

**Accomack County
Department of Public Safety**



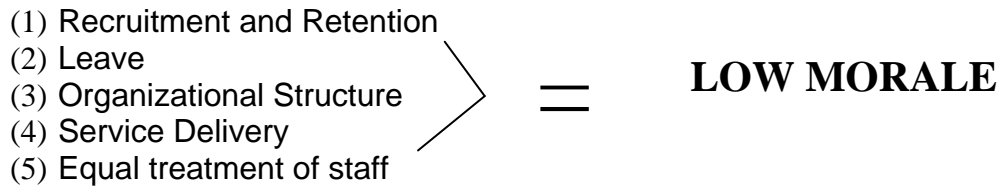
Fire/EMS Staffing

CHANGE . . . FOR A SAFER TOMORROW

October 21, 2004

Introduction

The Department of Public Safety has been faced with a host of serious concerns in its effort to provide supplemental staffing to the volunteer stations. The most notable being:



The areas of concern listed above are interrelated and collectively have had a negative impact on the Department's ability to provide adequate staffing to the volunteer stations and this ultimately diminishes service to the community. The supplemental staffing program was designed to provide skilled, career personnel to respond to both FIRE/EMS situations when the volunteer staff could not provide sufficient manpower. Meeting this objective is becoming increasingly more difficult.

This document looks at those four major areas of concern within the Department of Public Safety. It is hoped that the information presented will assist the County leadership to more fully understand these issues, their current impact on the DPS, and what can be anticipated in the future.

History

In 1977, four Stations: Onancock, Onley, Melfa and Wachapreague met with their District Supervisors to discuss the possibility of daytime EMS coverage. This need was due to the lack of volunteer coverage each station was experiencing. After many meetings, the Board of Supervisors approved two paid EMS positions for each of the four stations. The funding for these positions was obtained through the Comprehensive Education Training Act (CETA). First-Aide and EMT personnel were eligible to apply for these positions. In September 1977, the Onancock Volunteer Fire Department received the first two daytime EMT positions. Melfa Volunteer Fire & Rescue was the second department to have two daytime EMT positions beginning in November 1977. EMT placements at Onley Volunteer Fire & Rescue and Wachapreague Volunteer Fire Companies came later in the year.

Under the CETA program, funding was dependent upon federal government approval. When additional funding was needed to maintain the CETA program, discussions were conducted with District Supervisors and a tax was imposed to provide the additional funds. Atlantic and Metompkin Districts were offered this same program but declined the additional staff. A straw ballot was conducted at each of the four station's voting precincts to obtain citizen approval. The results of the straw ballot were overwhelmingly supportive of the daytime EMT program. With such a positive response, the Board of Supervisors approved the daytime EMT program in 1980 for Lee and Pungoteague Districts.

Each station conducted interviews. Once the employees were selected, approval was given by the County Administrator. Each station was responsible for the supervision of their employees. In most cases, the Station Chief was the Supervisor. This was the person who would approve time off, sign time sheets, and assign station work as desired. Each station supplied uniforms for their employees. Employee training was taken on his/her own time and some stations covered the cost of the training. Since many employees already had higher levels of training, the Board of Supervisors approved a step-plan pay scale for the following positions: EMT, Shock Trauma Technician and Cardiac Technician positions.

In 1982, Parksley Volunteer Fire Department requested and received two daytime EMT's. As other stations saw a need, they requested and received daytime EMT positions. Each District's request had to be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

In 1997, at the request of the volunteer stations, the Board of Supervisors formed the Accomack County Department of Public Safety.

Current Department

At this time, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) employs twenty-two (22) staff members who are assigned to nine (9) volunteer Fire/Rescue stations. At full staffing, each station has a maximum of two personnel on duty through a variety of work schedules. Two personnel are legally required to respond to an EMS call (driver & attendant) and the minimal staffing level for a fire call is three personnel (driver & 2 firefighters).

The primary purpose of supplemental staffing is to respond to Fire/EMS calls during times when volunteer availability is low and to provide assistance at emergency calls. The supplemental staff also performs light station maintenance, in-service training, preplanning, apparatus checks, as well as, completing a standardized list of activities to ensure that equipment is in optimum condition.

At present, the DPS staff is assigned to only those Stations with an EMS unit (ambulance). They do not offer any direct assistance to those stations providing just fire protection services. Financial support for the Fire/EMS supplemental staff comes from the Emergency Medical Services Fund levied in the four tax districts. Supplemental staff classifications, including salary and required position certifications, have been listed below.

CURRENT Staffing Placement

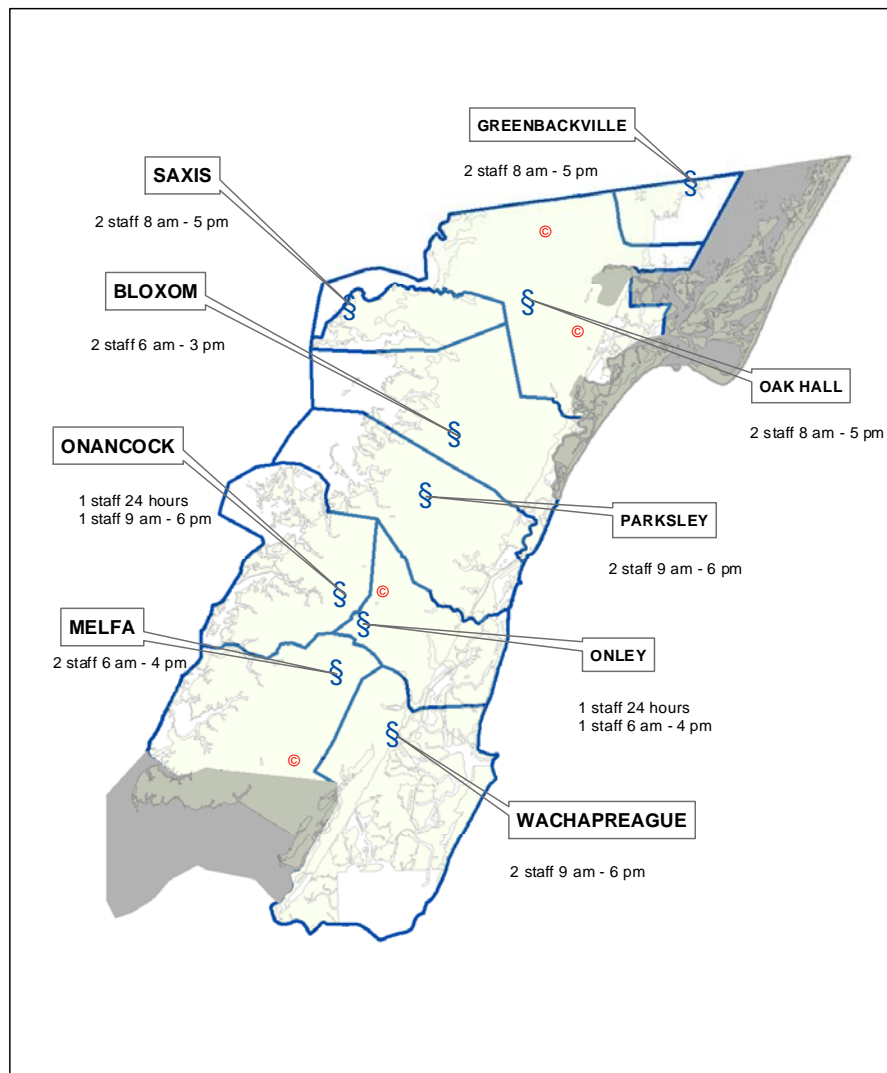


Figure 1

Work Schedules

Atlantic District

Greenbackville 8 am – 5 pm 40 hrs./week
Saxis 8 am – 5 pm 40 hrs./week
Oak hall 8 am – 5 pm 40 hrs./week

- No paid lunch
- Overtime paid, but reimbursed to the County by Oak Hall Rescue

Metompkin District

Parksley 9 am – 6 pm 40 hrs./week
Bloxom 6 am – 3 pm 40 hrs./week

- Bloxom and Parksley switch work schedules every three months
- No paid lunch
- Overtime paid, but reimbursed to the County by Parksley Fire Department

Lee District

Onancock 8 am – 8 pm (3 weeks 24 hrs.) & 9 am – 6 pm (1 week 50 hrs.) 218 hrs./28days
Onley 8 am – 8 pm (3 weeks 24 hrs.) & 6 am – 3 pm (1 week 50 hrs.) 218 hrs./28days

- 24 hours rotation = 24 hours ON DUTY followed by 48 hours OFF DUTY
- Paid lunch
- Work Holidays
- Not allowed to take leave on a holiday
- Are not allowed to use annual leave during the 3 weeks of 24 hour rotation
- 10% incentive for working extra hours
- FLSA 207k exemption for overtime

Pungoteague District

Melfa 6 am – 4 pm 200 hrs./28 days
Wachapreague 9 am – 6 pm 200 hrs./28 days

- Paid Lunch
- Staff rotates working holidays
- Work times do not rotate
- 10% incentive for working extra hours
- FLSA 207k exemption for overtime. The 207k exemption is explained in the Equal Staff Treatment section to follow.

Organizational Structure

Under the current organizational plan, a Supervisor is required to complete a yearly performance evaluation on those employees under his/her direction. The most immediate problem is the fact that the Supervisor and the employees, for whom he/she is responsible, are not assigned to the same Station. An opportunity for observation, immediate direction, or redirection under actual working conditions, the chance to provide support and praise, or just answer a question is lost.

The issue then becomes whom does the employee rely on for assistance? Whom does he/she ask when questions regarding work expectations or fair and equal treatment arise? Is the expectation that he/she take direction from someone who has no direct responsibility for the employee?

Once an employee is hired, he/she receives a one week of orientation; there is a good possibility that they will not ever see their immediate supervisor in a normal work capacity again. Currently, employee problems or concerns must be phoned in to the Supervisors. This lack of middle management has caused employees to feel ignored after the initial hiring period and they are basically on their own with little to no assistance from the Department. This lack of immediate contact and feedback with the organization breeds apathy and tends to cause problems in morale and often leads to an employee seeking other employment

As our responsibilities to the community become more diverse, issues between the volunteer and career staff compound. Each time a disagreement or question remains unresolved, staff morale, job performance and the ability to work as a cohesive unit erodes. It is imperative that all employees have access to their supervisors on a weekly basis. Frequent interaction with supervisors will prevent small problems from escalating.

Timely intervention provides support and direction, it imparts to the employee the sense that work that he/she is doing is essential and more importantly, the individual has value.

Our County needs both career and volunteer staff to meet the safety needs of this community. The County must recognize their responsibility to the career staff by providing adequate guidance to new employees and on-going support to the entire staff. Lines of communication must be open and areas of responsibility must be clearly defined

Service Delivery

Currently the Department of Public Safety attempts to staff nine stations per day with two personnel per station. As discussed previously, employee leave places a large impact on our ability to maintain staffing and service.

Differing policies in the four magisterial districts make it extremely difficult to transfer personnel to stations in need of full staffing. The magisterial districts prevent a priority staffing system to be implemented. Thus each station, regardless of call volume, is staffed equally. This creates the situation of one employee sitting in a high run station and two other employees sitting in a very low call volume stations. Service is adversely affected because one person cannot respond to a call. Another responder from another station must also respond, whether they are career or volunteer. In these situations, which happen on a daily basis in more than one station, cause two emergency vehicles to be on the road and delays patient care.

Equal Staff Treatment

Although all Department of Public Safety employees are hired by the County under the same standards, job description and pay scale, few employees are treated the same. By policy the County treats their employment as four separate and distinct departments, each with its own work schedule, pay scale, rules, etc. These differences are not implemented by the department of public Safety, but rather the magisterial districts and more specifically the stations in which they work.

The current employment inequity can be defined and divided into four categories to include: work schedule, pay, staffing and supervision.

Work Schedules

Although all twenty-two (22) DPS Fire Medics were hired to perform the same job, using the same job description, they are working four (4) very different schedules, which vary from 160 hours per month to 218 hours per month.

- Currently (10) DPS employees work from 8:00 am - 5:00 pm and are paid for 8 hours.
 - The County's hours are from 8:30am - 5:00 pm and those employees are paid for 8 hours.
- Twelve (12) employees are required to work holidays, while the remaining (10) are not.
 - All Employees work under the same job description, but based on nothing more than work location must work the holiday. No annual leave can be granted because no other employees are allowed to fill in those districts.
 - It is important to note that other departments work holiday's (ie. landfills) but employees at both landfills are required to work the holiday. We do not have the North Landfill employees working every holiday and the south landfill employees who do not work the holiday.
- Eight (8) employees are allowed to use their accrued Annual Leave only during thirteen (13) specific weeks per year, while the remaining fourteen (14) employees may choose from all (52) weeks.
 - 24 hour personnel are not allowed to take off 24hour shifts, because no provision was made for backfill.
- Four (4) employees are classified as FLSA 207k Exempt and work Monday through Friday 50 hour per week
 - FLSA 207k allows employers of personnel functioning as firefighter to work up 212 hours in a 28 day pay cycle without encumbering overtime. The exemption was designed to protect employer from large amounts of overtime when employees work 12 or 24 hour shifts on a flexible schedule thus the 28 day pay cycle versus a normal 5 day or 1 week cycle.
 - It was not intended to have firefighters work more hours in 1 week and a normal employee. No other non-exempt employee is allowed to work more than 40 hours per week.

Pay

The current magisterial district approach, separating the Department in to (4) separate sections, not only causes inequality in work schedules but also in compensation. All four magisterial districts have four separate pay rates as well. Employees are constantly requesting transfers to a District with more a lucrative pay schedule and more attractive work schedules. Those employee's who stay in Districts with lower pay, are resentful and feel taken advantage of by the system.

- 10 Employees are paid Overtime (through and agreement with volunteer companies)
- 12 Employees are paid compensatory time
- 12 Employees earn an extra 10% based on station placement
- 12 employees are paid for lunch, 10 employees are not
- 8 employees work Monday thru Friday 50 hours per week without overtime compensatory time over 50 hours.
- 10 employees work Monday thru Friday 40 hours per week and are given overtime compensatory time over 40 hours.

Staffing

The inability of the Department to provide consistent full staffing at Stations contributes to the daily stress of the employee. Employees are unable to respond promptly to calls for service from the public. This leaves the employee with a “helpless” feeling or feeling of worthlessness (Why am I here If I can't do my job?).

The lack of “fill-in” employees makes the staff less likely to report illness, and job related injuries. Some employees have mentioned feeling guilty about taking Leave knowing that their absence it leaves their fellow workers understaffed.

Supervision

The inability of the two (2) mid level Supervisors to see employees in normal work capacity further alienates the employees and fosters a dangerously negative work environment

Recruitment and Retention

Although Accomack County's rural setting offers its residents a unique opportunity to experience the benefits of small community living, in recent years, the diversity offered by mainland Virginia and Maryland has affected our County's ability to attract and retain skilled employees. In the last five years, the Department of Public Safety has lost several well-trained and experienced personnel to Norfolk Fire/Rescue, Virginia Beach Fire/Rescue, Virginia Beach EMS, Wallops Flight Facility, Eastern Shore Ambulance, MTI, and Onancock Building Supply Co. During this calendar year alone, the Department has lost four (4) employees to these departments. This equates to an almost 20% turnover in our staff during the first eight months of 2004. With the Hampton Roads area expanding, we expect additional opening in the future to be strong attractors for our current employee pool. All of these employers currently offer a more attractive salary schedule, benefit package and promotional opportunities than Accomack County.

With regard to recruitment, during the last four application cycles for new employees, the number of applicants has steadily decreased to a point where lowering the entrance qualifications was required in order to fill the positions. It costs \$4,689.79 to hire a new employee at the Fire Medic I level. This cost reflects uniforms & personal protective equipment (PPE), the associated costs with advertising, hiring process and obtaining the necessary physicals, drug screenings and criminal history background checks. Due to the lowering of entry level qualifications, the Department has to spend around \$2,200 per employee for them to take the EMT-Enhanced class to bring them up to the Fire Medic I job description. Employees have twelve months to successfully complete this course.

STARTING SALARY

When a prospective employee is considering a new position that would require relocating to a new area, salary appears to be one of the most influential factors in accepting that position. The starting salary for a Fire Medic I in Accomack County is below that of our neighbors. The table below shows what is currently available in other localities in our vicinity.

Department	Fire Medic I	Fire Medic II		Retirement
	Firefighter II EMT-Enhanced	Firefighter II EMT Intermediate	Firefighter II EMT Paramedic	
Accomack County	\$24,860	\$27,905 after 1 year	\$27,905 after 1 year	30 year
Chesapeake Fire/Rescue	\$32,492 + Overtime			Early retirement incentive
MTI**	28,000 + Overtime		\$33,500 + Overtime	Sentara Plans 401K 403B
Norfolk Fire/Rescue	\$32,951 + Overtime			Early retirement incentive
Virginia Beach Fire Dept.	\$35,904+ Overtime			Early retirement incentive
Virginia Beach EMS**			\$39,631	Early retirement incentive
Wallops Flights Facility***	\$33,458+ Overtime			Paid \$1.40 per hour for retirement
Ocean City, MD		32,957 + Overtime		Early retirement incentive
Pocomoke EMS, MD**		\$35,809		Early retirement incentive
Salisbury Fire Department MD				Early retirement incentive
Snow Hill Fire Department, MD			\$35,000 + Paid Overtime	Early retirement incentive
New Castle Public Safety, DE			\$35,077 + Paid Overtime	Pension plan

**EMS ONLY

***Wallops FD provides additional incentives \$0.40/hr. Hazmat Tech; \$0.40/hr. Rescue Tech; \$2.00/hr. health insurance allowance; \$25.00/mo. uniform allowance

BENEFITS

Shift Work

A majority of the departments shown in the above table are functioning on a method of 24 hour shift work. Twenty-four (24) hour shift work allows personnel more time off, the ability to supplement their income with second jobs, lower rates of burn out, and higher morale. Accomack County has 10 employees working Monday through Friday 40 hours per week, 4 employees working Monday through Friday 50 hours per week and 8 employees working 24 hrs. The employees most satisfied with their current assignment are those working 24 hour shifts.

Early Retirement

Currently, Accomack County does not offer early retirement nor the LEOS/VALORS benefit, although surrounding communities do. Over the past few years, the Department has experienced a loss in staff, many of them moving to those localities offering early retirement and/or the LEOS/VALORS benefit. In order to curb employee turn-over and remain competitive with the surrounding localities, Accomack County must be willing to offer these benefits.

Promotional Opportunity

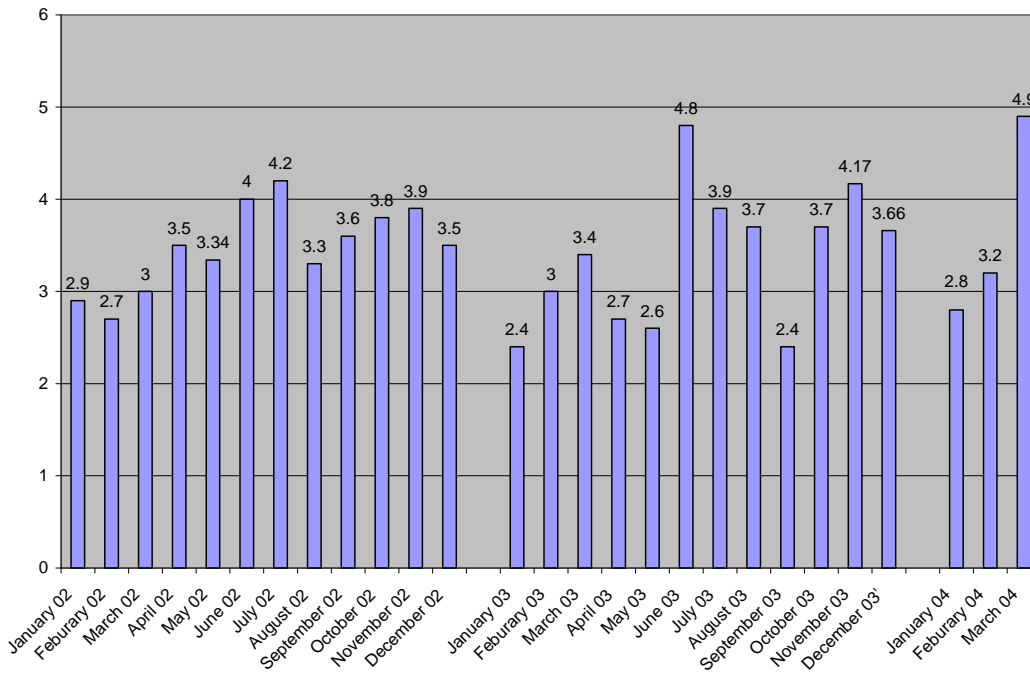
Accomack County's Department of Public Safety is a small Department in a rural community setting. Due to its size, there is limited opportunity for position and salary advancement. In order to address this issue, the County must consider other means to attract and retain their DPS employees. One way to provide growth opportunities is to establish a Career Ladder. This mechanism would recognize and provide an opportunity for salary advancement by compensating employees for additional education in their field, improved skill levels, and work performance.

Leave

Annual Leave and **Sick Leave** are benefits afforded to all full-time County employees based upon years of service and time worked. Employees are permitted to accumulate both Annual Leave and Sick Leave each pay period. Employees are also permitted to accumulate and carryover their earned leave until the maximum number of days set by the County is reached. Any leave accumulated above the maximum amount must be used or forfeited. The Department receives a significant number of leave requests per year from its (22) employees. Each time an employee requests sick time or leave, their absence results in longer response times and the need to use manpower from multiple stations in order to provide the necessary coverage. The current DPS Leave Policy allows for (4) employees to request annual leave or training leave and (1) employee to use sick leave (for non-emergency absences) per day.

Under the current Leave Policy, the Department may have as many as five (5) employees away from their duties per day. This translates into having only four (4) of our stations at full staff. When there is excessive illness in the Department, employees out on Workman's Compensation, or a position vacancy, adequate staffing of the stations becomes critical. The full extent of this problem is demonstrated in the graph below. It represents the average number of personnel off per day over the last two years.

Average Number of Personnel off per day
2002, 2003 & 2004-YTD



Leave Includes: Annual Leave, Vacancy, Sick Leave Course work, Comp time, Workers

Incident Based Overtime is overtime that occurs when an employee has to continue to work beyond his/her shift due to early morning, lunch time and late day calls. Employees are never certain that they will be able to leave at the end of their scheduled workday.

For Example: An employee working from 8 am – 5 pm receives a call at 4:15 pm. An average call requires 10 minutes to the scene, 15 minutes with the patient, 35 minute drive to the hospital, 20 minutes at the hospital, 45 minutes back to the station, and 10 minutes to cleanup and leave. It is now 6:30 pm. That employee has generated 1.5 hours of overtime at time plus one half. Since we currently do not pay overtime to our employees, that amounts to 2.25 hours of compensatory time leave.

On average, the Department staff generates approximately (50) hours of incident-based overtime per month. This overtime is returned to the employee as compensated time, thus adding to the problem of providing leave.

Fill-In Overtime occurs when the Department is forced to call in off-duty employees to work as a fill-in for staff members who are on some type of approved Leave (FLSA educational leave, bereavement leave, workmen's comp. etc.) When a District needs fill-ins, off-duty employees from the District in need are contacted first. If the District in need cannot provide the manpower from its ranks, and this is often the case, then employees from other Districts are contacted. All employees who respond to a fill-in request are granted compensatory time. The time earned will then need to be taken from the District that was able to provide the manpower, causing that District to be put into a position of less than adequate staffing numbers in order to meeting the Leave request.

Educational Overtime is time taken beyond normal working hours for educational advancement and training. Educational overtime is driven by Department standards, such as required participation in an annual live burn (8 hours) or other mandatory job-training exercises. It is also generated as the result of regulations within the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

Compensated Time vs. Overtime: Up until July 2004, all time worked over the overtime threshold was covered as compensated time at time plus one half rate. The volunteer Departments of Parksley and Oak Hall, have agreed to pay the incident and training based overtime costs for a total of 10 of their personnel. This action reduces the amount of time away from the job for that Station. This still leaves (12) employees earning compensated time. It also continues to foster the disparity between County employees.

All of the various types of Leave offered to DPS employees contribute to the **Accumulated leave** problem. Currently, the Department lacks a plan or mechanism to address the issues created by Accumulated Leave, so that Stations are not left under staffed and the community at risk. Employees are aware of the strain that their absence creates for their co-workers, as well as, the risk factor to the community and will often forego submitting a request for Leave. This kind of long-term stress affects the morale of the entire Department. Annual leave, Sick leave, Educational leave and overtime are benefits afforded to employees for services given. Employees are entitled to take time off; a plan should be in place to address this issue without leaving EMS/Fire service to the community compromised.

Morale

The issues that have been identified are not easily resolved. If they are ignored and allowed to persist, they will chip away at the general morale of both the career and volunteer staff and will seriously affect our ability to meet the safety needs of this community. Accomack County has had a history of serving the community with a dedicated and committed staff. Our community deserves the finest safety services that we can provide within the parameters of our current resources. We must recognize the impact on morale when employees feel isolated, disconnected, and disenfranchised and we must be willing to take the steps necessary to eliminate these negative factors.

In July 2003, a survey was sent to all DPS employees in order to assess perceived working conditions within the Department. The issue of staff morale was of great concern to the majority of our employees. The attached document is the result of the survey and includes all responses. The highlighted questions, in yellow, deal specifically with the question of morale.

Staff is concerned with job security, work schedules, the inability to recruit new, well-trained employees, equal compensation and the desire to have a more cohesive working force.

Recommended Solutions

In order to provide more effective and efficient services while remaining cognizant of fiscal concerns and constraints, the organizational structure of the Department of Public Safety needs to be reviewed and updated. Amending the Department's current organizational goals must be considered in order to establish a foundation that would permit the Department to keep pace with the emergency services of our fast growing, ever-changing community. The following are recommendations for the Department of Public Safety in order to allow the Department to operate more efficiently today and in the future.

All of the recommendations listed are intended as a means to operate in a more effective and productive manner while maintaining current full staffing levels. They are *not* intended as a means for expansion or growth.

Provide Staff Equity

Target Area(s): Morale, Organizational Structure, & Retention/Recruitment

Although the Department of Public Safety staff is considered one department its employees are treated as four (4) separate departments based on Magisterial Districts, thus four (4) different standards are applied when dealing with DPS employees. This creates not only management problems, but morale and service delivery problems as well. Department of Public Safety personnel function as Fire Medics under the same job description and under the same pay grade but that is where the similarities end.

In order for the Department to grow, provide excellent service, retain employees, as well as, attract viable candidates for employment, inconsistencies by magisterial district or station must end.

The following actions are recommended:

- All employees should receive overtime pay for hours worked in excess of 40 hours a week.
- All employees working Monday through Friday should be classified as 40 hour employees and receive overtime for anything work in excess of the 40 hour work week.
 - FLSA 207k exemption should only apply to personnel assigned to 24 hour shifts.
- An employee working a 24 hour rotating shift should be classified as 28-day, 212-hour employee.
- Individual district pay incentives should be eliminated.
- Uniform scheduling should be put back in place.
 - 24 hour staffing should remain in place
 - All other staffs should be staffed through uniform hours.
 - All Stations should be staffed 8 hours per day.
- Holiday staffing should be on a priority basis, using a station's call-volume, and all staff should rotate through the holiday work schedule

Provide for Supervision of Staff

Target Area(s): Organizational Structure, Service Delivery, and Morale

Currently, the Department of Public Safety has two mid-level Supervisors who are responsible for the daily supervision of personnel assigned to the County's (9) volunteer stations. Under the current configuration, each Supervisor is assigned to a specific station and/or district and this makes the possibility of immediate and effective supervision impossible. Removing Supervisors from permanent assignment gives them the flexibility to serve in their designated capacity providing much needed immediate, one-on-one and legally expeditious supervision, oversight and guidance. Additional advantages are listed below:

1. Daily contact with volunteer personnel in order to correct issues that arise.
2. Can potentially provide additional ALS intercept.
3. Establish daily supervision and interaction with employees.
4. Continuous evaluation of operational and administrative functions.
5. Remediation and training of personnel can be increased.
6. Liability and risk management concerns and worker's compensation issues will be effectively managed and addressed potentially reducing injuries, claims and potential lawsuits.
7. County will reduce its overall liability by providing an appropriate level of supervision of personnel. Performance reviews will reflect an accurate representation of performance.
8. Employees will be able to interact with their direct supervisor, establishing a link to the organization as a whole, increasing morale of the employee and organization.

Hire Additional Staff

Target Area(s): Leave, Service Delivery, Organizational Structure

Hire Additional personnel as "Backfill"

The DPS should be able to maintain adequate staffing levels at all times and employees should be able to use Leave time as needed knowing that their absence will not dilute staffing levels. A system or method should be implemented to provide for coverage or "backfill" as needed. Currently, the DPS does not have any procedures or policies in place that addresses this very serious issue. Studies completed in 1992 and 1998, re-emphasize the need for backfill and supervision of staff. If we are to continue to staff (9) stations per day then adequate manpower must be readily available in order to meet this objective. Using a general management principle, assuming an eight (8) hours schedule, it takes one (1) additional employee for every five (5) in order to maintain adequate staffing while granting accumulated leave requests.

The need for backfill personnel is well documented with independent studies and recommendations from the Fire Commission's own Response Study and the Tidewater EMS Council Study. In spite of the wealth of information available supporting the need for additional personnel to date, none have been hired.

Establish a pool of employees

Providing leave will always be an issue for any department. It becomes a much more serious issue when that department is providing direct emergency care to the public. Having a staff ready to respond immediately to a life-threatening emergency could mean the difference between life and death. The best way to deal with leave issues is to maintain a pool of ON-CALL or PART-TIME personnel at the Fire-Medic I or II Level. This group would most likely come from the volunteer ranks within the County. Additional funding would have to be budgeted as needed, from each of the districts to cover the cost of these positions. A further concern would be the impact on the volunteer stations, as currently any personnel hired by the County may no longer volunteer in the jurisdiction of their employment.

Actively seek a Department of Labor (DOL) opinion letter on volunteering:

From a recruitment standpoint, many of the volunteers in Accomack County have the qualifications that we require for a Fire Medic I, but are unwilling to give up the ability to volunteer. Both the paid employee and the volunteer represent a viable resource. Each time the Department hires from the volunteer ranks, the volunteers lose one person as a potential responder. The Department should be able to use the skills that these individuals possess when and where they are needed, regardless of their status. In addition, some employees have expressed interest in the ability to volunteer. I believe that volunteering should be an individual's choice. There are conflicts between employees and volunteers in our County but these could be minimized or possibly avoided all together if a written agreement could be implemented with our employees. It would outline the parameters of volunteering once we have clarification from the DOL. This would also open a potential labor pool for part-time employees

One caveat, using employees who do not work as frequently as full-time staff will require additional access to a supervisor. With each new employee, full or part-time, the County's liability for actions they make on the fire ground, at the station and on medically related issues increases. A mechanism for supervision will be essential for ensuring that these part-time employees are trained to County standards, perform at acceptable levels, etc.

Increase Employee Salary and Benefits

Target Area(s): Recruitment/Retention, Service Delivery, & Morale

A. Paid overtime for all employees:

- Employees should be paid time and a half for overtime worked beyond the standard 40 hour work week. This simple action would significantly reduce departmental compensated time, as well as, assist with the current leave problem and provide some consistency within the department.
- The Parksley Volunteer Fire Department and Oak Hall Volunteer Rescue Squad have verbally agreed to look into reimbursing the County for overtime for those employees in their respective districts. The Department of Public Safety supports the idea of overtime money in lieu of compensated time. The specifics of the plan will be outlined in a written agreement between those companies and the County. The generosity of the volunteer companies and the importance they place on having their Station staffed, should be a wake up call for the County to provide overtime monies for all essential employees regardless of work location.

B. LEOS/Fire VRS:

LEOS/Fire VRS provides full-time career fire personnel the ability to retire after (20) years of service rather than (30) years. Other departments in surrounding localities offer this benefit. See Attached LEO Fire VRS. The first step in determining cost would be an actuarial study performed by VRS.

C. Increase base salary competitive with other areas of competition:

People coming to work for the Department of Public Safety do so with full knowledge that a higher salary is available in mainland Virginia or Maryland. The difference in salary should not be so great that it prevents Accomack County from consideration as an employer. A difference of \$10,000-\$15,000 is too compelling for most. Accomack County has traditionally been a community in which cost of living was very low and property was affordable. That is no longer the case in 2004. Property values have sky rocketed, cost of living has increased, and cost of employee health benefits is staggering.

EXAMPLE: Assuming you have a new employee with a family who accepts a position as a Fire Medic I with a starting salary of \$ 24,860.00 dollars. After taxes and family health benefits that employee will take home \$14,000.00 per year. (6% FICA, 4% Federal 4% state, 1% Medicare and \$600/month family health) This approximate take home pay is near the amount many mainland Virginia and Maryland Fire/Rescue Departments are paying above our starting salary.

D. Modify our promotional process to provide salary incentives at small intervals :

Another tool for retention of current employees is the development of a career ladder or promotional steps. Because the Department has limited promotion potential for current staff, career ladder or salary step increases for continuing education is vital to employee retention. This would allow employees to increase their earnings as they become a more valuable employee to the organization. A proposed plan, Retention of Personnel, will be presented to the Board for consideration.

E. Provide a salary incentive for Paramedic.

Paramedic certification is the highest and most difficult certification to obtain for a pre-hospital care provider. It also is the certification that allows EMS providers the greatest amount of medical intervention in the field. When examining any Fire/EMS based system, the number of paramedics is vital to the success rate of patients as well as the system as a whole. These employees serve as instructors, mentors, preceptors, and ALS intercept in the field. Accomack County's current Job Descriptions as well as current promotional process does not recognize the paramedic level of certification. Recruiting providers from within the organization to seek this high level of training and retain personnel once they have completed this training is crucial to service delivery within Accomack County.

In the proposed Retention of Personnel plan, a salary incentive is outlined for paramedic level providers.

Merging of the EMS Tax District Funds

Target Area(s): Equality, Organizational Structure, & Service Delivery

Insuring the Public's safety through fire/EMS is a responsibility that local government recognized and addressed when they established the Department of Public Safety. The level of service that the DPS is able to provide is dependent upon the support it receives from local government. Staffing decisions should be made based upon the needs of the community and not individual tax districts nor stations. As the safety needs of our community have changed, driven by population growth, tourism and governmental mandates, so to, have the needs of the Department of Public Safety. The time has come for County leadership to recognize the changes that have taken place in our community since 1997, and the implications these changes present with respect to community safety.

Accomack County must move forward and establish a singular taxation base and a concise plan for the staffing of our stations that is driven by need rather than what has been done in the past. A consolidation of current individual tax districts would equalize services to the entire community. The reorganization of current staffing practices would provide the community with skilled employees when and where they are needed most. It would improve response time and provide for the more efficient use of safety equipment. These changes do not in any way diminish the need for volunteer fire and rescue departments. In fact, they have become more vital with time. They are an integral part of the safety services offered to this community. Their contribution to the public's safety is invaluable and the County relies upon their dedication to continue to meet and maintain the highest safety standards possible.

Without merging of the tax districts the Department of Public Safety will remain a disjointed organization with continued service delivery problems, recruitment and retention issues and disparity among County employees. Without merging of the tax districts, service and tax rates will remain biased with those economy depressed areas paying increased taxes for the same service other areas of the county are getting for a much lower rate. It is not surprising for that simple reason above Schools, Law Enforcement and Public Works are not subject to taxation and service delivery by magisterial district. So why is the County's career Fire/EMS personnel controlled in this manner?

What are the benefits of merging the EMS tax levy into one?

From a Departmental standpoint, all of the recommended action items listed in this document requires the merging of the tax districts.

From a taxpayer's point of view, Fire/EMS should be funded along the same lines as the schools, public works, and Sheriff's Department because it is the responsibility of local government to provide Fire/EMS services to its population as a whole without bias and with economic equality.

Priority Based Staffing

Target Area(s): Service Delivery & Organizational Structure

Currently, the Department of Public Safety attempts to staff nine (9) stations per day with personnel. We have an average of 3.5 personnel off per day. Of the nine (9) stations we staff, some have a much higher call volume than others.

Jan – Dec 2003

Saxis	78
Greenbackville	76
Oak Hall	299
Bloxom	255
Parksley	307
Onancock	682
Onley	554
Melfa	262
Wachapreague	110

*DPS staff only

Stations with central locations and higher call volumes have a greater need for staffing. Given our current policy a station that runs 100 calls a year or less can be fully staffed and a station running in excess of 500 calls per year is left with one person.

Stations that have a documented need should be fully staffed each day even if this means only minimally staffing the stations with a lesser need.

The following is the recommended approach to station staffing during the day time hours. Each station would have at least one personnel stationed. Full staffing of (2) personnel would follow this priority chart.

BASE LEVEL	(2) Career Staff Placement		
	PRIORITY 1	PRIORITY 2	PRIORITY 3
All stations With (1) Career Personnel	Oak Hall	Onley	Greenbackville
	Parksley	Bloxom	Saxis
	Onancock		Wachapreague
	Melfa		

Often time with issues of Public Safety, priority and importance are confused. This action is not to imply that one department or area is less important than another. But based on real factors such as population, housing density, and call volume, some areas have a higher priority for service. When determining resource allocation, need for service must be the objective factor used.

The criteria used to determine priority staffing must be re-evaluated on a yearly basis to monitor growth and population change.

ALS (Advanced Life Support) Intercept

Target Area(s): Organizational Structure & Service Delivery

The Department of Public Safety cannot recruit ALS providers at the Paramedic or Intermediate levels. We need to examine and possibly implement an ALS Intercept program during the day and perhaps on a 24 hour basis in the near future. An increasing percentage of our employees do not make it to the Fire Medic II level. The Department needs to look at staffing the station with Fire Medic I personnel and use the FireMedic II ALS personnel as an intercept or meet on scene for advanced care. Approximately 85% of DPS call volume during the daytime hours can be handled by EMS providers at the EMT-Enhanced level or Fire Medic I. ALS intercept personnel would only respond to calls in which higher skilled EMS procedures were needed.