

INTEGRATION OF POLICE AND FIRE SERVICES

Integration of police and fire departments into a single agency – and combining the duties of policemen and firemen – has proved to be an effective means of providing public safety for a relatively large city. A recent survey by the Research Council of the Department of Public Safety in Oak Park (a Detroit suburb) describes the advantages of “integration”. There is a lesson in administration to be learned from Oak Park.

HELP IN A HURRY

“Oak Park’s fire department is as close to a resident’s home as the nearest patrol car!”

Public Safety Officers in cruising patrol cars can be trained to guard homes and businesses against fires as well as against crimes. “Little fires” do not become “big fires” if they are stopped in time. Cruising firemen (public safety officers) in patrol cars bring the fire department close to each house and business and save the valuable minutes that it takes the fire engines to travel from the station to the fire.

KEEPS FIREMEN BUSY

The fire department, as we know it today, consists of numbers of men waiting at a station with a fire engine for an alarm. These men eat and sleep in the station, as they generally “work” 24 hour shifts. While the fireman sleeps, his pay goes on.

If a fireman can patrol the city in a car between fires, and work an 8 hour day, then all of his paid time is productive time. As the trend for shorter and shorter work weeks continues, it becomes increasingly necessary to find something for firemen to do in their waiting and sleeping time.

MORE MEN ON PATROL

If part of the fire fighting force can be trained as policemen and be put on the city streets in patrol cars, the increased number of patrols reduces the area that each man has to “cover”. Increased police patrol should mean better police protection for each resident. Policemen can be trained as firemen, and the increased number of trained fire fighters should provide better fire protection.

“HOT SHOT” COMPANIES SUPPLEMENTED

Special conditions in a city, such as heavy industry or high buildings, may require the maintenance of traditional fire companies in some sections; but the “hot shot” company – every fireman waiting at the station with the apparatus – can be supplemented, even in the largest cities, with patrolling public safety officers.

If the essence of fire fighting is to get the most men to a fire in the shortest possible time – integration seems to provide part of the answer.

CITY MANAGER’S VIEWS

The Research Council report on the Oak Park Department of Public Safety was received by City Manager Harold K. Schone with this comment:

“It is my opinion that the Citizens Research Council has once again rendered an invaluable service to the municipalities in Michigan, which results, of course, in benefits to the taxpayers; and it is my sincere wish that this report is read by all the municipalities in Michigan and that wherever it is read – use of the valuable information contained will be made.”

BETTER SERVICE – MAN FOR MAN

Each city must decide what level of police and fire services is required for its residents – and then it must make available the necessary men and equipment to provide that service. Regardless of what level of service is to be provided, there is more than one way to do it – and integration is one of the ways.

Integration will work to the degree that men and equipment are available and will provide better protection man for man. “Too few” public safety officers will not replace “enough” policemen and firemen. Integration is not a means to reduce the number of police and fire personnel to provide better service; it may provide equal service with fewer men – and it will provide better service with the same number of men.