A FIRE AUTHORITY AND YOU

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PROS AND CONS

Pros:

• Versatile: not a “one size fits all” solution
• Doesn’t require a public vote
• Easier to modify or dissolve
• Can be implemented in stages
• Cost savings through:
  - Eliminating duplication
  - Economies of scale
• Overcomes resistance to mutual aid
  - Typical firefighter: “meh...we can handle it”
CONS:

- More moving parts: boards, budgets, audits, insurance policies
- Legal basis not as clear to the public
- Needs to be done for the right reasons
  - “what’s in it for us” vs “the right thing to do”
- Overcoming different cultures will be an issue
- It’s not the solution to a bad relationship
THINGS TO DO IN PREPARATION

• Boards must be on board (no pun intended)
• Volunteers need to be supportive
• Union buy-in and commitment is vital
• Share your vision
• Be transparent
• Meet with any dissenter
• Do your research.....Consider an outside look at the proposal
• Have a plan for change
AS YOU IMPLEMENT

- Participation on committees brings ownership and commitment
- Sometimes it’s easier if everybody has to change
- Be willing to redirect things that aren’t working
- Mission, vision, and values…..
  - Up front, or let them develop?
- Policies and SOG’s
- Branding is important
  - Give them the t-shirts
THERE WILL BE CASUALTIES

Strive to obtain commitment to the new organization, not just buy-in. Those who are neutral are potential terrorists to your efforts. If they are outwardly terrorists, provide a means for them to gracefully depart the organization and recognize them for their service.
This is potentially an opportunity to start with a clean slate and set the direction of the organization.

You need to get the right people on the bus and put them in the right seats on the bus.

If you bring on board the wrong people or place them in the wrong seat you will lose credibility and you’ve just created a terrorist to your efforts……
WHY NOT JUST MERGE?

- One problem with mergers is that they tend to happen all at once with little debate. Two organizations slammed together create animosity and contention within the organizations and spread to the communities.

- The Fire Authority model has allowed time for compromise, knowing that if things didn't work out, they could be undone as easily as they were put together. This feature takes the wind out of the sails of those factions with a "my way or the highway" attitude and fosters compromise and cooperation.

- There will always be the grumbling minority, but they are less likely to gain supporters and momentum.
FIRE AUTHORITY VS MERGER

- Fire Authority can soften the blow of a merger by maintaining individual agency identities while the common elements were merged.
- Not unlike a marriage where two individuals start by dating, auto aid agreements and joint drills can be created.
- Creating common procedures and equipment comes next as the two individual districts become a couple.
- Living together as one entity finally completes the process created by merged Boards making joint decisions. It has given us the opportunity to find the strengths of unity while weeding out the weaknesses in both organizations.
- The final step is the formal marriage as approved by the voters that dissolves the two individual organizations and creates the formal new one.
WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES?

- Not every aspect of an Authority is as rosy as it seems. As any organization grows, the individuality of each agency tends to be driven out.

- Standards are established to create unity, but often single out individuals that struggle to meet the minimums of a smaller organization.

- As the organization grows, communication becomes both more difficult and more essential. Without good lines of communication, it is impossible to gain and retain trust. Of all the factors, communication still seems to be our Achilles heal.

- Also, the bigger the ship, the harder it is to steer. Change becomes more cumbersome and managing that change is more likely to step on toes and hurt feelings. This is where shared values and a common purpose come into play.
LEADERSHIP

• The troops are more likely to follow if they see you know where you are leading them, so share your vision at every opportunity.

• Mistakes will be made, own them, try something else, and keep moving ahead.

• Keep the goal in front of you and everybody else, and remember it’s about the public we serve and doing the right thing.

• The media, including social media, can be your friend or your enemy….It’s your choice which one they will be.

• Illegitum non carborundum!