

MULTI **BRIEFS**

: EXCLUSIVE

# Your spare fleet is just as important as your front-line apparatus

**Frank R. Myers**

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Maintaining and keeping your spare apparatus fleet functioning and assuring that it stays cosmetically respectable is crucial for your department.

One main reason is that during off-duty special events, your spare trucks are the ones seen by masses of tourists, visitors, residents and citizens. The other reason is that it needs to be ready 24/7/365 in case of a disabled front-line apparatus.

Now, playing the devil's advocate, if the spare trucks don't look good cosmetically, it can send a message to taxpayers that an upgrade is needed. However, we need the public to be confident they are getting the best equipment money can buy. Also, there is no inspiration for those who view a "shabby" fire truck to help or join an institution that cannot maintain their equipment.

The other aspect is that when a neighboring department needs to borrow a truck in a time of shortage or has no spares in their fleet, it sends a good signal to them about how you maintain your trucks — I believe it is called dignity.

There is nothing more embarrassing than to have another department put down the condition of a spare truck or to be talked behind your back even though you responded to them in their time of need. They may be gracious upfront, but say differently when you turn your back.

Fire departments are a close-knit group and there is always another firefighter a person may know from a different department. The rumor mill spreads fast — especially through social media.

The front-line apparatus does get seen when responding to alarms. However, they stay parked in an apparatus room most of the time (in most circumstances), out of the public's eye. With terrorism a constant threat, leaving the stations open for the public to see the trucks or be welcomed in is a thing of the past. More and more, the SOP for many departments is to keep everything "locked down."

Spare apparatus need to perform just as well as the newer, front-line apparatus. We cannot compromise the functionality of a truck to just "get by." Our business is to protect lives and property. You cannot afford to arrive with a disadvantage and subpar equipment.

It may not perform the same as the newer apparatus or have all the bells, whistles and features, but it needs to be 100 percent functional. This is especially true when it comes to key safety components such as; tires, brakes, relief valves, road to pump functionality, engine performance, audio and visual warning components, pump panel and dashboard lights, etc.

If there is anything questionable, you may need to resort to going to other departments for one of their reserve/spare apparatus. This is good and bad. It's good in that it shows the public that we have cooperation with our neighboring department (mutual aid plan). But it also can send a message that your department needs new apparatus. Perhaps the aging front-line fleet — even though it is getting the job done — needs to be replaced.

There is no doubt that any spare/reserve apparatus housed in a station needs to get the same detailed checkout as the front-line trucks daily or at least weekly. These reserve apparatus are great learning assets for newly hired, probationary or rookie firefighters.

The newbies, for the most part, are motivated, aggressive and willing to learn more about their job and job function. Have a senior driver show them how to do a proper morning checkout, then give them the responsibility of adopting the truck as their own. What you are also doing is building a tradition and legacy.

For those reserve apparatus not located or housed at a fire station but at your department's fleet maintenance facility, a rotating schedule needs to be initiated or put in place. Your department needs to allow these personnel to go "out of service" for an hour or more to conduct detailed readiness checks.

All in all, the reserve fleet needs to be loved and respected. These trucks served their time and served well when in service. One may run across a truck they once rode in and be reminded of many memories, whether good or bad.

Just look at any webpage with the word "fire" in it, and I will guarantee you that fire trucks are the most photographed item in any fire department, especially the antiques.

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#### About the Author



Frank R. Myers is a retired lieutenant with the City of Miami (Florida) Fire Rescue, where he served for 32 years. He works as a consultant for [PSTrax.com](http://PSTrax.com), a technology service that helps fire departments across the country automate their apparatus, equipment and inventory checks.

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