

IAFC Missouri Valley Division: Safety, Health and Survival Message-Summer 2009:

100% Participation in the National Fire/EMS Health, Safety, and Survival Week.

As we approach June and the summer months that lie ahead, there is no better way to get started on discussing safety issues and raising the bar on safety than by having 100% participation by all fire agencies in the IAFC Missouri Valley Division for the 2009 National Fire/EMS Health, Safety, and Survival Week, held 14-20 June.

Let's reflect on these words for a moment-SAFETY, HEALTH, and SURVIVAL. You could design your nearly entire training calendar with classes and drills revolving around those powerful words.

Safety-This word pretty sums up why we exist and what we are all about! Safety applies to the public we serve and ourselves as firefighters. Safety involves being "safety driven" in all of our decisions-not just on the fire ground or emergency scene, but in all facets of our job, no matter what rank we may hold. Safety driven in our Administrative decisions, safety driven in our fire prevention decisions, safety driven in our public education decisions, and the list goes on. I realize this may sound rudimentary and basic, but what if every decision we made we asked ourselves one simple question: "Who will be safer from this decision and can it be done better to make it safer?" Think about creating your annual goals and objectives and longer term strategic plans with having safety at the forefront of all your decisions.

Health-For the past 30 years since LODD data was organized in its current format, cardio vascular emergencies continue to be the #1 cause of LODD. Over 50% of firefighter deaths are the result of LODD year in and year out. But what are we (you) doing to promote wellness, health and fitness in the (your agency) fire service. Do you have a policy in place that allows members time for physical fitness and equipment (tread mills, bikes, weight, etc). I have noticed during my 28 years in the fire service that a lot of attention and time is given to vehicle and safety equipment maintenance. This is a highly important and mission critical part of our job. But what about maintenance and checks on our most important and valuable asset-our Firefighters! As Fire Chiefs and Chief Officers, I believe one of the most powerful messages we can send to our members in terms of promoting health is by setting a positive example in terms of health, wellness, and fitness.

Survival-This is a topic that has gained much needed attention and momentum in recent years. I don't recall a lot of training exercises designed around firefighter survival when I entered the fire service in 1981. Firefighter's survival was discussed, but formal training in this area was not common. Training that involved civilian rescue has always been the focal point of our industry since the fire service began and should continue to be a top priority. But what happens if things go wrong on the fireground-terribly wrong? How prepared are firefighters to survive a catastrophic building collapse, flashover, entrapment, etc. How much of our annual training should involve specifics on firefighter survival. Admittedly, I do not know what the exact percentage should be for the fire service or if there is a correct answer in terms of how much survival training is needed annually. How many times per year does your department spend on training your fire fighters to survive a very bad situation versus standard and/or mandated training? 80% standard training and 20% firefighter's survival training? As leaders in your fire agency, you are best prepared to answer that question. The skills and experience of your members will normally dictate the

amount of training that is needed in various areas. Here is a good “acid test” question we should all ask ourselves; If one of my members were trapped, are they prepared to survive? I can recall the FDNY surviving crews in the 9-11 WTC collapse. These members all survived an “un-survivable” event. I remember watching the crew interviewed and sharing their own unique accounts of what happened. One thing stood out to me and it was a common statement amongst each person-Their training, teamwork and preparation saved their lives on that fateful day.

Safety, Health, and Survival-Lets continue to become immersed in these words, thus promoting safe actions that are the trademarks of our fire service culture.

On a final note as we enter what appears to be a busy summer of potential and probable wildland fires, let us all review and adhere to the 10 Fire Orders and 18 Watch-Out Situations. Let’s make it a top priority for us and our members to make every decision in the urban interface fit these proven safety statements.

Thank you taking the time to read this message and have a safe and healthy summer!

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher P. Riley, MS, CFO, MIFireE
Fire Chief, City of Pueblo, CO.
Internationally Accredited Agency, CFAI
& President, Colorado State Fire Chiefs Association