

PA FIRE POLICE ***“The Fire Police”***

By Tony Riccardi - PA State Fire Academy Approved Fire Police Instructor

As you travel from community to community and observe fire police officers on duty, you get the sense that some have realized the importance of making a good impression in both appearance and conduct. Unfortunately, many others continue to ignore their appearance and continue treating motorists in a rude manner.

These fire police officers argue the point that motorists are “stupid” ignore their hand signals, and a host of other complaints. Certainly this is true of some motorists but, to state that all motorists are stupid is just plain unfair.

In the classroom we explain to the students that when your pager activates and you are needed to some emergency, you have two choices of conduct.

One – put on your official hat, badge, vest, and the mindset that says, “now I have to go out and deal with a bunch of idiots.” Since you have already convinced yourself they are idiots. It follows they will be idiots to you and your conduct will reflect this mentality.

On the other hand, you now receive a page that you are needed – you then put on your official hat, badge, vest and the mindset which says, “now I have an opportunity to get the traveling public safely around the emergency.” With this mindset, you will find dealing with motorists a little easier because you haven’t categorized everyone as stupid. Many motorists do comply, but fire police officers never talk about them because the tendency of humans is to dwell on the negatives.

As promised, this month we will deal with professionalism since every fire police officer wants to be considered a professional and wants to be treated that way.

Unfortunately, this does not occur simply because one desires it. Some effort is

required on your part to hopefully bring it about.

Do you have a short fuse when someone makes a mistake? Do you yell and shout at motorists if they didn’t understand what you wanted them to do? You already have two strikes against you in achieving professionalism.

How great is your desire to be treated as a professional? What are you willing to do to achieve this status? Unfortunately, most fire police think that just merely going on duty should qualify them to be treated as a professional.

Several years ago, during the riots in Philadelphia, police officers stood in a line at parade rest. A young African-American woman walked up to the police officer (in full view of the TV cameras) and spit in one of the officer’s face. The officer pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the spit away and replaced it in his pocket and returned to his position. That’s professionalism!

First, in considering how to achieve professionalism, it begins with your appearance.

It is estimated that 96% of your effectiveness is directly related to your appearance. Neglect that and the rest doesn’t matter. You’re already defeated.

As a fire police officer, wearing a badge and conveying an authoritative image, you must be constantly aware of your conduct. Keep in mind that motorists are watching you more than you may realize. What opinion will they draw from your actions?

So what does it take to be professional? And, more important, are you willing to do what it takes? Many fire police officers have expressed the opinion that motorists should respect them and regard them as professionals when they step out into the highway.

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Unfortunately, that may be their desire but, it never really works that way and you will have to earn their respect and the right to be called a professional.

There are four very important items fire police must consider:

Become familiar with the Fire Police Law (Title 35, Sections 7433 to 7437) and understand the requirements and be willing to apply the information.

Become familiar with the Fire Police Code of Ethics. We have often stated that, if fire police officers did nothing more than obey the code of ethics, their prestige and respect would increase almost immediately.

Decided if he/she can meet the physical requirements of the position. Keep in mind some activities may require standing on your feet for several hours at a time. Do you have the stamina? Will you need frequent rest during these periods?

Decide if he/she is suitable for the job. (Right temperament)

In deciding if you are suitable for the job, it is important that you honestly evaluate your capability to undertake this responsibility with the proper attitude towards those with whom you will come into contact. Losing your temper, shouting at motorists, making gestures with your hands, etc. are not the ways to achieve professionalism.

The important thing to remember is that the motorist you are dealing with is just like you and I, we don't like being stuck in traffic, we don't like being sent out of our way and we're not going to understand that an accident or fire is the reason for the delay.

Remember, we all have our own self-interest at heart and therefore motorist are not going to understand no matter how hard you try to explain the problem. This is when professionalism matters the most and when fire police have to "go the extra mile" in dealing with impatient, rude, and maybe disrespectful motorist.

So the question remains, are you willing to do what it takes to achieve professionalism?

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