

Fire Officer I – Assignment #6

Utah Fire and Rescue Academy

Situation:

An embarrassing situation regarding your department has been covered in the local newspaper and the fire chief wants to make a public response to it. As a company officer, you have been assigned by Fire Chief Bill Bush to address the following issue for the University Place Fire Department. He wants you to draft an open letter to the citizens of the City of University Place for his signature.

Assignment:

1. Regardless of what Chief Bush has already said in the article, how should he respond now to this citizen's complaint?
2. Prepare an open letter to the citizens for Chief Bush's signature to be published in the *News Tribune* in response to the following news release.

Requirements:

1. Type this on professional letterhead, double-spaced. Be sure to proofread for grammar and spelling.
2. Make it professional and as brief as possible you are limited on printing space.
3. Submit the assignment electronically as a .doc or .docx.

State Skill #7

Local apologizes for chief's behavior



Dep. Chief Bleeker's use of a reserve ambulance was the focus of a citizen complaint.

Sunday, June 30, 2002
The News Tribune

University Place, Washington - University Place firefighters apologized to citizens Thursday in light of a community uproar over a deputy chief's use of a department ambulance to haul wallboard to his home.

In an open letter to The News Tribune, the University Place Professional Firefighters Union said no member has used a public vehicle for a personal errand. But firefighters are "humbled and embarrassed" by the incident, the letter reads, and by the "cavalier" response from district officials.

Earlier this month, an anonymous citizen witnessed deputy fire chief Richard Bleecker haul wallboard to his home in a 1984 Ford ambulance with "University Place Fire District No. 3" emblazoned on the side.

When questioned this week, Fire Chief Bill Bush defended Bleecker, saying that other district employees, including himself, had used the surplus ambulance for personal errands.

It is considered a reserve vehicle, contains no medical equipment, and needs to be driven occasionally to stay in working condition, Bush said. Scott Kelly, the union's vice president, said firefighters wanted to communicate their disappointment to citizens. "It's important that the public knows how we feel," Kelly said. "I'm not sure the responses the public has received convey that through the administration's actions."

Neither Bush nor any of the five fire commissioners returned repeated calls seeking comment Thursday. But Commission Chairman Fredric Langton sent an e-mail to all district employees and volunteers on Thursday, reminding them that fire vehicles are for official use only.

The state prohibits a municipal officer from using his or her position to gain special privileges. But the state auditor's office has said it's up to district commissioners to enforce the law. Firefighters say they have used the reserve ambulance to transport equipment from the old fire station on 40th Street West to the newly constructed public safety building near City Hall.

Since the report of the wallboard incident, though, firefighters and paramedics have taken heat from angry citizens, said union officer Jim Sharp. Several have called to chastise the district. A few have spotted on-duty firefighters buying lunch and accused them of abusing the public's trust. "The department as a whole has been damaged by this," Sharp said. Fred Tuttle, a 16-year resident, was angry enough to write a letter to Bush. "The leadership is not out there protecting the very precious resources that tax money gives them," Tuttle said Thursday.

Tuttle also e-mailed a sarcastic request for use of the ambulance to the fire district. The district will need more than a letter of apology to satisfy citizens, union leaders said. The fire district will ask University Place residents to support its annual maintenance and operations levy in the fall. Last year, nearly 65 percent of voters supported the measure.

District officials will have to work hard if they want voter support this time, Tuttle said. "I've never questioned the integrity of those levy and bond requests," Tuttle said. "I now will question whether a request is for my family's protection or if this is for another toy in their clubhouse."