

Do you have people willing to do research and development?

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In the fire service, we always had the opportunity to try new equipment, gear, tools, uniforms, turnout gear, etc. Anyone with the opportunity to try different and innovative offerings from different manufacturers should take advantage of it. It can make your job easier, safer, more cost-efficient.

The only way to keep up with trends and technology is to be "in the know" about what your particular industry is doing. There is no better way than to use what manufacturers or representatives have to offer in a field test.

Many times, at my former department, we would have such opportunities — especially when it came to medical equipment used by first responders, EMTs and/or paramedics. When we would arrive at the emergency room with a patient, the ER personnel would sometimes be unfamiliar with the item we were using. That is because the EMS service would have more exposure to the equipment.

And those who are more willing to test items are more likely to get continued opportunities to field-test or evaluate the latest and greatest products. You would get a certain amount of self-satisfaction knowing that you have contributed to helping improve an item that eventually may become an industry standard.

A long tradition of being innovative and cooperating with different entities also gets recognition for your department or company. For example, we had that opportunity when we participated with the U.S. Navy in field testing and experimenting with "fog" nozzles back in the day. Pictures of those historical events still hang in our chief's office and training center for all to see.

The public likes to see an aggressive, forward-thinking fire department. They want assurance that they are getting the best protection possible. This is also accomplished by participating in different events and getting exposure from the media.

It needs to be an ongoing process. Any company/entity needs to stay at the forefront of their industry. If not, they will obviously fall behind and become obsolete when using old equipment and techniques if newer items are available. The fire service is no place for this and needs to remain at the forefront.

Unless you are an industry that is in business for profit, it's good to share any new items, training or techniques with other departments if it improves safety for employees, crews and the public. The worst thing that could happen is to agree to try something, then have it sit idle and never get used.

More opportunities will not come your way if you do this. Manufacturers value constructive criticism and feedback when it comes to improving their product.

Next to our quartermaster's office is a fire station to which I was assigned. We always had a flow of fire service manufacturers coming by to value our input and try new stuff. We would also get invited to equipment and apparatus demonstrations, presentations and meetings.

The crew at my station and shift was always ready, willing and able. It was a great way to keep up to date with what was being offered for firefighters and their departments. The biggest value is that we would pass it on to the personnel in our department, or they would come and ask us about it. They would also see us using it and inquire about it.

Once co-workers know you have something newer and better, they want in on some of that action, too! Manufacturers loved this and appreciated you knowing that it would be thoroughly evaluated. Every now and then — with the approval of your department, of course — you get a freebie (flashlights, extrication gloves, tools, etc.).

Another approach would be to peruse different publications. When something catches your eye that you think would be helpful for your department, contact the manufacturer or representative to see if they can send you their product to field test or even get a presentation.

Education never hurt anybody. Most of the time they will bend over backward to respond to your request.

About the Author



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