

## **AFGE REGIONAL FIRE FIGHTER COUNCIL CONFERENCE CALL MINUTES**

Sandy Choate, Council Advisor, started the conference call of the Fire Fighter Regional Council at 2:00 pompon Wednesday July 12, 2006.

A roll call of Regional Officers was taken and a quorum was present.

The first order of business was to discuss the by-laws of the Council After discussion there was a motion made and seconded to approve the new by-laws. This was approved by voice vote with no objections.

The second order of business was to elect a Secretary/Treasurer. Thomas Sincock was nominated and elected to fill the position.

Discussion on the following issues were addressed:

**Fire Fighter Web Site.** Sandy briefed the Council on the status of the web site. It is not progressing along as fast as she had anticipated. Setting up the site has been extremely time consuming. However when the web site is up and running there will be navigational tools set up that will include a link to the AFGE National Web Site. We will have on our site the ability to access information, post and answer issues, and National Office is in the process of setting up a pay-pal site so that the Locals can purchase Fire Fighter materials. AFGE National Office will also set up, in conjunction with the Web Master an area for pictures from the different Departments. We want as many pictures as we can get to include apparatus and fire stations, crews and information about each Fire Department. We will also be able to access Agency Regulations, shift changes, mandatory overtime and training opportunities. Also, AFGE is helping to set up web sites so that they will all be on one seamless site eventually. As of today this is not totally complete.

One of the things that afge has done is to insure that all information that goes onto the web site it true and accurate and Sandy will make sure that the material is legal. So if the pictures come to Sandy she will make sure that National Office gets them If there are any awards or commendations sandy will make sure its on the web site. Any new apparatus would be good. Get them in ASAP.

### **General Information.**

The regional representatives are going to have to contact the local presidents and get them to give us the members so that we can set up a roster with E-mail addresses and phone numbers so that we can send to each one information and should be sent to sandy so that the information can be forwarded to National Office to insure we can identify the members. The cards can then be sent to the local liaisons for distribution. We won't have a directory until we get the information needed. We also need to know who the local liaisons are and they should be elected by the members abut can be appointed by the

Local President. Also there may be a need to have more than one liaison if the dept. is large. This person would be an assistant contact.

There was a question raised as to whether a coordinator or liaison could get mileage reimbursement since they sometimes have to travel a long distance to meet with members at outlying stations. Brandon was asked to check and see if National would assist since it could be considered organizing. (mileage)

Sandy was asked if the NVP's have been briefed about the council and sandy responded that it would be appropriate to send a letter to them advising of the council and how it will help organizing. Perhaps getting a co-signature from President Gage would help. Starting from the top down may be a better idea. Perhaps a letter to Alma also. Sandy will talk with President Gage about this

When we met with President Gage he wanted the council to be a catalyst for litigation and for NSPS at the regional and local level. One of the responsibilities will be for contract language and we need to start collecting language from locals and develop a list of issues for a contract, so that any local negotiating contracts can have language for Fire Fighters included.

AFGE has hired attorneys to do litigation but have not handled any litigation for fire fighters there will be issues of first impressions or fire fighter issues. This structure may change and the way the by-laws are set up they should give it to the liaisons and they can review with council and report what may be of interest so that they can make a decision to either take the case or lend advice. To Sandy's knowledge, there is one case challenging waivers at the Northport Veterans Hospital. The issue involves the VA granting a waiver allowing three men per shift. The VA Council has a health and safety part of the contract that we believe the VA is violating and was handled by Jackie Simms from the National Office who handles VA litigation presented the case. We are currently awaiting the Arbitrators decision.

### **Legislation.**

DOD has proposed legislation for allowing contract fire fighters to fight woodland fires. Brendon briefed the committee on the current status. We have a very narrow window to lobby. The House of Representatives removed the language, but the Senate left it in They are waiting for DOD to respond. They haven't yet and Sandy mentioned our opposition to it. There is a training center in the Yakima National Forest that has a whole bunch of exotic animals out there. The Army uses a part of this forest for training exercises. Apparently they have had some fire out there and there is a court case mandating the Army to drop fire retardent. Since the army is currently deployed, they want to use Contractors. If they had explained this we might not have a problem but the Army said as it is currently written that the union might not like it but we stated that if they would amend the bill we could live with it.

There is one piece of legislation that we are preparing will start to correct the issue of the holiday inequity. We have had this on the burner and OPM has taken the position that

since you are paid for your work you are compensated. This is a bogus argument since all persons working on holidays get paid. The intent of the bill is to not ask for monetary compensation but for something equivalent to comp time. Benny Egger, the former Chairman of the Fire Fighter Steering Committee is trying to get Senator Thad Corchran and Representative Chip Pickering to back the legislation. Bennie has a personal relationship with Congressman Pickering so we are hopeful that we can enlist his assistance. Allan kadrofske from legislation has the bill ready to go.

**General Comments.**

Tina had an idea to have the officer's pictures on the web site. It is a good idea but are you willing to send the pictures. If so we would like to have the pictures by July 20, 2006. Also we have the ability to review and edit their information. We can still do it as we currently do

There being no further business, the next conference call is tentatively set for September 8, 2006 at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted for approval:

Thomas W. Sincock

## **AFGE REGIONAL FIREFIGHTER COUNCIL CONFERENCE CALL MINUTES**

Sandy Choate, Council Advisor started the conference call of the Fire Fighter Regional Council at 2:p.m. on Tuesday, September 26, 2006

A roll Call of Regional Officers was taken and a quorum was present.

The first order of business was to approve the minutes of the July 12, 2006 conference call. There were no objections.

The agenda was as follows:

At the AFGE National Convention the delegates approved an increase for both the Police and Fire Fighter Councils. The former amount, \$15,000.00 per year for three years was increased to \$20,000.00 per year for each Council for three years. As part of the resolution we will be required to give a report of expenditures to the National Executive Council (NEC) yearly and to explain in detail, what the Council functions and goals are/were for the year. Since we are relatively new as far as our re-organized council, we will start out with a budget for 2007 and may do a power point presentation of our work progress so far. The following is a breakdown of the budget for 2007.

- \$9,000.00 - Sandy's retainer
- \$3,500.00 - Other DOD- EMC expenses
- \$2,000.00 - Travel expenses for Sandy and Tina
- \$2,200.00 - Travel reimbursement for  
Coordinators
- \$350.00 - Computer equipment update
- \$600.00 - Membership for John and Tina
- \$450.00 - Conference call expenses for year
- \$300.00 - Stationary and Business Cards
- \$900.00 - Decal printing
- \$800.00 - Miscellaneous expenses

This budget will be fairly similar to 2006 except a small increase in the retainer. The \$2,200.00 will breakdown to \$200.00 per Coordinator to be used for gas re-imbusement while traveling to different Locals. Prior to any Coordinator going to visit a Local they will need to get approval for re-imbusement from either John or Tina before hand. We can keep a better track of how the expenditures are made by doing this.

### **Sandy's visit to Ft. Hood and Red River Army Depot.**

Sandy had the privilege of speaking with James Hill and the Fire Fighters at Ft. Hood. Prior to her arrival she asked that there be a list of concerns drawn up and they were

discussed at great length. James stated that the members were impressed with what they heard and the responses. It seems to hold more weight when an experienced attorney versed in the facts speaks with them. The same held true at Red River. Sandy brought back some questions to research for them.

The issue discussed was:

**COMP TIME FOR TRAINING:** The choice to take either overtime or comp time is the employee's choice not the Chief's. However, comp time is earned at the regular hourly rate whereas overtime is time and a half. It appears that the Army will allow comp time accrual for a calendar year.

**CAREER PROGRESSION AND PROMOTIONS UNDER REVISIONS TO GS-081:** currently the intervening grade for progression is paramedic. Sandy has a friend at OPM who has agreed to move changes to the series to the DOD OSHA quickly. It will be fixed but will take time. Also the natural progression for a Captain to qualify for a Chief's position is also going to be corrected. Sandy believes that this issue will be affecting the other Service branches in the future.

#### **NATIONAL REGISTRY V STATE CERTIFICATION FOR EMT-B'S:**

The Army wants all EMT-B's to be nationally certified as well as State certified so that if they should transfer to another facility their qualifications would be recognized. Sandy explained that there is no requirement currently in existence that would mandate this. As long as the individual has completed a state requirement that is recognized by a national consensus organization that would be sufficient.

#### **BRIEFING ON DOD F&ES WORLD WIDE CONFERENCE:**

Both Sandy and Tina did a lot of networking while at the conference. The Army is trying to revamp their personnel system to be more customer oriented. The current system leaves much to be desired and measuring success is difficult under the current system. One downside was that many of the Chiefs are retiring out of frustration and disgust at how the fire service is being treated due to downsizing. They simply do not have the fight in them anymore.

The Air Force is reducing their ranks by 40,000. It is assumed right now that 10 percent of these cuts will come from the civilian side. It is anticipated that up to 900 fire fighters are going to lose their jobs. While there is a program in place to help them get jobs with other Departments, the process is lengthy and could have an impact on service time for retirement. The question was asked that if a fire fighter who started at 37 years of age and was displaced for two years before coming back into the fire service what impact would it have on the mandatory retirement age of 57. IT was a good question that we cannot answer at this time since this is all speculation. The real answer lies in the ability to lobby the individual congressman and Senators to point out the dangerous environment that will occur if the fire service is cut Currently because of the way staffing is perceived, there

may not be enough fire fighters to adequately respond in an emergency. Stations now equip manpower to certain types of equipment based on staffing. On a lighter note, during the awards program, many of the awards went to either AFGE Fire Departments or Chiefs who were AFGE members before moving up the career ladder. IT proves that AFGE has an effective program that we all can be proud of.

Benny is currently working on having a meeting with a couple of his elected Representatives who he is friendly to feel out their opinion on the Holiday Pay Bill and if they would be willing to be co-sponsors of the bill.

We need a better process with regards to OWCP prior to coming on duty. If a fire fighter slips on ice, even though it is witnessed by others the Agency may try to controvert the claim using the argument that although he was on the property at the time he was not on duty.

There being no further business the conference call was ended. The next call will be announced as soon as we can get it arranged.

## **AFGE FIREFIGHTER COUNCIL CONFERENCE CALL MINUTES**

Sandy Choate started the conference at 2:00 pm on February 13, 2007. Those on the call were as follows:

Sandy Choate  
Tom Sincock  
John Ruthenbeck  
Brock Hendersdon  
Greg Smith

The minutes of the previous conference call were deferred until the next time.

Sandy introduced the newest member of the Council Greg Smith. He is ready to get working to make the Council a success. Sandy also made the callers aware that her e-mail address has changed. You can still contact her at the old e-mail but she will be canceling the old service in the near future. The new address is [sandychoate@comcast.net](mailto:sandychoate@comcast.net).

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Bennie Egler made contact with Senator Thad Cochran's Legislative aide with regards to the Holiday Pay Bill. Sandy will be sending him the information as soon as she can. Once she has established contact we are then going to ask that we each contact our Senators and ask if they would sign on as a co-sponsor. However, at this time we do not want to share this information with anyone. Brock Henderson thought it would be a good idea to send to each of us an outline of the bill and Sandy will do that along with the actual language.

We are still working on the web site. The national office did try to organize this for us but when it was sent to John Ruthenbeck it could not be loaded properly. National has stated that they have done as much as they can on this and since President Gage is for having our web site included with National's links Sandy will talk with him personally about the problem.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Sandy attended the last NEC meeting in Washington, DC and did a power point presentation with handouts. The NEC members commented after her presentation that they were extremely impressed with what we are doing. NVP Charlotte Flowers and Gerald Swanke would like us to come to their District meeting and do a presentation. Sandy informed them along with Roy Flores that there appears to be some confusion between some of the Local's and the fire fighters they represent. They do not understand our problems since they are unique. Also, Sandy will send out the presentation along with the handouts to the council members.

Sandy and Tina attended the last DOD FES meeting at Ft. Belvoir, VA. There was discussion on the new information command vs the old information agency. Charles----- Is leaving to go to Ft. Bliss, TX so the position of Manager is vacant. Dale Means, a Contractor Specialist is in charge temporarily. Issues handled under VICAP are also up in the air. Kevin King who has been a good ally is leaving the USMC Fire Service.

We discussed the line of progression. Management is taking the position that paramedics cannot go from a GS-8 to GS-10 because they haven't progressed to the GS-9 grade. If this is allowed, they could never qualify for a chief's position.

DOD has decided to implement a change to the initial uniform allowance. It will now go up to \$1500.00. This is going to be Agency specific and not all Services may do it. The IAFC was going to pursue this but apparently changed their minds and decided not to.

Sandy briefed the Council on the Northport VAMC arbitration decision. Currently, the VA can issue to individual facilities, a certificate of equivalency if a facility has patient areas with sprinkler systems. The Local's position was that not only does it violate NFPA standards but also violates the Collective Bargaining Agreement with regards to Health and Safety. The arbitrator, in his decision gave a well balanced rational decision. However the VA is appealing on the grounds he over stepped his authority and that he infringed on their right to determine internal security. Sandy is in the process of writing our response and has been granted an extension.

Sandy and Tom Sincock will be attending the VA Council meeting at the Legislative meeting on February 25, 2007. We are hoping to meet with the Leadership and some of the Local Presidents who have Fire Departments so that we can come to an understanding on some of their concerns.

At the NEC meeting, Sandy spoke with Don Hale, the head of DEFCON. He asked if DOD Fire Fighters would have an interest in joining with them. Sandy and Tina believe that it may be a good idea and Sandy will be sending Don an e-mail to see if we can't flush out any motives for this sudden change from a couple of years ago when we politely asked to leave their meeting.

There is some concern that the coordinators are not sharing information with the Local liaisons. However the general consensus was that they are getting the information but may not be passing it along to their Local's. There was some discussion over having a fixed time and date for the conference calls. Since there was no agreement the next conference call is scheduled for April 11, 2007 at 2:00 p.m..

The next DOD FES meeting will be held at Good Fellow Air Force Base at their Fire Fighter Training Academy. Anyone who has been there knows that it is a first class school.

We have a mechanism in place to help Local's with contract language. Any local desiring assistance can contact their regional coordinators for assistance.

There being no further business the conference call was completed.

Respectfully Submitted;

Thomas Sincock  
Secretary/Treasurer  
Fire Fighter Steering Council