

(SEPTEMBER 2005)

# Letters to the Editor

## The fire service should be an emergency service

This refers to Lance C. Peeples' remarks in Roundtable (July 2005, page 45).

I can only hope that his vision of the fire service in 2025 does not come true. I believe his ideas would be better suited to the social services sector of society—i.e., gun safety, water safety, lead poisoning, and bicycle safety. He even goes so far as to suggest that we may be called to serve as street social workers.

The fire service/EMS is tasked to respond to and mitigate emergency situations. The hats we wear now are too numerous. We are emergency responders and, as such, are incapable of curing all the ills of society. We must target areas in the future where emergency management will be needed and get more proficient in dealing with the problems that come with new technologies.

Knowing where to direct those in need of social services is one thing, but actually providing them is entirely different and does not belong under the purview of the fire service. Peeples should remember he is a professional in the fire service and should let the social workers be professionals in their chosen fields.

His vision of 2025 struck a nerve. Just two months ago, I asked, "What are we becoming? The Philadelphia Social Services Department?" That was in response to a gun-lock giveaway at fire stations. I am finding it increasingly difficult to find time to accomplish the myriad of tasks expected of us now—fire prevention, building inspection, company training, preplanning, possible terrorism, and so on.

I'm assigned to a company that doesn't get a lot of fires, and I still can't find enough

**KNOWING WHERE TO DIRECT THOSE IN NEED OF SOCIAL SERVICES IS ONE THING, BUT ACTUALLY PROVIDING THEM IS ENTIRELY DIFFERENT AND DOES NOT BELONG UNDER THE PURVIEW OF THE FIRE SERVICE.**

hours in the day to complete all that is expected of us. This idea of the All-Everything Department and needing to do more to cure all the ills of society takes away from and just plain ignores the fact that the fire service is an emergency service. This is not the direction in which the fire service should be heading, and it may prove dangerous when incidents take place that can result in line-of-duty deaths.

**Tom McGraw**

*Lieutenant*

*Philadelphia (PA) Fire Department*

## Is the IBC meeting its intent?

After reading Richard Licht's article, "The Impact of Building Code Changes on Fire Service Safety" (April 2005), a line in the International Building Code (IBC) 101.3 comes to mind. It reads, in part, "to provide safety to fire fighters and emergency responders during emergency operations." This leads

me to the question: Is the IBC meeting the intent of this code with its various tradeoffs for the use of sprinklers?

I believe in the use of sprinklers, and I know that you would be hard pressed to find any firefighter who would testify against their use. In reality, we have all come across systems that are poorly maintained, siamese filled with debris, and an occasional water supply problem. But, where is the protection for those firefighters as they search for victims or advance a hoseline to the seat of a fire if we sacrifice the barrier ratings in hallways of egress or extend the length of the hallway they must travel?

I have recently become involved in the code process and, although the intentions of individuals may be honorable, I do not believe they have a full grasp of the real life-and-death situations we face daily. I encourage members of the fire service to become more active in the code process because we are allowing these individuals, architects and code engineers, to dictate the working conditions we face daily. I would also encourage the IBC to consider the real-life ramifications of sprinkler tradeoffs and the philosophy of building with less mass and less balance.

**Sean DeCrane**

*Captain*

*Cleveland (OH) Fire Department*

**We'd like YOUR opinion. Send all Letters to the Editor to Diane Feldman, Fire Engineering, 21-00 Route 208 South, Fair Lawn, NJ 07410; or e-mail them to dianef@pennwell.com. Be sure to include full name, rank or title, fire department, city, and state with your letter.**