



2016 Wisconsin Towns Association

To help me understand the challenges of rural, town, and village fire departments I tried finding information on them. I found the Fire Department history for the town of Calumet, Wisconsin. This gave me an idea of how costs and needs have skyrocketed since their beginning until today. They noted that in 1951 they could put into service a pumper truck for about \$2,000. Then in 2010, a new truck was put into service for the cost of \$397,000. In just 60 years, the cost of a truck has increased by 200 times. The same is true for the firefighters' personal equipment. It has grown from just helmets, fire retardant shoes, fire-protective clothing and gloves, to now include self-contained breathing apparatus and thermal imaging cameras, and all sorts of specialized tools for accidents, chemical spills, and more. To use all these tools and equipment safely, the volunteer firefighters need more and more specific training.

These costs and needs do not even include any of the emergency medical items which they need such as: ambulances, defibrillators, and training to use these things in order to be first responders. The firefighters need to go through intense training to be EMTs and first responders who can respond to just about any tragedy that comes to mind.

This leads me to brainstorm on what strategies legislatures should or could consider to address the dilemma of increasing town/village fire and emergency medical costs.

One idea that I have is to consider an incentive system. This can be compared to a 401k for a person's retirement fund. What I mean by this example is: 1) that the firefighters/EMTs/First

Responders be encouraged and required to keep up with their training in the most up-to-date techniques and practices available. I do not know what the cost would be for these people to do that, but if they are willing to put in the time, they should be reimbursed the money to get it done.

2) The community should also be committed to support their emergency workers with not just money for their training and skills, but also with good modern equipment. So again the community part in this would be that if they put in so much money, there would be a place to get some matching funds to help pay for the modernized equipment and tools that they need. 3) I think it would be great if area legislators on all levels would get together with the local fire departments and tour the facilities. It would be even better if somehow they could see these fire departments in action which may best be done in some friendly competitions held regionally. Then the top team from each region could move up into the finals and “compete” and showcase their abilities, departments and equipment. This would demonstrate the immense training and effort these public servants put in. It could really create some great local community excitement for their departments and also give a feeling of reward to these people who work really hard, but do not always get a “thank you.”

This incentive system would help distribute the costs on a statewide base versus a small local community with a lower population. The competition could unite the people from all over the state together to see the vital role our emergency people provide and answer.

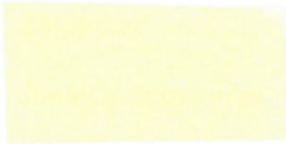
Another idea I have involves what many of these town/village/rural fire departments do already. Many of them host picnics, pancake breakfasts, and other types of fundraisers. I think it would be great if our legislators would set aside the time to attend these events. This would give them a greater understanding of the personal commitment these emergency responders invest. Plus it would give them a chance to meet the people of the communities they serve. They may

hear stories from appreciative victims of tragedy and see just how important and needed these departments are.

I remember last summer, being up in Door County, Wisconsin. In a tiny little community there was an accident in which it appeared that they did not have all of the equipment needed for the injuries sustained in the accident. The ambulance had to come up from Sturgeon Bay during the busy tourist season, weaving its way down the congested highway, there and back. . That length of travel time could be disastrous in many accidents. When legislators become more aware of these hardships, which occur more frequently each and every year, it hopefully will move them to come up with the means to help out these small communities.

These are just a few examples that I have in which our local area and state government can work together to make Wisconsin the best and safest state it can be.

Thank you for giving me this chance of thinking about a question and coming up with an idea that I hope will help.



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Bibliography:

Town of Calumet Fire Department and First Responders - www.calumetfire.com