

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
THE SENATE GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
ON
THE NEEDS OF THE FIRE SERVICE IN
RESPONDING TO TERRORISM**

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Mr. Chairman. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today.

My name is Michael J. Crouse, and I am the Chief of Staff for the General President of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF). I am here today representing the views of our General President Harold Schaitberger and 245,000 professional firefighters who are members of the IAFF. I spent 17 years as a firefighter employed by the federal government protecting United States military installations. For 10 years I was the IAFF District Vice President representing all IAFF federal firefighters. In this capacity I was intimately involved with emergency preparedness at military facilities.

Mr. Chairman, exactly three months ago today, I watched with horror as the planes hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Within minutes of those attacks, I knew that hundreds of my fellow firefighters were responding to the call, entering those buildings, and placing themselves at risk. When the first tower collapsed, I also knew we had lost hundreds of firefighters under millions of tons of jagged steel and debris.

The 344 firefighters, who made the ultimate sacrifice and rescued tens of thousands of civilians from the hellish carnage of the World Trade Center tragedy, are my brothers, as are the thousands of other firefighters who responded to the terrorist attacks in New York and at the Pentagon on September 11.

For firefighters, it is still September 11th. Every time the alarm goes off, we steel ourselves to the possibility that we are responding to the latest act of terror. In this first war of the 21st Century, the battle lines are drawn in our own communities, and civilians and the places Americans frequent are explicit targets.

Mr. Chairman, in your home state of Connecticut, there are many high profile targets of terrorism such as the Groton Naval Submarine Base, Yankee Nuclear Power Plant, Derby Hydroelectric Dam, and Dow chemical processing plant. Additionally, like the rest of the nation, Connecticut has its share of federal buildings, transportation hubs, shopping malls, schools, entertainment facilities, and media outlets, which are extremely vulnerable and if hit would cause massive devastation.

Hartford, Connecticut, the capital city, in certain ways is less prepared for a terrorist attack than many rural communities. Hartford has no hazardous materials (hazmat) response team, no mass casualty unit, or terrorism training classes. Primarily due to financial limitations, Hartford does not have the personnel to man these specialized units or to provide the necessary training.

In this war, we must not only support our troops abroad, but also with equal zeal and financial resources, support firefighters who are the nation's domestic defenders. The federal government must do its part in preparing the nation's fire service for its role in the war against terrorism. The first things the federal government must do to shore up our homeland security is to assist local communities with hiring additional firefighters and providing all firefighters with the specialized hazmat/WMD training. Secondly, establishing a single point of contact to help localities access the various federal programs can have a positive effect on terrorism response.

For nearly 100 years, IAFF members have been protecting the citizens of our nation from all hazards. We are the first on the scene when there are incidents involving hazardous materials, we are the nation's primary providers of emergency medical care, and we are the ones who search for and rescue people who are trapped and in danger. However, while the job we need to perform in this war is familiar, the magnitude of the challenge before us is unprecedented. In the past, we have had to respond to isolated incidents. In this new world, we need to be prepared for a coordinated, well-orchestrated series of attacks on American citizens. While we all tend to look toward the military in time of war, the reality is that in the war against terrorism, it is firefighters who will be our nation's first line of defense.

If we are to be successful in fulfilling our mission, we must have adequate resources. Sadly, as of today, we do not. The need for additional firefighters and on-going training is tremendous and it can no longer be borne solely by local jurisdictions.

To those who argue that hiring and training firefighters is a local responsibility, I say that preparing for and responding to terrorism is a federal responsibility. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacks on America. They were national tragedies that demand a federal response.

PERSONNEL

The first and foremost need of the fire service is adequate personnel. Today, 2/3 of all fire departments—large and small—operate with inadequate staffing. In your own state, Mr. Chairman, jurisdictions such as Danbury and Fairfield, operate with only three firefighters per apparatus. Responding to a fire with only three people makes it impossible for the first responding unit to comply with OSHA's "2-in/2-out" standard for safe fireground operation, and places the lives of those firefighters in jeopardy.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which investigates firefighter fatalities, has identified inadequate staffing as a chief cause in dozens of firefighter deaths over the past few years.

And yet, cities like Danbury and Fairfield and the thousands of other jurisdictions that operate with three person engine companies aren't the worst of it. Incredibly, a growing number of communities attempt to respond to emergencies with two people per apparatus, the City of Manchester, Connecticut among them. The men and women of the Manchester Fire Department are as brave and capable as any in the nation, but there is simply no way that they can safely protect the public with two people on a rig.

Congress would never allow our Army to engage in a war with 2/3 of its divisions undermanned. Incredibly, this is exactly what we are asking our local fire departments to do. Congress can greatly impact the safety of the American public from acts of terrorism just by getting more firefighters in our communities. While stream-lining the coordination amongst the more than 40 federal agencies with a hand in terrorism response is an important matter for debate, Congress will get immediate real-world results by helping local jurisdictions hire more firefighters.

That is why the IAFF along with the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and several Members of Congress have strongly endorsed the SAFER Fire Fighters Act, S. 1617 and H.R. 3185. The SAFER Fire Fighters Act uses the procedures established by the highly successful Universal Hiring Program for police officers to place 75,000 additional firefighters in our communities.

The SAFER Fire Fighters Act is an innovative approach to solving the nation's need for more firefighters. It is an example of the new type of federalism that our country needs to combat terrorism. The SAFER Fire Fighters Act would be a step towards better cooperation and coordination amongst local, state and federal governments to respond strongly and decisively to terrorism.

TRAINING

The second most pressing need in preparing the fire service for the war on terrorism is specialized training in WMD and hazmat response mitigation.

From the vantage point of front line emergency responders, the two crucial components of any WMD or hazmat training program are that the training is conducted in the local jurisdiction incorporating the unique aspects of the communities, and that it uses trainers who are both certified instructors and professional firefighters.

The advantage of training in one's own jurisdiction is self-evident. Training for a terrorism event in your own community allows first responders to not only learn the tactics and methods of effective response, but apply these theoretical concepts to concrete targets in their jurisdiction. This value-added piece is missing when firefighters are forced to attend remote training sites like Fort McClellan, Alabama. The value of qualified firefighters teaching other firefighters is in the benefit gained by shared experiences. The bond of common experiences allows firefighter instructors to more effectively communicate the lessons of a training course than say a person from the academia or the military. These firefighter instructors know the fire fighting jargon and can speak the language and because they are both firefighters and subject matter experts, they command a great amount of respect from their students. I am proud to note that the IAFF offers training programs to fire departments—free of charge—in terrorism and hazmat response that have all the elements of a successful training program. Our training uses skilled instructors, who are both hazmat technicians and certified instructors, to train fire departments to safely and effectively respond to conventional, biological, chemical, or nuclear terrorist incidents. Additionally, our program conducts the training in the community and incorporates the unique aspects of the localities.

The IAFF programs, developed in partnerships with DoJ, DoE, DoT, EPA and HHS, are the only hazmat and terrorism response programs that focus on emergency responder safety. Our relationship with certain agencies stretches over the last four Administrations. Over this period, we have trained tens of thousands of firefighters, both professional and volunteer firefighters, union and unorganized departments, on how to safely respond to terrorist attacks and other hazmat emergencies.

Especially since September 11th, the demand for our training program far outpaces our funding to deliver it. Our ability to deliver the training is only limited by the funding we get from our federal partners. If our grants from the various federal agencies are increased, the IAFF can dramatically increase the number of fire departments trained in terrorism and hazmat response and mitigation.

COORDINATION

There has been a lot said in the media and in official government reports bemoaning the lack of coordination and duplication of programs by various federal agencies. We agree that a single point of contact, whether it is the Office of Homeland Defense, DoJ, or FEMA, will help localities in terms of getting current, accurate, and collated information to prepare for terrorist attacks, and will assist local jurisdictions with acquiring coordinated federal support when terrorists do attack.

More important than determining which agency should serve as the point of contact, however, is clarifying the lead agency's mission. While there is unquestionably a need for a federal agency to coordinate the various counterterrorism programs that exist throughout government, we do not believe that this lead agency should subsume the functions of those other agencies.

There is value in several agencies being involved in terrorism response and it is not necessarily duplication when several agencies are involved in what seemingly is the same area. For instance, in the area of training, many of the so-called duplicative programs are in fact specialized training to address specific needs. EPA, DoT, and DoE all offer hazmat training. However, the EPA program focuses on responding to hazmat incident at superfund sites. Likewise, the DoT program focuses on the unique challenges posed by the release of hazmat while it is transported. Lastly, the DoE program is specific to hazmat issues at nuclear facilities. Each setting presents distinct challenges and needs to be addressed in separate training programs.

Thus, the federal government should not necessarily eliminate those programs that are viewed as duplicative. There is value in several agencies contributing their subject matter expertise to a specific area. However, Congress can assist local jurisdictions in accessing the various programs that they need by providing a single point of contact that functions like a clearinghouse to refer communities to the appropriate agency or agencies.

CONCLUSION

Too often, the fire service has been neglected when it comes to planning for and devoting resources to respond to terrorism. Yet, we are the first responders and the ones making the ultimate sacrifice to protect our nation. As we pray for a quick and decisive resolution to the war in Afghanistan, we must not forget that the war against terrorism began on our soil and will continue to be fought here.

The firefighters of the IAFF will be ready when terrorists strike again. But our ranks are thin and reinforcements are needed quickly. The federal government, including Congress, the Administration, and the 40 plus agencies that play a role in terrorism response, must recognize that firefighters are the lynchpin to any effective and strong response to terrorism.

Congress must take the lead in this area by providing the fire service with the resources to ensure adequate staffing so that we can operate safely and effectively, and providing firefighters the necessary training so that we will be able to play our role in fighting the war on terrorism.

Thank you for this time to present the view of the IAFF. I will be available for questions by the committee.