

19 Jan 2015

Mayor Kookier
City of Rapid City
300 6th St.
Rapid City, SD 57701

Mayor Kookier,

I am writing regarding the issue of switching the fire response at the Rapid City Airport away from Rapid City Fire Department (RCFD) to an authority fire department. There are several critical issues that need to be considered other than the potential cost savings which directly will impact the Citizens of Rapid City. Questions that need to be answered before this transition is made to prevent liability issues would include:

- The majority of plane crashes do not occur on the airport property, but in surrounding areas. This requires a coordinated response and in some cases a determination by the local airport authority if the authority will allow their equipment and resources to leave the airport property. This would include who determines if resources can leave, for how long, and how far can they travel to a crash site?
- Since the airport may respond to crashes and be in command of those incidents, how often and to what level will they provide training to RCFD on crash operations?
- How will airport firefighters maintain their level of training and proficiency of skills? With the current situation, firefighters can be rotated to other stations to ensure they are competent as well as learning and using the latest techniques.
- Switching will create a fire service with very few incidents. What is a level of demonstrated competency and risk that the City is willing to accept regarding airport response?

- When RCFD and the authority fire department need to work together on an incident, will all the equipment be compatible and remain compatible for years to come? This would include self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), appliances, EMS equipment, triage tags, etc. If one agency upgrades equipment, who will pay for the other to both upgrade and train with the new equipment? For example if RCFD changes SCBA, will the City also purchase compatible units for the authority fire department since the authority is not changes or may not have funds available?
- How will standards of response be determined since both agencies may be responding to the same incident, either on or off airport grounds?
- How will the City ensure proper staffing, training, and leadership is provided by another agency operating in their community?
- How will turnover of authority employees be handled? Since authority fire fighters are generally paid less, they are looking to move to larger departments with greater call volume. This creates turnover in a department that may not have the financial or training facilities to ensure the highest level of proficiency.
- How will fuel or other hazardous materials incidents be handled on airport property when those experts are based in RCFD? Will services be billed or will Rapid City incur that cost?
- How will inflight medical emergencies be handled when the authority fire fighters do not regularly go on EMS calls and their skills are not at the same level as RCFD?
- Will Rapid City provide the necessary human resources training to ensure the City is not liable for any ADA or EOC complaints since agencies may be working together?
- How does the City ensure the level of competent emergency personnel when these employees do not answer to the City?
- How will capital upgrades in response vehicles be handled and will Rapid City need to supplement the authority or will the authority have taxing ability to ensure they maintain an industry standard for equipment?

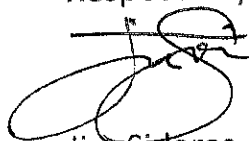
These are just a few of the issues they need to be determined. It comes down to value versus cost. Rapid City Fire Department is a well led and managed organization. They ensure the safety of the community and are answerable to the City leadership. RCFD budgets, legal, human resources, and other issues are handled with the utmost of professionalism by an entire City team. Their long-range planning for all areas of the organization is well developed and available to the City leadership for review.

Moving this important component of emergency response away from the oversight of the City is an extremely important decision. This level of control will be lost by the City with a switch to an authority fire department and yet the City may incur some of the risks.

In my career, I have been on four plane crashes and many inflight emergencies. The most recent plane crash occurred about one mile off the airport property resulting in nine deaths. In plane crashes, the level of expertise and experience is of the utmost importance since there is limited time to save lives. This is due to the many unique challenges of aircraft emergencies as well as the issues in the surrounding crash site. Switching the direction of emergency response is a decision not to be taken lightly. Ultimately in the event of a disaster, either large or small, the City and its leaders will have to answer questions whether the cost savings was worth the value of switching from a high performing organization.

Feel free to contact me with any questions or if I can be of any assistance.

Respectfully,



Jim Sideras, RN, MS, MIFireE, CFO, CESMO, EFO
Past President, South Dakota Fire Chiefs Association