

## Q & A with The Commissioner *The Budget, Funding, Terrorism Preparedness,*

### *Q. How prepared is the FDNY for another terrorist attack?*

A. Since the unprecedented and horrific attack on the World Trade Center this Department has focused on rebuilding and preparing for the possibility of another catastrophic incident. We've introduced a new radio communications system and enhanced Haz Mat capabilities by giving additional training to 625 firefighters in 21 ladder companies. We have trained 70 senior officers to operate as part of two Incident Management Teams, with expertise in managing a large-scale incident of significant duration. Beginning this month, we will begin training all fire and EMS officers in the Incident Command System. This training program (16 hours for lieutenants, 40 hours for captains and chief officers) is designed to help them protect their members and begin management of a large scale incident should they be first responders to a potential terror attack or other large emergency. Funding for this program—about \$10 million—is provided by the federal Department of Homeland Security.

We also have spent a lot of time consulting with other experts and agencies. We have been training with CBIRF, the Marine Corps' elite unit for handling chemical and biological incidents. Our anti-terrorism taskforce, which is headed by former CIA Director Jim Woolsey, believes we are making significant progress and are on the right track in our pursuit of improved technology such as wireless command boards, live video feeds via helicopter to our Fire Operations Center, and tracking technology for members.

We recently met with Israeli fire and EMS officials who confront suicide attacks and other calamities on an almost daily basis. It was clear from these discussions that in terms of preparedness with respect to other first responders throughout the world, we continue to be the best and most prepared to deal with any emergency, regardless of size or magnitude. But we must do more. We need to further improve our technology and equipment and provide the training that our firefighters and EMS personnel need to stay safe with all the new threats they face. By seeking new funding and developing

new training initiatives, the Department is committed to doing everything we can to make certain you receive the best protection against these new threats.

### *Q. Why don't we have a second Haz Mat unit? Didn't the McKinsey Report recommend the FDNY create another HM unit?*

A. Actually, McKinsey's recommendation states: "...that the FDNY expand its hazmat capabilities ...," and creating a second Haz Mat unit was one of several alternatives suggested. Would we like to create a second Haz Mat unit? Yes, but there are several significant obstacles - most importantly, the necessary funding. It would cost about \$5 million to create another unit, and about \$1.5 million in annual costs going forward - this at a time when we've been forced to close six engine companies due to the city's budget problems. Another problem has been the lack of interest on the part of firefighters to volunteer for assignment as Haz Mat Specialists. However, while the federal government won't pay for creating and staffing a second Haz Mat unit, they will pay for advanced Haz Mat training. We used those funds to train 625 firefighters in 21 ladder companies throughout the city to augment our Haz Mat, Rescue and Squad units. (In addition to 40 hours of Haz Mat training, they also received 40 hours of rescue support training focusing on search, rescue and victim removal from collapsed structures and confined spaces.) We now have more than 1,000 firefighters with advanced Haz Mat expertise. We believe it's better to decentralize our training and educate more members rather than have such a concentrated base of knowledge. We are now more flexible. We can respond quicker to incidents across the city and we can even respond to incidents simultaneously. What we've done is what McKinsey recommended: expand and enhance our Haz Mat capability. We've started this process and will continue to try and expand our capability. What's next? We plan to have four engine companies trained as Haz Mat Techs (equivalent to the training level now held by all our Rescue and Squad members) in the very near future.

### *Q. Is the Department punishing members because of excessive LOD medical leave?*

A. We are not punishing them. We have been monitoring a number of members who have a history of excessive medical leave, and recently we detailed 24 of these members from busy companies to slower ones or from ladder to engine companies. (These two dozen members were selected from an original group of about 250 who had more than 40 days of line-of-duty ML for each of the last three years.) Not only did their prolonged absences strain our staffing in those busy neighborhoods, their injuries were probably exacerbated by the high activity at those companies. It is anticipated that the change to a lower level of activity/branch of service and supervision will positively affect their health and safety. While we realize there is a passionate bond between a firefighter and his/her company, the reassignments were intended to improve the quality of protection in those busy neighborhoods as well as our efficiency throughout the entire department.

Medical leave is directly related to staffing levels and overtime. Due to recent high levels of ML—as well as the high number of retirements that have left the Department understaffed—we have exceeded our budgeted overtime levels by tens of millions of dollars. The collective bargaining agreement between the UFA and the city stipulates a reduction in the number of five-firefighter units to 11 if the annualized ML exceeds 7.5%. (Currently, it's at 8.04%.) Earlier this year, the city and the UFA reached a negotiated agreement setting new targets for ML levels so that we can both continue to provide five-firefighter manning on engine companies (now at 40), while working to bring ML averages back to their pre-9/11 numbers (around 6.5% annually). I believe the new agreement and some of the initiatives we've taken have been effective and I'm confident that we will reach the targets set and get back the full complement of 60 five-firefighter engine companies by July of next year.