

PA FIRE POLICE

“The Fire Police Mindset”

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

This month we will explore some observations or, “points to ponder” as we like to call them, (things to think about).

There are fire police who enjoy training programs but will only attend if the class is held in their own fire station. It could be stated that at least they attend training but, the point to ponder here is, that they miss out on the opportunity to talk to other fire police officers and gain insights into how others operate and/or handle various types of problems.

Once we leave school, at whatever level of completion, we continue to learn but in a different manner. For example, reading newspapers, watching television, and more often than not, from the experiences of others.

Therefore, any time we have an opportunity to learn from others, or have others learn from us, it should be embraced.

For example: We recently conducted a class for a fire company where two fire police units, who usually work together on scenes, attended the program. During the program we learned that the captains took turns in preparing a drill for their two units. The one captain actually planned a surprise drill and no one knew what it would be until they arrived and were given the problem and assignments. They were then evaluated on their performance. A critique is then conducted to determine how they could improve their performance. What a great idea! These two units work together at emergencies so they train together as well. It’s no wonder they are so highly respected by their local police departments and have received commendations from these police departments.

Over the years one thing has stood out very clearly, the more you tell someone something the more likely they are to remember it. So, we will repeat the information that is of significant importance for fire police officers.

Pa Vehicle Code Section 3102

This vehicle code stipulates that a person authorized to direct and/or control traffic must be properly attired. In reading the Section it is obvious that if a fire police officer does not have a hat, badge, and vest, they would not be properly attired and would, therefore, have no authority. Literally this means that if the fire police officer is not properly attired, the motorist does not have to obey them.

Unfortunately, we have observed several fire police officers attempting to direct traffic while not wearing a badge and in some instances, not wearing a hat of any type.

The other vehicle code that we referenced is Section 3111, which actually contains two provisions that affect fire police officers.

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The first stipulates that fire police must use an approved traffic control device when placing signage or other type devices to alert motorists to conditions they will encounter.

Many fire police are now aware that flares cannot be used where an approved traffic control device is required since the courts have declared that flares are not an approved traffic control device. This stems from the case that occurred in Ross Township (suburb of Pittsburgh) where the police department placed flares on the road to alert motorists of the icy conditions. One motorist challenged them in court and the court ruled that flares are not an approved traffic control device.

One reason for repeating this is due to the large number of fire police who assumed they could no longer use flares, which is not the case at all. Flares can still be used in conjunction with other approved devices, used to illuminate fire police during foggy conditions and other similar situations.

The second part of 3111 states that hand signals given by anyone authorized to control and/or direct traffic must be clear and understandable.

Some of the hand signals used by many fire police officers defy understanding especially the one where the arm is swung in a violent circle. Does this mean "come ahead" or does it mean "to hurry up". If you mean one thing and the motorist determines it means something else, you could have a problem.

Another signal that lacks understanding along with just plain sloppiness, as well as being inappropriate, is when the fire police officer uses the index finger to motion a driver to come forward.

The surprising thing is when a fire police officer complains that the motorist failed to obey their signals. Unfortunately, it may not always be the motorist who is at fault, but none of us want to hear that we may be wrong. "They are required to obey me" complains the fire police officer.

Well, legally you're right. However – according to section 3111, of the vehicle code, you could lose that argument in a court room if it can be shown that your signal was not clear and understandable.

Many fire police officers want to be considered and treated as a professional.

Next month we'll address the issue of professionalism so you can truly understand what being a professional is all about.



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