities to learn. With the help of technology, traditional information on training and education has improved dramatically over the years. Not so long ago, the mention of online training and education within a fire department would be expected to receive many negative comments. Although this subject still gets negative comments, more firefighters and chief officers are receptive to nontraditional methods of training and education. Technology has become a critical part of professional development at all positions within the fire service. Chief fire officers should help ensure these opportunities are appropriately applied whenever possible.

Today, there exist several levels of college degrees. Today’s fire fighters may conveniently participate in programs and complete certificates and various levels of college degrees. Technology also enhances the opportunity for chief officers to maintain proficiencies. Fire officers III and IV must maintain proficiency in many areas. Many states currently require continuing education and fire suppression. The IAFC sponsors a
training component which focuses on technology, information technologies, data management, strategic planning, and leading change within your organization and the fire service.

Changes and trends also affect personnel management and human resources. Chief fire officers may consider asking questions to anticipate the needs of their organization and prepare a strategic human resource management plan. Considering this, economic changes must also be considered. Chief fire officers must consider the current status of the local, state, and national economy. They should also consider the economic status in the next three, five, and ten years. Chief officers must plan for any anticipated adjustments and allow for different resources to prepare for the change. Within some states, changes in the state budget may directly affect a fire department’s ability to meet the training needs of employees. Also, a significant budget reduction will require downsizing, and possibly layoffs. These major cuts will directly affect the fire department’s ability to accomplish its mission. The human resource plan must contain short and long-term objectives. It must also contain strategies to meet those objectives. Many departments plan to accomplish these objectives by forming partnerships with other organizations. For example, some fire departments will conduct training together. This can be very cost-saving. It can also be an advantage by increasing networking and exposure to other methods of performing tasks.

Although some firefighters may say “the fire service is not a business, it’s a public service”. However, many experienced fire chiefs know differently. Being a business, a fire department is also subject to being affected by changes and trends within the local business society. For example, the increase or decrease in industry development within communities can contribute to a fluctuation of employment opportunities and populations.

The fire service is also experiencing changes and trends among legal and hiring issues. The city of New Haven, Connecticut, recently encountered a legal matter involving promotion tests. The department decided to throw out fire lieutenants promotion tests after the test had been given, and even scored. The attempt was to avoid a potential disparate impact lawsuit. The department’s action was overruled by the U.S. Supreme Court. Other recent legal matters include claims of discrimination against applicants from ethnic groups, sexual harassment complaints against supervisors, and hiring practices, etc.

Fire departments also experience changes in the responsibility of code enforcement and public education. For a municipality to accomplish the job of actually making a community safe, there must be coordination and teamwork. Everyone must know the thoughts of others involved to support efforts to build a safe and effective building. The chief fire officer must document all conversations with a memo, or other method, that summarizes the issues discussed and the outcome. This can help avoid memory lapses causing problems in the future. Chief fire officers are becoming more and more involved in obligate education. Some departments implement a chief officer position to manage fire and life safety education. Even though a fire and life safety division may not have a chief fire officer as his or her top staff member, this responsibility may be delegated to a chief fire officer in administration or fire prevention.

Public fire safety education has become an even more crucial part of all fire department’s mission. The goal of public fire safety education is to bring a message and knowledge to the residents that will allow them to be safer. This also includes efforts by the fire department to control the incidence of fire. Many fire departments have implemented a chief officer position to lead the fire safety education bureau. Some chief officers who lead such bureaus may have previous experience in fire safety education and some may not. It may be a common practice to promote personnel from the fire suppression bureau into this position. Although it may be uncommon, some fire departments may select a person to lead the fire safety education group, one who only has fire safety education experience. On the other hand, some fire departments may select a chief officer to head the overall fire prevention efforts. In addition to public fire safety education, this may include fire inspection, code enforcement, and fire investigation. There are many changes within society and trends that may affect how fire departments deliver their fire safety education services. One such change is demographics. The diverse demographics of each jurisdiction may vary. It may be necessary for departments to build or purchase fire safety programs that target a specific demographic group. Also, the personnel working within the fire safety education bureau may represent various generational groups. Each group has its own unique characteristics and limitations. The chief fire officer must ensure that generational strengths are matched with the appropriate customer group. This will help to achieve maximum effectiveness for fire safety education messages and courses.
The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard addresses the chief officer’s role in influencing community leaders:

- 1021-6.4.6

**How students can apply this lesson to their department:**

- Students should seek additional training in areas of diversity, organizational culture, and generations in the workplace, etc.
- Students should also keep current with fire service journals and other publications. These publications often have excellent articles relating to emerging changes and trends that affect the fire service.

**Suggested Reading**

**Chapter 1:**
Life Safety Initiatives, p. 7


- Click [here](https://firechief.com) to access a PDF on Setting Smart Goals

- *How fire chiefs can be better writers* [https://www.firechief.com/2016/04/07/how-fire-chiefs-can-be-better-writers/](https://www.firechief.com/2016/04/07/how-fire-chiefs-can-be-better-writers/)


**Key Terms**

Refer to the key terms within your assigned reading in your textbook.