



SO YOU WANT A TRAINING TOWER?

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

More and more fire departments in the United States face that question each year. While a department will purchase hose, gear, and fire apparatus on a regular basis, acquiring a training building from “scratch” is a new and unique experience that requires a whole new knowledge base. What do you need to consider? Let's take a look:

Recognizing a need for a training structure is the easy part. You know you need a safe professional place to train and evaluate operations. You know you still want it operational 25 years from now. The more difficult part is performing an adequate needs analysis. An architect's analysis will tell him/her what he/she needs to know to design a structure. The department probably knows what training can be accomplished with a training center. Both approaches are valid, but do not satisfy the complete requirements of a needs analysis.

While the needs analysis process is simple, it is time-consuming. It consists of a series of questions that will eventually define exactly what your needs are, not only for today but also for the future. It should be detailed, and it needs the participation of all the key parties. There is a tendency for people to blow through it. Oftentimes, these are the same people who will later complain that “it wasn't designed right” or “they should have thought of that”. While your needs analysis is unique to your department, everyone must answer some basic questions.

One of the hidden problems in doing any needs analysis is data collection! Who is going to keep all the information and put it into some kind of format that is useful for decision-making? This is critical! Think this through and get people who can write, use computers and don't mind working with data, facts, taking notes, listening rather than talking and following through.

If you can do this part well, you are really on your way to a successful project!

WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE/MISSION?

Is it Fire Suppression only? Fire/EMS? Haz-Mat? Heavy or Special Rescue? Homeland Defense Preparedness? Are you a Public Safety Department needing to meet the needs of both fire and police professionals? All of these things dictate your training needs.

RETHINK HOW YOU TRAIN



SO YOU WANT A TRAINING TOWER?

Take everything into consideration!

WHAT ARE THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE AREA YOU SERVE?

Go out into your community and drive around. What is the tallest building in your community? Is it rural, a residential setting or a commercial/industrial area? Do you have, or do you run into, areas that have standpipes? Do you have sprinklers in those same buildings and areas? Do you have balconies, elevator shafts, parapets, flat roofs, exterior fire escapes? What type roof surfaces are common on your residential buildings?

What about fire department demographics? What ladders are carried on engine companies? Do you have or staff a truck company? Do you utilize master streams? What engine and truck company evolutions do you use? Do you utilize ropes for high angle rescue? Will mutual aid operations need to be supported? These items have a large impact on the design and ultimately the success of your training structure

WHAT TRAINING GOALS ARE YOU SEEKING TO ACCOMPLISH WITH THE TOWER?

What will this project do for the department? Sometimes the hardest part of the project is getting the department and all of its leaders to agree. NFPA documents lay out the minimums for 1001 certification, but that may not suffice if you're a larger fire department. Are there state training requirements that need to be met, OSHA or state safety agency requirements, NFPA, contract compliance requirements? Are you compliant with ISO standards? Will you have in-service, rookie, special, or day and night training? What is the frequency of your training? What methods or techniques do you intend to teach, fighting fire on the ground floor, upper floors, from a standpipe? How many floors do you need to teach hose line advancement evolutions - up stairways, in basements? How many roof venting evolutions do you need or use? How and where will you teach nozzle-handling techniques - on flat ground outside, in the drill tower, in the burn building without fires? Do you intend to teach technical rescue, Haz-Mat? Will you use the tower for physical fitness and confidence building? Will recruit-type classes be conducted?

RETHINK HOW YOU TRAIN