



# ATFD Responding

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## Accreditation Manager:

Dave Schramm

## Administrative Support Team

### Computer Network Administrator:

John Bothwell  
Mike Ratka (Assistant)

### Fire Training Coordinator:

Larry Siefken  
Greg Breyer (Assistant)

### Recruitment & Retention:

Tom McAneney  
Bob Muller  
Grant Kerrick  
Chris Mc Loone

### Abington Township Fire Department Chiefs:

**Abington Fire Co.**  
John Bothwell

**McKinley Fire Co.**  
Mark Maxwell

**Weldon Fire Co.**  
Ken Clark, Jr.

**Edge Hill Fire Co.**  
Charlie Rohrer

**Roslyn Fire Co.**  
Ed Wurster

## ATFD Training Update

The first quarter training program for 2006 has been dedicated to making Firefighter II certification available to all department members who recently achieved Firefighter I certification, as well as offering refresher classes for various other disciplines such as bloodborne pathogens and hazmat operations.

The department also received word that funds have been allocated for renovating the newer portion of the training tower. Plans call for erecting a new one-story section that will help enhance the training evolutions conducted there. Movable interior walls will allow training officers to create more challenging scenarios for search and rescue evolutions in addition to other disciplines. Training Coordinator Larry Siefken has solicited input from all five fire companies to help ensure that the new addition to the training tower will address each company's unique training requirements.

### Firefighting II Certification

More than 50 members participated in Firefighter II certification training

from January to March. During the skills tests to complete their training, members braved inclement weather and a working structure fire but saw the course through to its completion. The ATFD now boasts having more than 50 members trained to the nationally certified the Firefighter II level. As the class concluded, preparations were underway to get the next Firefighter I class going to accommodate the training needs of the department's newest members. During the next few months, these members will go through the Firefighter I class and will be given the opportunity to continue on with Firefighter II.

### Regular Training Program

In recent years, January and February have become the months for refreshing department members' training in hazmat response and bloodborne pathogens. In what has become the average attendance for these classes, more than 50 members attended each refresher class, ensuring ATFD personnel are up to date on their certifications when they

respond to emergencies. Siefken plans to canvass the department to gauge interest in a full hazmat operations class for some time in 2006. Siefken is continuing to develop the training program for the second and third quarters of 2006.

### Technical Rescue Training Plans

The ATFD recently equipped and placed into service a technical rescue trailer. This trailer contains specialized equipment for trench rescue and collapse rescue operations. To date, two training sessions have been conducted to help members familiarize themselves with the contents of the trailer, and to learn how to use some of the specialized equipment carried on the unit. In the interest of having several members trained to the same level in technical rescue, Siefken will survey the department to gauge interest in conducting awareness-level training for various technical rescue disciplines. This would be a starting point, much like Firefighting I, and subsequent operations and technical certifications would be offered, leading up to establishing a team of qualified personnel to respond to all technical rescue incidents in the township.



*"We will strive to invigorate and fortify the spirit of volunteerism in the Abington Township Fire Department by allowing each of our five fire companies to maintain its individual identity that complements our organizational goal of continuous self improvement."*

## Focus On Operating Guidelines

A major component of the accreditation process is to generate a list of operating guidelines (OGs). In order to achieve accreditation at the department level, the ATFD must be able to prove that it has an established set of OGs each company can use as a guide as it generates its own guidelines. To that end, each guideline developed at the township level is intentionally written in broad terms. No company is required to integrate a guideline into

its operations, but each company must "ratify" each guideline before it is included in the operations manual.

The process of approving each guideline is simpler than creating one. After a guideline is written, it is brought before the chiefs of the five fire companies. Each chief will review the guideline and make suggestions/changes to it. Bob Muller, the accreditation team member charged with generating the guidelines, takes the chiefs' directions and revises the guideline as

necessary. After the chiefs approve a guideline, it is presented to each fire company and members are encouraged to make any suggestions for revision. After department members approve the guideline as written, the president and chief of each company signs off on the guideline and it is added to the manual. To date, more than 20 OGs have been generated. At no time is an OG etched in stone. If changes are required, they can be made at a later date. All the OGs will be available to members of each company

on the township Intranet in PDF form.

Intentionally broad, the OGs generated by the Department are meant as guides. Individual companies can develop their own OGs based on these guidelines, or they may develop them on their own. The ATFD must be able to prove that it has established parameters for operating as a unit in order to attain accreditation. It is also good practice at the department level to have such guidelines in writing.

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## ATFD Line Officers Meet

A meeting of all ATFD line officers was held in March, 2006 at Edge Hill Fire Company (Station 400). The meeting, initiated by the five township chiefs, acted as a means to keep all ATFD officers abreast of department-level operations. There are various meetings held throughout the year including EMAP, Accreditation, Fire Board, and township chiefs meetings. The purpose of the March officers meeting was to tie all these meetings together and provide a forum for all fire company officers to ask questions. More than 30 officers from the five companies attended the meeting.

The meeting began with an accreditation update by Dave Schramm. Providing a quick synopsis of what has been happening in the accreditation office, Schramm reinforced his invitation to all members to participate in this process. It is critical that all officers understand accreditation, why the ATFD is going through the program, and what it will mean to the department over the course of time.

Following the accreditation report, was a training report, a report by the fire marshal, a report by computer network administra-

tor John Bothwell, an update on grants by Roslyn Chief Ed Wurster, and an update on 800 MHz radio procedures.

There was also a dialog on where to house specialized equipment including the technical rescue trailer and a potential hazmat vehicle. The hazmat vehicle would be available for incidents not requiring a full hazmat team response. The unit would be operated by qualified personnel within the township.

The officers also discussed finding a new home for the technical rescue trailer, now housed at Abington Fire Company (Station 100).

The group also discussed a resource available to the township should a large scale event warrant a complex implementation of the Incident Command System (ICS). Chief officers from other townships have made themselves available to participate in such an event should it become necessary. Although it's important not to ignore such a resource, all in attendance agreed after a quick glance around the room that the ATFD leadership is its own best and most important resource.

## ATFD Moves To 800 MHz Radio System

Changes to radio systems are inevitable as technology introduces more and more ways for fire departments to communicate. During its history, the ATFD has migrated from telephone dispatches, to Abington Police Department dispatches and, most recently, to being dispatched by the Montgomery County Communications Center (MCCC). Five to ten years ago, the MCCC announced plans to move all dispatch operations to an 800 MHz system. Police and EMS departments were the first public safety agencies to make the switch to 800 MHz, but fire departments were only recently moved over to the system.

There are many advantages to communicating on this system, and although there have been growing pains across the county, the transition to this new system has been relatively seamless.

The ATFD switched to the new system on April 4, 2006 at 1000 hours. Since the move, ATFD companies have made use of its many features during several incidents including a large brushfire, a dwelling fire, and a garage fire. Moving operations to the system was well

planned, and the switch was not made until the township chiefs were comfortable that they had a system in place for radio usage. Simply put, the system is:

- **Region 5:** Used to hail the MCCC and used for routine operations.
- **Fireground 5:** Used for communication on the fireground for incidents where using Region 5 to communicate would hamper communications among other companies with the MCCC.
- **Event 5:** Used during significant incidents when communications at the incident will overwhelm the Region 5 channel, but the incident commander wants the MCCC to monitor all operations.

The use of various channels, depending on the magnitude of the incident, has already proved useful at the incidents noted above. The system will truly prove its worth when fire, police, and EMS all need to communicate at a large scale incident. Such an incident has not occurred since the switch-over, but it's nice to know that communications with each agency will be seamless.