

November 28, 2005

The following question was recently posed via e-mail regarding minimum training requirements for a volunteer fire department:

Question:

I need to know what the State of Oregon deems minimum training requirements for a Volunteer (100%) Fire Department.

We are not accredited with DPSST and it may not be possible to do so due to lack of interest from personnel to become instructors.

Basically, I have a Board Meeting tonight and I want to convey to the membership the consequences of inadequate training or inadequate records of training.

Without State Certifications through the DPSST - how do we prove training? I assume that at minimum a Roster signed off by a certified instructor would be good - but what if all our training is in-house - sort of like teaching ourselves without anything but a textbook to tell us if we got it right?

And then what happens if no one has had official training beyond our drills and then there is an injury or death?

Obviously we want to be compliant, but with such limited resources, we really need a place to start - so "minimum" is good to start, then we can work toward "recommended" levels.

Does OSHA come in automatically? Is it up to our insurance to prompt the investigation? I really need to know all the details and have them in writing. Just treat us like we are brand new and starting from scratch. Which is basically true since we recently had quite a turnover of personnel.

Answer:

I can only answer your questions from Oregon OSHA's focal point, which is occupational safety and health. Our standards exist (and are expected to be complied with) so that fire fighters will return home after each shift without being injured or exposed to unhealthy agents. OR-OSHA's standards do not teach fire fighting skills. Fire fighting is normally taught by BPSST, or one of the fire academies. The Oregon Rules for Fire Fighters, located in Division 2, Subdivision L (under "Laws & Rules" on the OR-OSHA web site, at www.orosha.org) are the minimum Oregon OSHA standards that need to be complied. OAR 437-002-0182(5)(b)(B) clearly states that programs for training employees in the fundamentals of

accident prevention must be implemented. OAR 437-002-0182(10) addresses training and education. The following is part of that section:

(a) The employer or employer representative shall establish and implement a policy for the delivery of education and training designed to develop and maintain an appropriate level of knowledge, skill, and ability throughout the fire fighting classifications (ranks). Such education and training shall be provided to fire fighters before they perform assigned duties on a continuing basis.

(b) Before fire fighters participate in structural fire fighting activities, or in live fire training in a structure, they shall meet the training levels prescribed by the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training's (DPSST) 'Entry-level Firefighter' or have equivalent training.

(c) When live fire training occurs, it must be conducted under the direction of the fire department training officer, or employer authorized representative. All live fire training must be conducted following the requirements of Appendix C of this standard.

As for State Certification of your department's skill levels, that's something that Oregon OSHA does not get involved in since that involves fire fighting skills, not safety or health. Compliance with Oregon OSHA's rules require performance that shows competency, and documentation of safety and health training (what was taught, who taught it, who attended it, when was it given, and how were attendees tested).

Injuries, illnesses, and fatalities act as catalysts (among other things) to bring Oregon OSHA to your door. Injury and illness rates are regularly reported to Oregon OSHA through Workers Comp. The answers to your questions regarding inspection scheduling and how inspections are conducted are covered in Division 1, Administrative Rules. Possibly your best next step might be to invite a representative of Oregon OSHA to one of your meetings to answer questions and get acquainted, or request a voluntary consultative visit by Oregon OSHA. You might also consider contacting the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association for their assistance. Oregon OSHA and OFCA work closely together