

Aiken Public Safety, SC

Communicating a Fire Department's Activities and Needs

Using the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS)

Aiken Public Safety in South Carolina has been using NFIRS since the early 1980s. During this time frame Aiken has used their own data in many facets of their fire department's business. In the early days, the data was used mostly for reporting activities to the South Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal. Now the data is used in almost every decision that is made. NFIRS data is used to justify funds and resource needs of the department; determine and manage training of firefighters; and identify and guide public fire education initiatives.

In the beginning, fires were the main concern of incident reporting to Aiken. Now all fire department responses are tracked by using additional modules such as the EMS module. Using these additional modules allows Aiken to see trends in the types of incidents they respond to.

In 2002, Aiken saw 25% Service Calls versus 18% Fires. This increased in both areas in 2003, now seeing 42% Service Calls versus 19% Fires. At a closer look, the total number of incidents had decreased from 1275 to 853. After some research, it was apparent that the number of first responder calls in 2002 was a good deal greater than in 2003.

In 2001, Aiken Public Safety began tracking first responder calls, and in 2001 and 2002 they responded to every medical call in the district along with Aiken County EMS or Aiken County Rescue Squad. This led to a hefty bill that tied up valuable resources and personnel. After reconsideration, it was decided that Aiken Public Safety was not needed at every medical call within their district, but continued to respond to life threatening emergencies, such as difficulty breathing, chest pains, unconscious and active seizures. The department could save a great deal of funds and resources while still accomplishing their main goal, life safety.

Due to the change of Aiken's responses to only life threatening first responder calls, first responder calls dropped from 42% to 23%. This is the reason that the percentages of service calls and fires increased while the total incident count decreased.

The accessibility of the data over the years has proven to be a great advantage. The data is used not only to see the differences in calls and expenses but also to prove these facts to the decision makers. Recently, Aiken has begun to use GIS technology to analyze incidents and the department's response to them. This will become an even more persuading method of communicating the fire department's activities and needs.