

FIREHOUSE SUPPLEMENT

Designing & Purchasing Your Next Apparatus

What Every Fire Department Needs to Know

Defining the
Mission of the
Apparatus

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**THE APPARATUS
PURCHASING
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ON THE COVER:

The process of designing, purchasing and equipping fire and emergency apparatus with the necessary components requires experience and expertise from within and outside the fire department.

Photo by Ron Jeffers



Defining the **Mission**

10 Tips to Ensure a Smooth Apparatus Purchasing Process

As a fire chief and editor-in-chief of *Firehouse*®, I have visited or been invited to numerous apparatus factories around the country. Seeing the latest types of apparatus with new features is certainly a benefit when attending conferences and expositions around the country.

HARVEY EISNER is editor-in-chief of *Firehouse*® and a retired assistant chief of the Tenafly, NJ, Fire Department, which he joined in 1975 and served as chief of department for 12 years. He also was a firefighter in the Stillwater, OK, Fire Department for three years while attending Oklahoma State University. Eisner is an honorary assistant chief of the FDNY and program director for the Firehouse Expo and Firehouse World conferences. He has covered many major fires and disasters and interviewed numerous fire service leaders for *Firehouse*®. He edited the books *WTC – In Their Own Words* and *Hot Shots*, published by Cygnus.

Where else could you view, evaluate, discuss and inquire about possible options, additions and required items on new apparatus? These opportunities are vital to apparatus committees seeking to make a purchase in the near future.

Coming up the ranks within the fire service, I have been involved with purchasing in different ways. During my tenure of more than 20 years, our fire department purchased two engines, two ladders, a squad (half engine/half rescue), renovated a heavy rescue and purchased a pickup truck and several SUVs. Anyone involved in this process picks up the small and major details along the way. Here are some of the tips I have picked up and can share with anyone who is going to serve on an apparatus purchasing committee.



of the Apparatus

1. The need

Advise the people with the purse strings that you need a new piece of apparatus well in advance. You can't walk in today and say you need a new piece of apparatus that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars and expect them to give their approval tomorrow. The first thing I remember when I took over as fire chief in 1988 was having to prepare an operating budget, a capital budget and a 10-year plan. That's when I read about giving plenty of notice about very large purchases. It doesn't always work out when it comes to the fire department agenda and the municipal budget. When our new mayor was elected, he was advised that the fire department needed a new pumper. He wanted a new artificial-turf soccer field. Guess which item was purchased? His agenda was more important than ours.

2. What are you going to buy?

Do your homework. Make sure you look at several types of models and different manufacturers and visit the departments near you to talk with the people who specify the apparatus and operate and maintain them to see what their comments

Above: OAK PARK, IL, MAY 5, 2014 – An early-morning fire spread to the exposures on either side of a 2½-story wood-frame dwelling. Oak Park used a tower ladder, a deck gun and several handlines. Berwyn used a ladder pipe to hit the fire.

Photo by Steve Redick

are. Take the time to ride on the rig and see how it performs and how the apparatus is set up for a ladder and pumping for an engine. Look at all the aspects of the items they had specified or added, especially if it is a specialty unit such as a heavy rescue.

3. What are your specific needs?

Discuss your varied ideas with the manufacturer's representatives and find out all the options they offer before the process begins, not after you see the finished product in the factory. We had a rescue truck undergo a renovation mainly for the problems with the chassis and body. Nobody had ever mentioned all the added extras that were available until we saw

“Don’t skimp on time or energy to get the best piece of apparatus you can afford.”

— *Harvey Eisner*

Editor In Chief, Firehouse® Magazine

them on other rigs in their factory and plant. If we had only known about these items, it would have streamlined the renovation, not adding them at the last minute.

We purchased a new aerial ladder with an extended cab. The cab was going to have about 12 more inches in length, four for the driver and eight for the jump and flip seats. I wanted to make sure that even if the manufacturer had to cut into the through compartment that ran from side to side of the apparatus that the firefighters in the flip seat had space to don their self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). The builder said that might cut into the compartment, robbing space. I said I needed the firefighters to wear the SCBA 100% of the time. Maybe we would use something from the through compartment 5% of the time. It was about what we needed, not what they wanted to give us.

4. Saving time, but doing it right.

Make use of available technology. This allows you to go online and review, add or change the specifications immediately, thus refining a process that was cumbersome and lengthy. What takes a few minutes today used to take weeks of mail going back and forth between you and the apparatus representative.

5. They can add it. Can you afford it?

Price out all the items you want. Can the manufacturer provide 10 of these items? Yes, but there is always a cost. Ten times \$750 equals \$7,500. Does your budget allow that or can you operate reasonably with two? Can the funds be used in a better way to provide something else?

6. Review the specifications

Go over the specifications with a fine-tooth comb. Once they have been awarded, what’s in the contract becomes the letter of the law. If the manufacturer cannot make something work, it will come back with a compromise.

7. The small details – make sure they understand

Pre-build meetings are important, just like every other aspect of the project. Discuss your thoughts and ideas about how you envision the operations and procedures to work so the manufacturer can help you build exactly what you want. Many apparatus could not fit into a firehouse because some-

one forgot to measure the height of the apparatus door the rig would need to fit in. You are going to use the apparatus for 10 to 30 years, depending on where you are located. Be smart, and do it right the first time.

8. Final check

No matter how long it takes on your inspection visit, you have to make sure everything is according to “spec.” Factory visits made before paint and final inspection will allow you to physically check each line item in the specification, detail and location of each piece of equipment and make sure they have been installed in the right place and that they work.

9. The sale after the sale

Make sure you have a manufacturer or place where the rigs can be maintained that is fairly close by and has emergency service. Much effort goes into putting an apparatus committee together. These many steps include: Investigating the various types of rigs that are available and right for your operation. Visiting and talking with other departments who operate these units, working with the manufacturers, writing the specifications, putting it out for bid, the acceptance process, awarding the bid, pre-build meetings, inspecting the rig and accepting the rig and training on the new apparatus.

Some departments, depending on use, replace their apparatus every 10, 12, 14, 20 years or more. To maintain the rig for all those years is what some manufacturers call “the sale after the sale.” Continual maintenance and upkeep are much more of an effort than the initial process mentioned above.

10. Purchasing a safe, effective apparatus to last a long time

Don’t skimp on time or energy to get the best piece of apparatus you can afford that will serve your department and the citizens you protect with the best that it can be for many years and responses to come. Many fire departments can only afford to operate and replace apparatus that are 20 or 30 years old. The changes made in recent years through the use of technology are light years ahead of the older, “antique” rigs we had been using only a few years ago. Engines, transmissions, lighting, seatbelt warning systems and warning devices are just a few of the items that have made new apparatus “state of the art.” ■

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The Apparatus Purchasing Process

How to work with apparatus manufacturers and sales representatives to get the most for your money

For most members of the fire service, buying new apparatus is not an everyday occurrence. It can be challenging and fraught with costly missteps. Fortunately, people who have bought numerous fire apparatus over the years are willing to share their experiences.

Firehouse Magazine has spoken with several experts across the country who shared their decades of knowledge and expert tips so that fire departments won't end up paying too much for apparatus that won't do what they want. Those con-

ED BALLAM, a *Firehouse*® associate editor, is a captain with the Haverhill Corner, NH, Fire Department and a nationally registered EMT. He is also a deputy forest fire warden for the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands. He holds certifications in emergency vehicle operations and pump operations. Read his *Firehouse.com* blog "The Business Behind Firefighting" at <http://bit.ly/1mY4L77>.

sulted for advice were: Crosby Grindle, vice president of the government division of National Purchasing Partners & Fire Rescue GPO; Timothy Calhoun, director of fleet services, Palm Beach County, FL, Fire Rescue; Greg Stone, a captain with the Los Angeles Fire Department and founder of East West Fire Apparatus Consultants; and Anthony Bulygo, a retired master mechanic from the Santa Clara County, CA, Fire Department and current operator of Bulygo & Associates Fire Apparatus Consulting. All four advocate well-thought-out specifications and a knowledgeable purchasing agent

Above: Buying new apparatus is not an everyday occurrence for fire departments, but knowledge and experience can help them overcome challenges and avoid costly missteps during the purchasing process.

Photo courtesy of Palm Beach County Fire Rescue

or committee to avoid any surprises and disappointments on delivery day. Here's a more specific look at what each expert had to say.

"Piggy backing" on bids

Crosby Grindle works for a company that advocates group purchasing and "piggy

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backing” on bids received from by other departments. “Any kind of piggy backing saves having to go out for a request for proposal and usually results in better pricing,” Grindle said, adding that having a clear expectation of what the apparatus is supposed to do and what it will look like at the outset will have a big effect on the end result and will usually mean people won’t be surprised by anything when the apparatus is finished.

Department expectations and requirements should be clearly outlined in pre-bid conferences and at bid awards. Change orders issued after a bid has been awarded can drive up the cost of apparatus significantly, Grindle said. He acknowledged that fire departments and truck committees are political in nature and many times will include individuals with the need to engineer apparatus from the ground up. “Don’t do that,” Grindle advised. “It’s unlikely that water flows differently in your community, or the trucks go down the road a different way.”

That doesn’t mean that people should “settle” for apparatus that will not do the job they desire or fit the bill in other ways. “People should just really look at what they propose and make sure it adds value to the process,” he said.

Grindle believes there may be just a bit too much customization on fire apparatus in the U.S. At the core, the mission of fire apparatus is virtually the same from coast to coast, he said. They haul water, people and tools from the station to the scene, he said.

Using United Parcel Service (UPS) as an example, Grindle said that company has a fleet of brown trucks that are identical everywhere they are used. It’s a process that saves money and time. Grindle said he understands the mission of fire apparatus is far more serious and faulty or inferior equipment can be life threatening. “I am not saying fire trucks are like UPS trucks, but there are some lessons to be learned,” he said. “You just have to use some common sense.”

When selecting a sales representative or manufacturer, Grindle said departments need to look at how responsive the personnel are and their ability to answer questions. “If they are not responsive or answering your questions, it might be an indication of what will happen in the future,” he said.

Grindle also advises departments to look at service and warranty conditions to make sure they are as good as the departments believe they are and as represented by the vendor. When bidding, Grindle suggested that fire departments check with their municipalities and legal counsel to make sure all the rules are being followed. “You don’t want to get sideways with them and have a vendor say you’re doing something inappropriately,” Grindle said. “Everyone needs to know the rules of the game even before you get going too far.”

“Define what you really need”

Anthony Bulygo has been in the business of buying and fixing fire apparatus for more than 40 years. He has worked with legacy names like Hahn and even has a dealt with a few World War II military vehicles converted into fire apparatus. Lately, through his consulting business based in Bakersfield, CA, he has been dealing with the most modern and high-tech apparatus around.

Right out of the gate, Bulygo assured fire departments shopping for a new rig that virtually all manufacturers build high-quality National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)-compliant apparatus. “Start out by defining the need rather than thinking you need to buy XYZ brand,” he said. “Define what you really need first, then find the builder who will build what you want.

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Don't do the reverse."

Bulygo said an apparatus committee is a good place to start in the process of getting a new truck in the station. That is, however, if the department does not have a fire chief or purchasing agent with the sole responsibility of acquiring new apparatus. A committee should have a chief officer in the mix – someone with "horsepower" to make a monetary decision – and then perhaps a battalion chief and if the department is full-time career, one representative from each shift. A line officer or two may be a good idea, he said, adding that at least one person on the committee should have mechanical aptitude, at least to the level that the person would recognize something does not sound right or would not work on a practical level. "Now you have a committee and you can start writing specifications for bids," Bulygo said.

While some departments go with manufacturer-supplied specifications and boilerplate verbiage, Bulygo said that could mean departments pay more for ap-

"Any kind of piggy backing saves having to go out for a request for proposal and usually results in better pricing."

— Crosby Grindle, National Purchasing Partners & Fire Rescue GPO

paratus than they should. "My advice is to make the specifications as generic as possible so any number of people can bid on it," he said noting that competitive bidding often leads to the best prices and values. Using specific bids, designed to eliminate bidders or at least steer the bid to one particular vendor, can lead to legal challenges from a losing bidder, he said.

Departments should have specificity built into the specifications, Bulygo said. For instance, fire departments may want to limit the distance they must travel to have warranty work done, he said, noting that in rural areas the distance can be up to 300 miles, which is not desirable for an emergency vehicle. The vehicle

will be out of service for a considerable time even for the most minor work and the staff needed to take the vehicle there is excessive. He said it is perfectly acceptable to specify a certain number of miles departments are willing to travel for service and make it part of the bid.

Common sense must come into play, however, he said, noting that he knows of one department that specified that the point of warranty work couldn't be more than 5½ miles from the station. Clearly, that department wanted to deal with a particular manufacturer that had a service center close by, he said, noting that it was legitimate, but may have been a bit too restrictive to be competitive.



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For Bulygo, it is important that manufacturers know the climate in which apparatus are being used. Boilerplate specifications may overlook that aspect of a department's needs, resulting in apparatus that cannot perform in hilly terrain or handle extreme variances in temperatures. For instance, Bulygo said, the NFPA requires parking brakes to hold on grades of up to 20%, but California law requires parking brakes to hold to the point where tires lose traction – a much more stringent requirement.



“Define what you really need first, then find the builder who will build what you want.”

— Anthony Bulygo
Bulygo & Associates Fire Apparatus Consulting

Bulygo advocates pre-bid conferences where all potential bidders air any gripes or misgivings they have about the bid or make exceptions and ask for clarification of certain features. “It’s also the time for the companies to argue the standards and make their case for exceptions to the bid,” he said.

Moving to the next step, awarding of bid, Bulygo said the committee, or whoever is making the purchase, must look at the bids and evaluate their responsiveness to the specification. He said he once reviewed a bid that was significantly lower than any of the others, but completely unresponsive to the specification. It reduced the horsepower of the engine significantly and shortened the aerial as well, leading to sizeable reduction in price, but it was not what the department wanted. That bid was completely dismissed and not considered any further, he said.

After the bid is awarded, Bulygo said it is important for the department to have one point person at the company who will handle all the communication with the manufacturer and answer questions. Also, there should be one person, or a small number of people, who can authorize change orders as the apparatus is built, he said. If everyone on the committee has the right to make a change,

the apparatus that rolls off the line might look dramatically different than what was originally specified and be considerably more expensive.

Along those same lines, Bulygo said there should be a core of people who follow the apparatus all the way through the production and delivery period. Too often, different people go to the pre-construction conference, the

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pre-paint inspection and the final delivery inspection. The change of personnel through the process can lead to some miscommunication and surprises at the time of delivery, he said.

During the final inspection, fire departments should request that it be done at the factory in a separate area, away from the production area with a pit or lift available and lights for a complete inspection and evaluation, he said. "You want a complete punch list of everything that is supposed to be on that apparatus and you want to check everything," he said. If anything is wrong, or needs taking care of, it will be done right at the factory.

As far as delivery itself goes, it is best that the apparatus is driven to its final home for a "shakedown" to make sure nothing is going to break, or if it does, the department hasn't taken delivery of it yet and it remains the responsibility of



"It all comes down to the relationship you develop with the manufacturer...Take the time to listen to the salesperson. Open, honest communication is important."

— Timothy Calhoun,
Palm Beach County, FL, Fire Rescue

the manufacturer to handle any repairs or remedies.

Bulygo said he is impressed with the quality of apparatus that has been produced lately and he is confident nearly all the apparatus manufacturers in business today are very capable of producing high-quality apparatus that will perform well for years.

"It wasn't always like that, but they've really stepped up and most of them are totally responsive," Bulygo said.

Apparatus reliability

For at least the past 25 years, Tim Calhoun has been involved in fleet maintenance. He started as the Palm Beach County fleet support supervisor in 1989 and he has worked with Palm Beach County Fire Rescue as director of the fleet since 2007. Between stints with Palm Beach County, he worked for Florida Power Light in its automotive engineering department and with the City of Boynton Beach as a fleet administrator.

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Needless to say, he has specified and purchased more than a few fire trucks.

"We certainly look at apparatus purchasing from a maintenance side," Calhoun said. "...I want the lowest-cost piece of equipment that's reliable and isn't in my shop all the time."

Calhoun said he is a firm believer in competitive bidding and has always tried to write an open bid, with input from officers, union representatives and the people who will be using the apparatus most. If there's a way to piggy back off another contract, he's willing to do that to save money. And, he's not shy about deleting some equipment on the particular contract to save a few bucks. "We work with vendors to get specifically what we want," he said.

Another way his department saves money is to remount bodies for brush trucks and ambulances, he said. Recently, Palm Beach County saved \$110,000 each on two brush trucks that were remounted on new cabs and chassis, Calhoun said. And, he is having a fleet of ambulances remounted, saving \$75,000 on each unit which saves a ton of money.

"My goal is to set two ambulances side by side and challenge people to pick the new one," Calhoun said, adding the metal box bodies are completely gutted with all new interiors installed and refurbished.

Calhoun said the real challenge will be to see if he can remount the bodies three, or even four times before having to retire the units. "Having them remounted once is a success story," Calhoun said. "Having them remounted three or four times will be the real success story."

Calhoun noted that all manufacturers of apparatus use the same basic components and install them on cabs and chassis that are essentially the same with similar motors. For him, the distinguishing factor is "who is going to support your product the best," he said.

"It all comes down to the relationship you develop with the manufacturer," Calhoun said, adding that a "good, honest salesperson" is just as invaluable. "Take the time to listen to the salesperson. Open, honest communication is important. ...If you think you know it all, you'll miss out. You need to keep an open mind or you might miss out on an opportunity?"

Getting what's needed

Greg Stone is a retired Los Angeles Fire Department officer with 33 years of experience. For a time, he was the procurement

officer for the city with responsibilities for purchasing the department's apparatus and other equipment. Upon his retirement, he partnered with Ken Wagner, who has been with the New York City Fire Department for more than 20 years and the Pleasantville, NY, Volunteer Fire Department for more than 27 years. Together, Stone and Wagner formed East West Fire Apparatus Consultants, a business

that helps departments write and review specifications and acquire apparatus. They can be found at <http://www.ewfac.com>.

Lately, Stone said his business has been getting calls from purchasing agents and city managers who want to validate their communities' bidding process and make sure they are getting what's needed. Stone said a consultant can help communities avoid the pitfalls of overly specific

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“Go through the specifications line by line and make sure everything is what it should be.”

— Greg Stone, East West Fire Apparatus Consultants

requirements that can result in challenges from bidders. “We recommend thoroughly open bidding,” Stone said. “For instance, you’ll want to specify an alternator capable of handling the load, rather than specifying a certain kind of alternator.”

Another example is compartment size, he said, noting that specifying 25¾-inch compartments, with no exceptions, will eliminate some competitive bidders. The same holds true for specifications for one-piece windshields and certain brands of independent front suspensions, Stone said, adding that vendors and manufacturers know enough about their competition to determine the department is looking for a particular brand of apparatus and will not submit a bid for fear of wasting time.

There may be legitimate reasons for specifying particular features, but de-

partments must know that it will likely reduce the number of bidders or significantly increase the number of exceptions vendors take to the bids, Stone said.

Stone’s company recently helped with a specification and bidding process on a refinery apparatus. It made the specifications open and generic and attracted five bidders. “And we changed only 10 things from the bid we went with,” Stone said.

Stone said he has seen the extremes for bid specifications as some departments insist on specifying every single detail to the point of being silly. He said that process is often a disservice to the department and the community because what is delivered is not what is needed and the cost can be substantially more.

“I think a lot of small fire departments lose track of who is paying for

the vehicles and that’s the taxpayers,” Stone said. “Not only are they abusing purchasing rules, I believe it’s morally wrong. They’re taking advantage of the system and going around the lowest bid.”

Stone said the best advice he can offer is to have fire departments write “good, solid specs” and then look for manufacturers that can provide the best service with emergency vehicle technicians available 24 hours a day. “A sales rep can be your biggest ally in the process,” he said.

Stone acknowledged that sales representatives have a vested interest in keeping the customer happy during the build process. “Most fire truck sales reps are really good at what they do and you should use them,” he said.

Stone said departments must keep track that the apparatus is being built according to the correct specifications. “You don’t want to get to the final inspection and find out the engine they put in is too small,” he said. “Go through the specifications line by line and make sure everything is what it should be... Remember that when you sign off on something, you bought it.” ■

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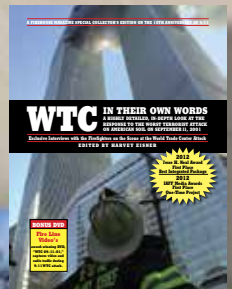
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8 Criteria For a Successful Apparatus Committee

How to establish qualifications for membership

So, your fire department is buying a new piece of apparatus. You will probably want to form a committee because that is usually the first step. Committees seem to be the way humans make big decisions that concern a lot of people, but they are not always the most efficient.

Motorized fire apparatus have been around more than 100 years and it is likely a committee was involved in the purchase process from day one. It's also likely they had lots of people with lots of opinions, even back then, like how much gold leaf should be used, the shade of red to be applied, warning lights and so on. They had way fewer options back then, so the decisions were probably limited.

Consider all options

Fast forward to 2014. Just think of the options available on today's apparatus – cab configurations, engine size, body material, suspension decisions, pump sizes, tank sizes, scene lighting, hosebed configurations, tool mounting and the list goes on and on.

ED BALLAM, a *Firehouse*® associate editor, is a captain with the Haverhill Corner, NH, Fire Department and a nationally registered EMT. He is also a deputy forest fire warden for the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands. He holds certifications in emergency vehicle operations and pump operations.

An apparatus committee's job is to evaluate the department's needs, sift through the options and come up with what's best for the community. In short, the committee is about getting the right piece of apparatus for the right job at the right price. That's a tall order for anyone, or any group of people, especially firefighters, who are often confident people with opinions on just about everything.

While there are some firefighters who wouldn't give two nickels to be part of an apparatus committee, there are many more who will want to offer their sage advice and opinions about the apparatus. They have read magazine articles, done lots of Internet searching and may have even gone to a few shows, so they are ready. They all want to be part of the committee, make their marks on the apparatus and have some sort of legacy for the next 20 years, or at least the life of the apparatus.

There's an old saying that goes something like, "There's nothing more effective than a committee of one." That may be a truism, and was per-

haps the way business was conducted years ago with the chief or a purchasing agent making apparatus decisions solo, but it is probably not the best way to make apparatus purchasing decisions today.

An apparatus committee should be of reasonable size, probably no larger than 10 people. Resist the temptation to include everyone with an interest on the committee. They may have good ideas, and thoughts, but including everyone in the department on the committee would be cumbersome at best and a waste of time at the worst. That's not undervaluing their ideas, but those who are truly interested can get their thoughts to the committee through a representative. They will be using the apparatus too and their lives will be just as influenced as well, so they should have a say, just not at the decision-making table.

Those with the biggest stakes in the decision should be part of the committee as should representatives of groups within the department. For instance

a career department may want to have members from all shifts represented as well as a union representative. A line officer or two, captain or lieutenant, would be a good idea too. A representative from command or commanding officer, like a battalion chief, or maybe

partment and they will have the ability to review the “fine print” of any bid that may be received and keep the department out of trouble with contract issues. They will also be helpful in performance bonding and penalty clauses for non-compliance.

most cases, that will be the voters of the community, so, if they have the final say, why not include an ordinary taxpayer on the committee? That member of the community, especially if well known and respected, may just be the answer to get the apparatus approved. If the taxpayers believe you have justified every component on the apparatus, and you are not buying a new toy, it may prove smooth sailing toward approval.

There is also some value to includ-

Fresh ideas and fresh ears and eyes often pay huge benefits.



even the chief, could prove helpful. You will need someone with the authority to get the apparatus through the political process, and a commanding officer may help with that navigation. Having the authority to approve the expenditure is a powerful negotiating tool.

Include City Hall

Many departments also have to use purchasing office and financial people at City Hall. They may not know about fire tactics or your operations, but they do know the business side of your de-

Emergency apparatus are costly and complicated pieces of machinery. Today's advanced apparatus technologies demand that apparatus committee members have the knowledge and experience to make sound purchasing decisions. *Photo by Ed Ballam*

The committee profile for volunteer departments is not much different. It is likely the chief will want a spot on the committee and a line officer or two should have a seat as well. A rank-and-file member or two will bring a user perspective to the committee as well.

While a community with a volunteer department may not have a municipal manager or a finance officer, there is certainly someone who has final say. In

ing the newest recruit on the committee, either for career or volunteer fire departments. That new recruit will be eager to be included and will likely ask questions and force seasoned veterans to justify the specifications through explanations. And, saying something is being done because “that’s the way we’ve always done it” won’t fly.

Fresh ideas and fresh ears and eyes often pay huge benefits. Remember the

mission – getting the right apparatus to do the right job at the right price. That does not mean tradition and paradigms will rule the day. And speaking of experience and traditions, try to avoid a committee comprised of a bunch of “old timers” who epitomize the adage of

An apparatus committee’s job is to evaluate the department’s needs, sift through the options and come up with what’s best for the community.

8 CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

To make it easier to decide who should be on the committee, here’s a list of do’s and don’ts:

- 1. Give everyone with a stake in the decision representation at the committee table.** Those who have valid interest in the performance and cost of the apparatus need to have decision-influencing authority in the purchase.
- 2. Firefighters from all shifts who will be using the apparatus for decades need to have a say.** They will be counting on the apparatus to perform when lives are at stake. They need to feel that they have been given the best equipment possible and letting them help make the decision will boost their confidence.
- 3. Include chief officers.** Chief officers who are accountable to mayors, city managers, finance officers and ultimately taxpayers and voters also need to have a say – their very jobs could be on the line if a bad choice is made.
- 4. The people who are paying for the apparatus – the taxpayers – need to have a way to have a say.** It can be through a budget committee process, or a selectman or councillor representative on the truck committee. Letting the public see the process and being thoroughly transparent can only yield benefits when a vote is taken. Citizens will know due diligence has been paid and they will be getting the most protection for the money they are spending.
- 5. Include people with mechanical aptitude, perhaps the shop mechanic or maintenance department representative.** Volunteer departments are typically comprised of people with a wide variety of talents. Perhaps there is a contractor with heavy equipment experience, or a farmer who knows about mechanical things, or a truck driver who may understand horsepower and torque and the difference. Or maybe there is a banker who knows all about bonding and finances. Firefighting for them is an avocation and experience from their daily vocational jobs can be invaluable.
- 6. Consider including an apparatus consultant on your committee, or at least as an advisor.** The typical fee is 1% to 2% of the total purchase and consultants can often save way more than that by ensuring money is well spent.
- 7. Don’t include people on the committee who have axes to grind or personal advantages to gain.** They will come in with the sole mission of defeating the purchase or steering the purchase to a particular brand or type of apparatus he or she prefers. That destructive force will surely have a souring effect on the purchasing experience and could lead to broken relationships and apparatus that people will resent it for years to come.
- 8. Resist the temptation to include apparatus salespeople on your committee.** While it might be true the firefighter who sells apparatus brand XYZ has a lot of experience with apparatus specifications, the committee will be better served to truly look at needs, options and specifications offered by a wide variety of manufacturers. If the mission truly is to get the right truck for the right job at the right price, keeping an open mind to all vendors is important. Because of the personal relationship the committee may have with the sales representative, there will likely be a natural and understandable bias toward the product he or she is offering. It’s best to keep things as generic and open as possible.

“200 years of tradition unencumbered by tradition.” Someone may have a lot of fire service experience, but there is a lot of new technology and new ideas for fire apparatus on the market today. Remember, the apparatus being specified today will be around for at least 20 years, longer in many cases. There’s no reason to put an apparatus in service with technology that’s been around

since 1934 and expect it to be efficient and relevant in 2034.

While buying apparatus can be the most important and arguably among the biggest events firefighters can have in their careers, it should be an exciting and, yes, fun adventure. Pick the people you trust and have good relationships and work together well to serve on the committee. Work to

maintain those relationships through the apparatus acquisition process by listening to and respecting each other’s opinions and suggestions.

Remember, you’re all working toward the same goal – getting the right truck for the right job at the right price. Keep that front and center and you will get an apparatus you will be proud to have your fire department’s name on. ■



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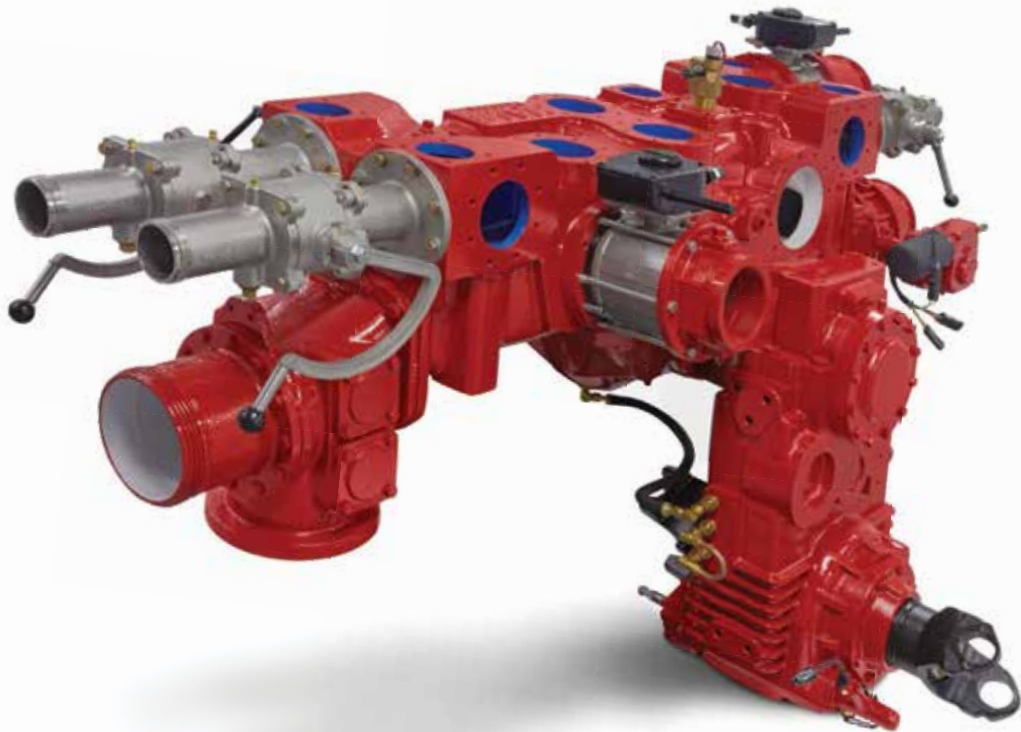


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