

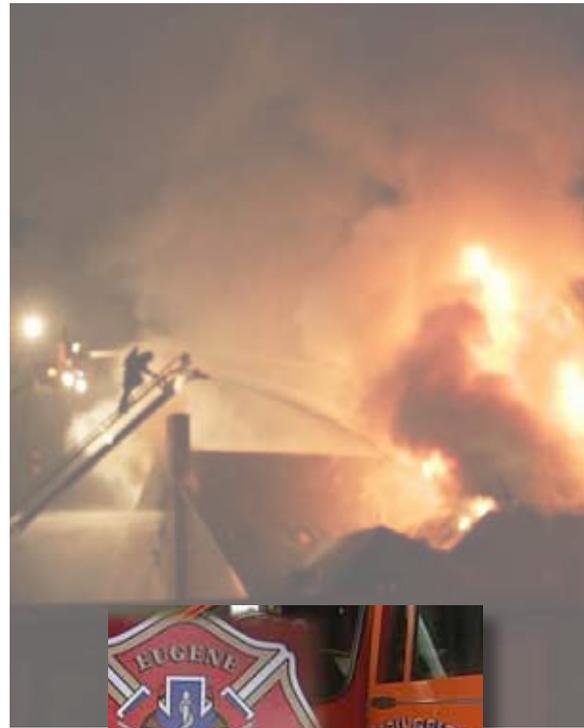


FIRE SERVICE MERGER: WHAT'S THE REAL STORY?

Providing fire suppression and emergency medical response is a serious business. As public officials, we have a responsibility and a commitment to provide the best possible service at the lowest possible cost. In doing this, it is important that we recognize and take advantage of opportunities to conduct our business in new, perhaps non-traditional, ways.

Merging the Eugene and Springfield fire departments is one such opportunity. The operational response system is merged already, in the 3-Battalion system that was put in place in 2007. We now are beginning to merge our administrative and support functions in order to take advantage of position vacancies, reduce taxpayer costs, and become more efficient in the office and on the drill field, as well as on the street.

We have full confidence that the whole will indeed prove to be greater than the sum of the parts.



For more information
call 541-682-7118 or e-mail
firedept@ci.eugene.or.us.



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WHERE ARE WE NOW?

In 2009, the two departments commissioned a study by the consulting firm Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI) of Portland. The consultants were asked to study whether greater service efficiency and/or taxpayer cost savings could be realized through further collaboration. The study concluded not only that continued cooperation would be advisable, but that in fact circumstances were favorable for a merger of the departments, which would lead to significant (at least six-figure) taxpayer savings per year.

Those savings are now being realized as the departments have undergone a limited functional consolidation and are sharing the positions of Chief of Departments, Fire Marshal, Operations Chief, Training Chief, Administrative Services Director, as well as staff from Training and Emergency Medical Services. Fire Chief Randy Groves, who was already serving as Eugene Fire Chief, has been sworn in as Springfield Fire Chief as well, and is



reporting to both City Managers. The realized savings for the first year of limited functional consolidation was over \$500,000.

Additional savings are being discovered as various tasks are consolidated and streamlined. Although more positions may be eliminated through attrition, no one is being laid off as a result of the merger.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

Ultimately, the ESCI study recommends that fire suppression and emergency medical response services for Eugene and Springfield be provided and funded independently of the cities, through the formation of a special taxing district, or annexation to an existing one. Another possibility would be the permanent establishment of an inter-governmental agency structured similarly to the Metropolitan Wastewater Management Commission. This could be accomplished by action of the City Councils and the Lane County Board of Commissioners. Issues of funding equity would need to be addressed.



Formation of a new taxing district, or annexation to an existing one, would require an affirmative vote of the taxpayers affected. Although this is the course recommended by the consultants, and although the district model has been successful elsewhere, it will be a matter of years before the formal question is put to voters, if at all.

We welcome your interest in any information we can provide, and we look forward to working with all who choose to be our partners in this endeavor. **For more information, or to voice your opinion, call 541-682-7118 or e-mail firedept@ci.eugene.or.us.**

