

Introduction

- Tim Hay Fire/EMS Chief for the City of Wellington, Kansas
- 43 years in the Fire and EMS service
- Worked at four different departments in Kansas and Utah
- Was the Fire Chief in Parsons from 1996 to 2007

Parsons Fire Department

- Career department with 19 staff, 6 on duty each day
- Community population at that time was 11,500
- Two stations
- Responds to Fire and EMS calls, non transport





Public Service Request

- Call from city clerk (city manager absent) requesting we provide a ladder for church painting
- All five staff responded to assist with a reserve Engine to supply ladder
- Staff decided to help the one person at the church raise ladder instead of dropping the ladder off.

Weather/Time

- November 24th, 1998
- Hazy morning cool temperature
- 9:22 AM when accident happened
- 5 staff on duty

Call on Radio

- I was nearby about three blocks away
- The tone of the firefighter requesting help
- I knew something serious had happened, this was going to be the worst day of my career.



Scene

- Two firefighters motionless on the ground
- One firefighter screaming in pain
- Ladder on the ground
- Two other firefighters attempting to give CPR to one member, one of those were injured
- I started giving chest compressions to one of the downed firefighters
- EMS and police quickly responded

Hospital

- Some family members were already there when I arrived. I couldn't look them in the eye was in in disbelief myself and already thought they probably didn't make it.
- Inside the hospital was chaos. They had already stopped resuscitation efforts on the two firefighters. They were both alone in an ER room.
- The third firefighter was still in pain screaming down the hallway, and a medical helicopter had been requested. The electrical shock entered him and exited through his foot. He also had heart problems from the electrocution.
- My wife arrived and I broke down.

What had Happened

- There was primary and secondary electrical lines passing in front of the church. During the raise of the ladder the ladder came into contact with the electrical line electrocuting 4 of the 5 staff on scene.
- Two are now dead, one is being flown to Kansas University Medical Center and one is being treated for a burn to his foot.

Notification of Family

- I have told family members of vehicle accidents, medical emergencies and other incidents that their family members had died, but this was extremely difficult as the firefighters were my family and died on my watch.
- One of the firefighters family all lived locally and the other firefighter had one cousin in town and his brother lived in Colorado.

Funeral Arrangements

- We didn't have a clue where to begin, but asked others for assistance.
- Time consuming and heavy toll on staff.
- Fire department funerals are more intricate than others.
- Had other departments cover our station for 4 days while we prepared and went to the funerals.
- We expected several hundred to attend both funerals which were held on the same day at two different cemeteries not located around Parsons.

Investigations

- There were numerous investigations into the accident.
- Kansas Fire Marshal, Electric Company, Police Department, Kansas Department of Labor, NIOSH
- Difficult to re-hash events especially with NIOSH.
- Recommendations did come out of this incident such as more ladder and safety training for staff.

Norm and Craig

- Norm Almond was a Captain and a big guy with a big heart. Was not married nor did he have any children. Was a big model train enthusiast and loved learning about hazardous materials response.
- Craig Brown was a Driver/EMT, was married with a young child and his wife was pregnant with twins. Craig was an avid hunter and fisherman. He was also competed in weight lifting.

Injured

- Danny Cagle who was a Firefighter/EMT recovered a couple months later from his wound and his temporary heart condition.
- Jay Hawks who had a small burn to his foot recovered quickly.



Lesson Learned

- Don't be complacent even with what seems the simplest of tasks!
- Look over your work area thoroughly for hazards.
- An incident like this will affect you for life, it doesn't go away.
- Have plans in place in the event there is an accident with injuries or death(s).
- Provide mental health services short and long term

Questions??