



**Commission on
Fire Accreditation
International**

Accreditation Report

**Columbus Fire and Rescue
205 7th Street South
Columbus, MS 39701
USA**

**This report was prepared on January 11, 2014
by the
Commission on Fire Accreditation International
for the
Columbus Fire and Rescue**

**This report represents the findings
of the peer assessment team that visited
Columbus Fire and Rescue
on December 1-5, 2013**

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EXECUTIVE REVIEW

PREFACE

Columbus Fire and Rescue recently received candidate status. On September 24, 2013, the department asked the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) for a site visit to determine if they could be recommended for accreditation. On October 17, 2013, the CFAI appointed a peer assessment team. The peer team leader approved the department's documents for site visit on November 6, 2013. The peer assessment team conducted an onsite visit of Columbus Fire and Rescue on December 1-5, 2013.

In preparation for the onsite visit, each team member was provided access and reviewed the self-assessment manual, standards of cover (SOC), community risk analysis, and strategic plan that were posted by Columbus Fire and Rescue on the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) SharePoint site. This documentation represented a significant effort by the staff of the department and other community agencies. The department used a consultant to assist with completing documentation required for accreditation. The department used the services of Charles E. Sampson and Associates, a private consulting firm that specializes in organizational and human resource development. The department utilized the firm to facilitate the strategic planning process.

SUMMARY

The CFAI has completed a comprehensive review and appraisal of Columbus Fire and Rescue based upon the eighth edition of the *Fire & Emergency Service Self-Assessment Manual (FESSAM)*. The commission's goals are to promote organizational self-improvement and to award accreditation status in recognition of good performance. The peer assessment team's objectives were to validate the department's self-assessment study, identify and make recommendations for improvement, issue a report of findings, and conclude if the department is eligible for an award of accreditation.

The peer assessment team followed CFAI processes and Columbus Fire and Rescue demonstrated that its self-study accreditation manual, community risk analysis, SOC, and strategic plan met all core competencies and criteria. The peer assessment team recommends accredited agency status for Columbus Fire and Rescue from the Commission on Fire Accreditation International.

The city of Columbus was established as a regional trading post in 1821. Columbus is ranked as the 17th largest city in the state with a population of 23,640 according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010 data). This is approximately 15 percent less population than 20 years prior. The city covers approximately 23.2 square miles and has over 300 building on the historical register, including several pre-civil war homes. The city is home to Mississippi University for Women, which was founded in 1884 as the first public college for women in the United States. The city receives significant financial support from the activities related to Columbus Air Force Base. Approximately one in six homes is currently vacant throughout the city. In recent years the city has experienced growth in new industry located on the southwest side of the city.

The department operates within a council-mayor form of municipal government. The fire chief is one of three direct reports to the mayor along with the police chief and the chief operating officer. The remaining 12 department heads report directly to the chief operating officer. The 15 department

heads work collaboratively as the city's leadership team. There are excellent avenues for communication between the mayor, the fire chief, and the other department heads.

The department developed a comprehensive SOC that accurately identifies the risks and response capabilities within the city. This was the city's first SOC and has helped to clearly define expectations for the future of the department. The SOC is tied to the goals and objectives within the strategic plan to ensure the appropriate resources are available for fire and non-fire risks. The SOC appropriately identifies that the service area as a suburban population density based on the 2010 U.S. Census. There are appropriate benchmark goals and actual baseline performance statements in place that identify and measure all components of the total response time continuum.

Following a detailed assessment and analysis, the peer assessment team believes by consensus that the alarm handling time, turnout time, and travel time for the first-due and effective response force components of the total response time continuum, as identified in the SOC, are in line with the industry best practices identified in the eighth edition of the *FESSAM* and do not constitute a gross deviation. The total response time is well within established standards set forth in the *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments*, 2010 Edition and the *CFAI Standards of Cover, 5th Edition* for first-due, second-due, and effective response force units. The department's total response time is consistently at or near expectations for suburban density. The department continues to work at improving alarm handling time and turnout times that are slightly outside of expectations. It is clear the department is committed to taking steps to meet the expectations.

The department has a new community driven strategic plan to cover the period of 2013-2018. This process was facilitated in part by a private consulting firm, Charles E. Sampson and Associates, and involved a diverse and appropriate mix of internal and external stakeholders. The city council supported this process from the beginning and had two council members participate as external customers. The department's practice is to update its strategic plan on an annual basis and to forward any changes to the mayor and city council for review and approval. The revised document will then be added to the department website. The mayor and city council have received and adopted the plan.

The department has a comprehensive process in place for the development, monitoring, measuring, and updating of all short-term goals and objectives through annual program reports. The long-term goals and objectives, located within the strategic plan, are monitored for completion by the eight program managers. There are also established goals and objectives in a recently incorporated capital improvement plan. Each goal provides for qualitative and quantitative measurements. All goals and objectives are reviewed and updated at least annually by the specific program managers and technical rescue coordinators. The long-term goals are presented annually to the governing body through the strategic plan and are considered in the budget process.

The department is primarily funded through the city's general fund. The department also receives funding from the Mississippi Fire Insurance Rebate Program, federal grants, and other creative local funding programs. The city's financial future outlook is projected to remain stable with incoming revenue expected to slowly increase over the next several years. The department has weathered the economic downturn better than most other comparable fire agencies. The department was cut approximately \$190,000 in FY 2011 and \$200,000 in FY 2014; however the department was able to absorb the reduction with zero reduction in services. The city operates a balanced budget with no significant issues that were observed by the peer team.

The department provides a wide range of emergency response programs including fire suppression, technical rescue, hazardous materials, and non-transport basic life support (BLS) emergency medical services, which are designed to meet the goals, objectives, and vision of the department and the needs of the community. There is a need to replace one aging station that limits the purchase of new apparatus, which is discussed in the strategic plan.

The department has adopted and follows the expectations of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and all members are certified to a minimum of NIMS 100. The passport accountability system is utilized on multi-unit responses. The department completes a comprehensive review of all standard operating guidelines related to the programs as part of the programs annual report. The department appraises the effectiveness of all of its programs on an annual basis.

The department is a full-service fire and rescue organization designed to provide essential public safety and emergency services in the community. To meet the needs of its residents, the department currently staffs six engines, one ladder truck, and one water tender from five fire stations. The pump capacity of all engines and ladders is a minimum of 1,250 gallons per minute. The department operates a 3-shift system and has established a minimum staffing benchmark of 19 firefighters per shift per day.

The department provides fire prevention and risk reduction programs through the fire prevention division. The division is led by the assistant chief and functions are carried out by the fire marshal, fire safety educator, and fire investigators. Their missions are driven from the needs of the community, national trends, and ultimately the safety of the responding firefighters. With the continued use of analytics to drive its mission, the division will be in a great position to address any risk reduction needs for the future.

The department has a well-organized and equipped technical rescue and hazardous materials response program. The department has received several grants and participates in a state level taskforce response team. Standard operating procedures ensure interoperability among all participating agencies.

The department responds to emergency medical services incidents to provide emergency medical technician-basic (EMT-B) emergency medical response support to Baptist Memorial Hospital Ambulance Service, a third-party advanced life support and transport agency. The department deploys one engine staffed with a minimum of three personnel to life threatening medical events. Department staff is capable of providing first responder emergency medical response support with automatic external defibrillation (AED) until the third-party service arrives.

The city has a well-integrated and coordinated system for emergency preparedness. There are regular multi-jurisdictional planning meetings and exercises to ensure that preparedness is always at a high level of readiness. The city and surrounding communities conduct an annual table top exercise and a full scale exercise at a minimum of every two years focused on an all hazards approach.

The department maintains five fire stations, one technical rescue building, a shared storage building, and two administrative office spaces to meet its objectives. The department's frontline apparatus consists of 4 engines, 2 engines with 50 foot ladders, and a ladder platform. The department maintains specialty apparatus for hazardous materials and technical rescue responses as well as

several small boats for dive and swiftwater rescue. The department has two reserve engines and all equipment is properly maintained with a scheduled maintenance and a replacement program. The department has recently replaced several staff vehicles and has several reserve vehicles for the staff and for members attending classes out of town.

The department operates well developed maintenance and supply systems to ensure a constant state of readiness for emergency response. The department has a complete cache of technical rescue and hazardous materials response equipment.

The department has its own internal human resources services that are supported, as required, by the city. The city and the department place a strong emphasis on achieving a positive employee climate. The relationship between the city and department personnel is collaborative and both entities support continuous improvement. The department is proactive in addressing work place safety and occupational exposure prevention. The department also promotes physical fitness; all members have access to physical fitness equipment. The assessment team observed a strong commitment by the department to implementing a formal health and wellness program.

The department's training program is well established. It was very apparent to the peer team that training is a very high priority amongst all members. The program components include agency mandated training, professional certifications, specialty training, management and supervisor training, company level evolutions, and general firefighter proficiency training. The department has a large amount of trained instructors along with a supervisor in charge of training. A key issue for the department is the lack of a dedicated training area to conduct a wide array of training.

Virtually all built up areas of the city are served by a well-developed and maintained water system. The department has one water tender that is strategically located and cross-staffed on an as needed basis to support incidents on major thoroughfares and outlying sparsely populated areas of the city that have long distances between hydrants. The department has access to additional tenders through a formalized requested aid agreement. The water utilities are responsible for hydrant maintenance, which is well documented.

The department's communication and alerting infrastructure is adequate for emergency communications within the department as well as for inter-agency situations. However, as outlined extensively in Category II – Assessment and Planning and Category IX – Essential Resources of this report, several opportunities for improvement in alarm handling procedures were identified by the peer assessment team. There is a need for additional technology and standard operating procedures to enhance dispatching capabilities.

The department provides most all of its own administrative services, with minimal support from the city. The department has the proper technology and equipment to support the administrative functions and responsibilities of the command staff.

The department has four written agreements with local, regional, state, and federal partners. These agreements are written to be mutually beneficial and to support the department's mission. They have proven to be cost effective and have provided incident support, training opportunities, specialized resources, and in-kind services. The department understands and supports the need to integrate resources across jurisdictional boundaries and provides response capabilities for other jurisdictions in the area.

The peer assessment team identified several opportunities for improvement during the site visit. Several deficiencies were addressed immediately by the fire chief and the command staff. The team made recommendations that are contained within this report based on interviews with program managers, line members, and command staff. The department accepted all of the recommendations and has assigned them to the various program managers and command staff members to begin finding solutions. The fire chief is committed to working with the incoming county dispatch center supervisor to find ways to reduce the alarm handling times.

The peer assessment team observed a strong commitment by the department to the CFAI accreditation process and, in particular, the strategic planning process. The current accreditation manager is the second for the department. The department is in the process of identifying a person to be mentored as the future accreditation manager. The past accreditation manager actively supported the current manager through this process and was an integral part of the strategic planning committee. Three members of the department are currently trained as peer assessors for CFAI and the fire chief is committed to having them participate in the peer assessment process in the very near future. The department is preparing to share the process with other departments throughout Mississippi in an effort to increase participation within the state and region.

The peer assessment team met with the mayor, the chief executive officer, several city council members, and department heads. The team also met with the majority of the external stakeholders involved in the strategic planning process and they expressed a long standing interest in the process, having been engaged and involved since the beginning of the strategic planning process. There is clearly a commitment by the community and its leaders to support the department as it moves forward with accreditation.

Composition

The city of Columbus was established as a regional trading post in 1821 to take advantage of the water transportation routes offered by the Tombigbee and Luxapalila rivers. Columbus was chartered by the state of Mississippi on March 8, 1884 under a special charter exclusive to the city. The city serves as the municipal seat for Lowndes County. The history of the fire service dates back to April 4, 1840 when the department was officially organized as a volunteer fire department. The department transitioned into a career department in July, 1901 when the city hired three full-time firefighters.

The 2010 U.S. census indicates that Columbus had a population of 23,640 while Lowndes County's population was 59,779. Columbus is ranked as the 17th largest city in the state. The daytime workforce increases the population by approximately 10,500. Columbus Fire and Rescue provides fire protection, emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous materials response, and technical rescue services to the city as well as providing requested mutual aid to the county and state.

Columbus has experienced a decline in population during the past two U.S. censuses. From 1990 to 2000, the city's population declined by 1,724 and another 2,329 between 2000 and 2010. These population declines represent a 6.2 percent and 8.9 percent drop respectively. Columbus covers approximately 23.2 square miles and has a population density of 1,072 individuals per square mile, which is a suburban density.

Columbus is located in the east central portion of the state known as the Golden Triangle. The city is a diverse mix of residential, commercial, and industrial occupancies. It is home to Mississippi University for Women and the Market Street Festival, an annual Top 20 event in the Southeast, bringing more than 40,000 visitors to the city. The local economy is reflective of regional and state conditions.

Columbus is transected by two rivers and two rail lines. The Luxapalila River transects the city along a north-south axis dividing the city into two main areas: Columbus and East Columbus. The old Tombigbee River channel isolates a southwestern section of the city known as The Island. The Kansas City Southern rail-line transects the city's south side along an east-west axis while the BNSF rail-line runs along a north-south axis.

The department responded to a total of 2,478 emergencies in 2012. This total includes 196 fire calls (7.9 percent), 1,739 emergency medical service (EMS) calls (70.2 percent), and 543 miscellaneous calls (21.9 percent).

The department has 70 uniformed personnel and responds 6 engines out of 5 fire stations. The department has a fire suppression rating of class 4 by the Mississippi State Rating Bureau.

Government

Council-Mayor form of government
Mayor and 6 Councilors
City Chief Operations Officer
Fire Chief (reports directly to the Mayor)

Fire Department

5 fire stations
70 uniform and 1 civilian personnel
3 shift system (24 hours on and 48 hours off)

Staffed Resources

4 engine companies
2 engine companies with 50 foot aerial devices
1 battalion chief truck
Several staff vehicles

Cross-staffed Resources

1 ladder platform
1 tanker (2,500 gallon)

Non-staffed units

2 reserve engines
1 mobile command vehicle
1 technical rescue truck
1 logistic truck and trailer
4 small boats (dive rescue)
1 communication vehicle and trailer

CONCLUSIONS

The self-study manual produced by Columbus Fire and Rescue was of high quality. The manual represented a significant effort by the staff of the department to produce and present a quality document.

- Columbus Fire and Rescue demonstrated that all core competencies were met and received a credible rating.
- Columbus Fire and Rescue demonstrated that all applicable criteria were met and received a credible rating.
- The peer assessment team recommends accredited agency status for Columbus Fire and Rescue from the Commission on Fire Accreditation International.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The peer assessment team conducted an exit interview with the agency consisting of the mayor, city council, chief operating officer, the chief finance officer, the fire chief, the command staff, and the accreditation team. The purpose of the meeting was to review the team's findings and recommendations. The department was given an opportunity to respond to any errors in findings of fact.

Strategic Recommendations

Strategic recommendations were developed from information gathered from the onsite assessment visit and the evaluation of the criteria and core competencies.

Category II – Assessment and Planning

Criterion 2B: Fire Risk Assessment and Response Strategies

Core Competency

2B.5 Agency baseline and benchmark total response time objectives for fire response conform to industry best practices as prescribed on pages 70-71 for first due and effective response force (ERF).

It is recommended that the department explore new technology, such as station alerting systems, and processes to reduce the alarm handling time including working with the incoming dispatch center supervisor to establish expectations for all fire dispatchers in accordance with the *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1221: Standard for the Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems, 2013 Edition*.

It is recommended that the department further analyze turnout time performance to determine where improvements can be made through training, education, and technology, e.g. mobile data computers or tablets.

Category V – Programs

Criterion 5G: Emergency Medical Services

Core Competency

5G.1 Given the agency's standards of cover and emergency deployment objectives, the agency meets its staffing, response time, apparatus and equipment deployment objectives for each type and magnitude of emergency medical incidents.

It is recommended that the department expand its emergency medical service responses to include all emergency 911 medical incidents.

Category VI – Physical Resources

Criterion 6B: Fixed Facilities

Core Competency

6B.4 Facilities comply with federal, state/provincial and local codes and regulations.

It is recommended that the department secure funding and install vehicle exhaust removal systems in all stations at the earliest opportunity.

Category VII – Human Resources

Criterion 7F: Occupational Health and Safety and Risk Management

Core Competency

7F.5 An occupational health and safety training program is established and designed to instruct the workforce in general safe work practices, from point of initial employment through each job assignment and/or whenever new substances, new processes, new procedures, or equipment are introduced. It provides specific instructions on operations and hazards specific to the agency.

It is recommended that the department consolidate the existing components of its occupational health and safety program in a more formalized way in accordance with *NFPA 1500: Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program, 2013 Edition*.

Category VIII – Training and Competency

Criterion 8C: Training and Education Resources

Core Competency

8C.1 Available training facilities and apparatus are provided to support the training needs of the agency.

It is recommended that the department explore opportunities to establish a dedicated fire department training area to support its training objectives.

It is also recommended that the department increase training classroom area within the five fire stations to better foster a learning environment to meet its needs.

Specific Recommendations

Specific recommendations were developed from the appraisal of performance indicators in each of the ten categories.

Category V – Programs

Criterion 5A: Fire Suppression

Performance Indicator

5A.2 The agency defines and provides appropriate and adequate equipment to accomplish the stated level of response for fire suppression and to be compliant with local, state/provincial and national standards.

It is recommended that the department organize current rapid intervention equipment to specific locations on designated apparatus for quick deployment during emergency incidents.

Criterion 5B: Fire Prevention/Life Safety Program

Performance Indicator

5B.5 The agency defines and provides appropriate and adequate equipment, supplies and materials to meet the fire prevention/life safety program needs.

It is recommended that the department consider technology, e.g. tablets or Toughbooks, for inspection documentation to streamline productivity and to help with analytical data.

Criterion 5C: Public Education Program

Performance Indicator

5C.6 The agency's information system allows for documentation and analysis of its public education program.

It is recommended that the department update the record management system software to include the public education module in order to obtain usable analytics.

Category VII – Human Resources

Criterion 7B: Recruitment, Selection, Retention and Promotion

Performance Indicators

7B.4 The agency's workforce composition is reflective of the service area demographics or the agency has a recruitment plan to achieve the desired workforce composition.

It is recommended that the department continue efforts to bridge the large gap in the makeup of the racial composition of the department so that workforce composition is better reflective of the service area demographics.

7B.5 A new member orientation program is in place.

It is recommended that the department establish a formal new member orientation program to ascertain that new members receive consistent guidance as it relates to the essential information that new members receive, such as: performance expectations, policies and procedures, jurisdiction familiarization, and other topics the department deems important.

7B.7 An employee/member recognition program is in place.

It is recommended that the department establish a comprehensive recognition program to ensure that department members are properly recognized with consistency.

Criterion 7G: Wellness/Fitness Program

Performance Indicator

7G.2 The agency provides personnel with access to fitness facilities and equipment as well as exercise instruction.

It is recommended that the department explore avenues to provide improved access to fitness facilities and equipment.

It is also recommended that the department explore opportunities to train members on exercise instruction so that firefighters have access to readily available fitness consultation.

Category VIII – Training and Competency

Criterion 8A: Training and Education Program Requirements

Performance Indicator

8A.5 A command and staff development program is in place.

It is recommended that the department establish a formal staff development program to provide firefighters a pathway for future responsibilities and to ensure the department has qualified members to carry out future mission requirements.

Criterion 8B: Training and Education Program Performance

Performance Indicator

8B.5 The agency maintains individual/member training records.

It is recommended that the department establish and maintain individual training records to ensure that all members training activities and certifications are organized and readily available.

OBSERVATIONS

Category I— Governance and Administration

Columbus Fire and Rescue operates within a council-mayor form of municipal government. The fire chief is one of three direct reports to the mayor, along with the chief operating officer and the police chief. The remaining 12 department heads report to the chief operating officer and all 16 people work together collaboratively to make up the city leadership team. This team meets weekly to discuss the state of each department and resolve any issues that may be present. The department heads are all required to attend city council meetings every other week and present an update monthly through department reports to the council.

The governing body and the agency manager are legally established to provide general policies to guide the department's approved programs and services and appropriated financial resources. The city of Columbus was legally chartered by the state of Mississippi on March 8, 1884. The city was granted municipal authority through the enumeration of powers of mayor and council to legally establish and organize the department. The authorizations are found in the Columbus City Charter and the Mississippi Municipal Code.

The established administrative structure provides an environment for achievement of the agency's mission, purposes, goals, strategies and objectives. The department is supported by the city's human resource director, city attorney, and chief financial officer in ensuring compliance with all applicable legal requirements concerning the various aspects of department operations. This includes local, state, and federal mandates. The fire chief uses professional networks, such as the Mississippi Fire Chiefs' Association and the National Fire Protection Association, to stay abreast of potential changes in these requirements.

Category II— Assessment and Planning

Columbus Fire and Rescue has integrated the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) self-assessment process into all aspects of the department and has established its self-assessment manual, standards of cover (SOC), and strategic plan. The department used the services of Charles E. Sampson & Associates to facilitate the creation of its strategic plan. The strategic planning committee consisted of ten internal participants comprised of various ranks within the department. There were 46 external customers and stakeholders that participated in the development of the plan that consisted of elected officials, city senior administrative personnel, city and county emergency response agencies, local businesses and industries, and civic organizations. The efforts of the department produced a comprehensive and integrated approach that is appropriate, acceptable, and affordable as it relates to the identified needs of the community.

The department collects and analyzes data specific to the distinct characteristics of the community served and applies the findings to organizational planning. The department analyzed the city by service area to determine the population density for the purpose of developing total response time standards. The city is a suburban population density based on the standards set forth by CFAI. The 2010 U.S. Census showed 23,640 persons lived with the city, which equates to 1,072 persons per square mile. There are three areas in the city that fall in the rural density classification, but the department decided to deliver the same standard of service there as to the rest of the city. The

department has completed a comprehensive analysis of the risks within the various population density areas. The results of the analysis and the associated identified needs are integrated into the SOC.

The department assesses the nature and magnitude of the hazards within its jurisdiction and develops appropriate response coverage strategies. Each significant fire and non-fire risk is categorized and listed to permit future analysis and study in determining standards of cover and related services. Special attention is paid to identify, analyze and develop strategies for non-fire or limited fire risks that gain importance due to cultural, economic, environmental or historical value.

The benchmark service level objectives incorporated into the standards of cover are based on local needs and circumstances and industry standards and best practices adopted from the: *CFAI Fire & Emergency Service Self-Assessment Manual (FESSAM), eighth edition; CFAI Standards of Cover, fifth edition; National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1221: Standard for the Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems; and NFPA 1710: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments.*

The department has analyzed each population area and planning zone to identify fire and non-fire risks within the city. The city is divided into 6 response areas and 15 planning zones. The accreditation team used this in-depth analysis to establish its first SOC document. The information enabled the department to develop the appropriate response to the identified risks. The response was developed to be efficient, effective, and safe while mitigating the risks within the current capabilities of the department's delivery system. The department identified seven recommendations for improvement that are included in the SOC document.

The department's accreditation team has identified the overall fire risk it protects, its areas of responsibility, the demographics of the city, the economic indicators influencing its ability to deliver services, the historical fire loss data, the available water supply, and the use of automatic fire protection systems for certain occupancies to establish an effective SOC strategy.

All commercial structures have been evaluated for fire risk as part of the SOC process. Each company officer is assigned a portion of the commercial building inspections on an annual basis. These inspections, along with the fire prevention bureau inspections, ensure that every commercial building and school is inspected each year. The companies are able to assess the structures for any changes to the fire risk. Changes in fire risk result in the appropriate adjustment within the SOC.

Careful consideration was given to the non-fire risks within the city in establishing an effective SOC strategy. The non-fire risks include emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, and technical rescue. The department completed an analysis and evaluation of the related service demands for each of these risk types. The process included an analysis of the realistic potential for an incident based on current risks and historical response data of the communities. Response objectives with the appropriate number of specially trained personnel have been determined and are included in the SOC.

The department evaluates the fire suppression program on an annual basis to assess the balance between fire suppression capabilities and fire risk with the city. The process includes program reports submitted to the fire chief, which contain fire suppression program objectives that measure its effectiveness. Objective 5A of the department's strategic plan provides processes to assess the fire suppression capabilities compared to planning zone fire risks. Response time performance, staffing

objectives, and community risk assessment factors, such as water supply, are also evaluated in this process. If an imbalance is discovered the appropriate changes are made to ensure the same high level of service is continually delivered to the city. These changes result in an appropriate update to the SOC document.

The department's practice is to document alarm handling as the time interval from the receipt of the alarm at the public service answering point (PSAP) until the beginning of the transmittal of the response information via voice or electronic means to the stations or the emergency response units in the field.

Following a detailed assessment and analysis, the peer assessment team believes by consensus that the alarm handling time, turnout time, and travel time for the first-due and effective response force components of the total response time continuum, as identified in the SOC, are in line with the industry best practices identified in the eighth edition of the *FESSAM* and do not constitute a gross deviation. The total response time is well within established standards set forth in *NFPA 1710* and *the CFAI Standards of Cover, 5th Edition* for first-due, second-due, and effective response force units. The department's total response time is consistently at or near expectations for suburban density. The department continues to work at improving alarm handling time and turnout times that are slightly outside of expectations. It is clear the department is committed to taking steps to meet the expectations.

Dispatch services are provided by the Lowndes County Communication Center, which is not accountable to the fire chief. The center is also in the middle of a leadership change and appears to be struggling with the process. The fire chief is committed to working with the new dispatch center supervisor as soon as a replacement is selected in an attempt to change the current procedures.

There are no simple solutions to reducing the alarm handling and turnout times; however, consistent with the continuous improvement principles inherent with CFAI, the department has implemented both short and long-term actions to address this issue. Those steps include such actions as:

- The department will work to change the process of dispatching the fire department and ambulance together. They will seek to have the process changed so that the ambulance dispatch does not interfere with the department's dispatch process.
- The department will begin responding to all emergency medical service calls that are received into the dispatch center. It has been the practice that the department only responded to five types of life-threatening emergencies. This has caused a delay as the dispatch center must determine if the calls fell within these categories before deciding to send the department.
- The department will begin to look for technology that will aid in reducing alarm handling and turnout time as the budget allows.

It is recommended that the department explore new technology, such as station alerting systems, and processes to reduce the alarm handling time including working with the incoming dispatch center supervisor to establish expectations for all fire dispatchers in accordance with the *NFPA 1221: Standard for the Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems, 2013 Edition*. It is also recommended that the department further analyze turnout time performance to determine where improvements can be made through training, education, and technology, e.g. mobile data computers or tablets.

A strategic plan for 2013-2018 is in place and, along with the budget, is guiding the activities of the agency. The mayor and city council have received and adopted the plan.

The department's comprehensive, community driven strategic plan has been published on the city's website. The strategic planning process was facilitated by a consulting firm specializing in organizational development, Charles E. Sampson & Associates. The process was embraced by the department and community leaders and included a diverse mix of both internal and external stakeholders. The internal stakeholders ranged from firefighters to the fire chief. The external stakeholders also had a wide range of representatives from the community to include: the mayor, city council members, the chief operating officer, utility companies, public education leaders, university leaders, the media, healthcare workers, city department heads, senior citizens, religious leaders, mutual aid partners, local law enforcement, and civic groups.

The stakeholders participated in several surveys and meetings and stayed engaged in the process through the completion the strategic plan. A majority of the participating stakeholders attended a breakfast meet and greet session during the peer team site visit and shared their experiences with the peer team. It was obvious to the peer team from these interactions that the stakeholders continue to be engaged with the department.

The plan's first annual review is due March 2014; the department is currently developing an appropriate method to update each participant in the strategic planning process.

Category III — Goals and Objectives

Columbus Fire and Rescue is guided by a vision statement, a mission statement, core values, and established goals and objectives. The goals and objectives are located in the 2013-2018 strategic plan, the self-assessment manual, a new capital improvement plan, and the standards of cover. These documents address goals and objectives that range from long-term goals, to program goals, to infrastructure goals, and response goals. The goals are closely aligned with the annual budget and therefore can be affected by the sluggish national economy. They are reviewed, at least annually, by the managers of each specific program.

The department has established general goals and specific objectives that direct its priorities in a manner consistent with its mission. The goals and objectives are appropriate for the community served. The department has developed general organizational goals with specific objective that are directed toward achieving the agency's long-range plans.

The standards of cover contains response goals and objectives. The strategic plan has established 8 organizational goals and 43 specific objectives. The goals and objectives were developed using the SMARTER principle: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound, evaluate, and re-evaluate. Each goal is assigned to the specific program manager or technical rescue coordinator that the goal relates to. The managers and coordinators are responsible to ensure that the specific goals are achieved; they report the progress to the fire chief quarterly. All revisions to these documents are forwarded to the mayor for review and approval prior to being published on the city website.

Short-term goals are identified in the annual program reports. The annual goals and objectives for each program within the department are developed, analyzed, and published as part of the city's yearly budget process. Each goal is overseen by the program manager or the technical rescue coordinator.

The department's infrastructure improvement goals are contained in the newly created capital improvement plan. This plan is considered a supplement to the strategic plan. The department has identified four items from within the strategic plan to address in the most current plan including: replacing an existing fire station, purchasing a new ladder truck, developing and building a new training facility, and building a satellite station.

The long range goals have been directly tied into city budget processes. The implementation of the published, long term objectives are currently at early stages of activity due to the relatively new strategic plan.

The department uses a defined management process to implement the goals and objectives. The department tracks progress of the goals and objectives by assigning each goal to a program manager or the appropriate technical rescue coordinator. The managers or coordinator are responsible to ensure that the specific goal assigned to them is completed within the timeline set; progress is reported in a quarterly report and the annual program report that is submitted to the fire chief. This form of organizational management is formalized in department policies and operational guidelines.

Processes are in place to measure and evaluate progress towards the completion of specific objectives and overall system performance. The department's goals and objectives are examined annually by program managers and technical rescue coordinators to ensure that they remain consistent with the department's mission, vision, and long range plans. These reports are forwarded to the fire chief by May 15th of each year to ensure that goals are included in the annual budget process. These updated goals are then reviewed and approved by the mayor prior to being published on the city's website.

Category IV — Financial Resources

Financial delivery systems for Columbus Fire and Rescue are executed by the chief financial officer (CFO) for the city of Columbus. The city has current and effective policies and guidelines that direct the city's financial delivery systems. The department involves its members in the budgeting process and has department level policies and procedures to direct budget preparation. The city is compliant with mandatory audits that meet Mississippi's state requirements.

The department's financial planning and resource allocation processes are based on agency planning involving broad staff participation. The department follows and complies with the state code that governs municipal budgets. The state requires that the budget must be prepared by September 15th of each year. For budget preparation and development, the city follows the state's municipal audit and accounting guide. The audit and accounting guide identifies the specific budgeting steps to be taken by municipalities along with benchmarks for the budget development that coincide with the budget calendar year. The department budget priorities are in line with the department's strategic plan and mission priorities.

The department's financial management practices exhibit sound budgeting and control, proper recording, reporting and auditing. The city does not currently participate in the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) program and therefore does not have a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting. The municipality does, however, annually contract with an independent auditor to audit the cities financial documents for state code compliancy. The state mandates that municipalities contract an independent audit within 12 months of the end of the fiscal year. The city's CFO ensures that audits are completed in the mandated time-

frame; furthermore, the CFO is responsible for rectifying any discrepancies that are noted during the audit. The peer team verified and validated that financial audits are conducted annually.

Financial resources are appropriately allocated to support the established organizational mission, the stated long-term plan, goals and objectives and maintain the quality of programs and services. Financial stability is a fundamental aspect of an agency's integrity. The department ensures that programs and services provided can be supported by the necessary fiscal resources using sound budgetary practices.

The department's current and anticipated revenues drive its capabilities to deliver programs and activities. It has received adequate funding and is projected to continue to receive adequate funding to maintain adopted levels of service. The department has received funding cuts of approximately \$190,000 in FY 2011 and \$200,000 in FY 2014. The department has managed the cuts in a manner that has not hampered its abilities to deliver programs and activities. The department anticipates slowly starting to receive back the funding that has been cut in the previous two fiscal years.

Category V—Programs

Criterion 5A – Fire Suppression

Columbus Fire and Rescue is a full-service fire and rescue organization designed to provide essential public safety and emergency services in the community. To meet the needs of its residents, the department currently staffs six engines and cross-staffs one ladder truck and one water tender from five fire stations. The pump capacity of all engines and ladders is a minimum of 1,250 gallons per minute.

The department operates a 3-shift system and has established a minimum staffing benchmark of 19 firefighters per shift per day. The department maintains a minimum of three firefighters per company on all front-line companies.

The on duty battalion chief is the initial safety officer for all incidents. During business hours, the chief of training and staff officers can and assume the responsibility of site safety officer. When dictated by the incident, and after business hours, an engine captain or off duty staff officer will assume the safety officer role. All captains and chief officers are certified as safety officers based on the *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1521: Standard for Fire Department Safety Officer*. The safety officer is formally expected to notify the incident commander of any unsafe operations. The department has sound standard operating guidelines to reinforce a safety culture.

The department operates an adequate, effective, and efficient fire suppression program directed toward controlling and or extinguishing fires for the purposes of protecting people from injury or death, and reducing property loss. The department reviews all standard operating procedures related to fire suppression on an annual basis. These reviews ensure best practice and lessons learned for past incidents are incorporated into the updates. The battalion chief officers are involved in the review and development process along with the command staff.

The department has adopted an incident management system and routinely uses it during every emergency response, regardless of the size or complexity of the incident. It is the fire chief's expectation that command will be assumed for every incident and broadcast over the radio. The

department has adopted and follows the expectations of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

The department appraises the effectiveness of its fire suppression program through a quarterly and an annual reporting process. The program reports are forward to the chief on a scheduled basis. Battalion chiefs monitor the response reports for their particular shift in the department's records management system and review results with the response personnel. They also use the review process to address trends and to implement best practices for continuous improvement.

The department has rapid intervention equipment stored on its apparatus for use during emergencies; however, the equipment is not stored together for rapid deployment. It is recommended that the department organize current rapid intervention equipment to specific locations on designated apparatus for quick deployment during emergency incidents.

The department's response and deployment standards are based upon the suburban population density and the fire demand of the community. Five fire stations provide citywide coverage; department staffing is based upon station location, incident type, and frequency. The targeted service level objectives in the standards of cover benchmark statements are based on industry standards and best practices, as identified earlier in this report in Category II – Assessment and Planning. The objectives have been approved and adopted by fire department management and the city council. The department's benchmark service level objectives are as follows:

For 90 percent of all structure fires, the total response time for the arrival of the first-due unit, staffed with 2 firefighters and 1 officer, shall be 5 minutes 55 seconds in suburban areas. The first-due unit for all risk levels shall be capable of: providing 500 gallons of water and 1,250 gallons per minute (gpm) pumping capacity; initiating command; requesting additional resources; establishing a back-up line and advancing an attack line, each flowing a minimum of 150 gpm; establishing an uninterrupted water supply; containing the fire; rescuing at-risk victims; and performing salvage operations. These operations shall be done in accordance with departmental standard operating procedures while providing for the safety of responders and the general public.

For 90 percent of all moderate risk structure fires, the total response time for the arrival of the effective response force (ERF), staffed with 13 firefighters and officers, shall be 10 minutes and 30 seconds in suburban areas. For 90 percent of all high and special risk structure fires, the total response time for the arrival of the ERF, staffed with 16 firefighters and officers, shall be 11 minutes in suburban areas. The ERF for moderate risk shall be capable of: establishing command; providing an uninterrupted water supply; advancing an attack line and a backup line for fire control; complying with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements of two-in and two-out; completing forcible entry; searching and rescuing at-risk victims; ventilating the structure; controlling utilities; and performing salvage and overhaul. The ERF for high and special risk structure fires shall also be capable of placing elevated streams into service from aerial ladders. These operations shall be done in accordance with departmental standard operating procedures while providing for the safety of responders and the general public.

The department's baseline statements reflect actual performance during 2010 to 2013. The department does not rely on the use of automatic aid or mutual aid from neighboring fire departments

to provide its effective response force complement of personnel. The department's actual baseline service level performance is as follows:

For 90 percent of all structure fires, the total response time for the arrival of the first-due unit, staffed with 2 firefighters and 1 officer, is 7 minutes and 22 seconds in suburban areas. The first-due unit for all risk levels is capable of: providing 500 gallons of water and 1,250 gpm pumping capacity; initiating command; requesting additional resources; establishing a back-up line and advancing an attack line, each flowing a minimum of 150 gpm; establishing an uninterrupted water supply; containing the fire; rescuing at-risk victims; and performing salvage operations. These operations are done in accordance with departmental standard operating procedures while providing for the safety of responders and the general public.

For 90 percent of all moderate risk structure fires, the total response time for the arrival of the ERF, staffed with 13 firefighters and officers, is 11 minutes and 24 seconds in suburban areas. For 90 percent of all high and special risk structure fires, the total response time for the arrival of the ERF, staffed with 16 firefighters and officers, is 12 minutes and 25 seconds in suburban areas. The ERF for moderate risk is capable of: establishing command; providing an uninterrupted water supply; advancing an attack line and a backup line for fire control; complying with the OSHA requirements of two-in and two-out; completing forcible entry; searching and rescuing at-risk victims; ventilating the structure; controlling utilities; and performing salvage and overhaul. The ERF for high and special risk structure fires is also capable of placing elevated streams into service from aerial ladders. These operations are done in accordance with departmental standard operating procedures while providing for the safety of responders and the general public.

It was verified and validated by the peer assessment team that Columbus Fire and Rescue demonstrated a trend of improvement in its actual baseline performance for 2010-2013.

<u>Moderate and High Risk</u> Structure Fires - 90th Percentile Times - Baseline Performance			2010-2013	Jan-Nov 2013	2012	2011	2010
Alarm Handling	Pick-up to Dispatch	All Risks	2:11	2:07	2:10	2:22	2:19
Turnout Time	Turnout Time 1st Unit	All Risks	2:13	2:04	2:05	2:21	2:30
Travel Time	Travel Time 1st Unit	All Risks	4:06	4:13	3:50	4:43	4:00
	Distribution	Moderate Risk	6:56	6:28	6:41	7:11	7:31
		High Risk	6:45	5:47	7:06	7:01	6:26
Total Response Time	Total Response Time 1st Unit	All Risks	7:22	7:30	6:51	7:43	7:45
	Distribution	Moderate Risk	11:24	11:16	11:19	10:28	11:54
		High Risk	12:25	12:00	11:48	12:22	12:55

Criterion 5B – Fire Prevention / Life Safety Program

Columbus Fire and Rescue relies on the fire marshal to administer its fire prevention and life safety program. With the assistance of the department captains as inspectors, all properties in the city that are required to be inspected are visited at least once a year. The fire chief and assistant fire chief provide code enforcement support when citations are administered by the fire marshal.

The department operates an adequate, effective, and efficient program directed toward fire prevention, life safety, hazard risk reduction, the detection, reporting, and control of fires and other emergencies, the provision of occupant safety and exiting and the provisions for first aid firefighting equipment. The department adopted the *2006 International Fire Code (IFC)* and local ordinances in May 2008. By adopting this fire prevention code, the city is compliant with the state mandate that municipalities adopt the state code or a code that is equivalent or more stringent than the state code.

The fire prevention division provides an effective fire prevention program for the community. To ensure compliance with all applicable fire protection laws and department objectives, the fire prevention division ensures new construction compliance through plans review and final acceptance inspections for the certificate of occupancy. Each of the low and moderate hazard occupancies are inspected every year by on shift personnel, as assigned by the inspection district, with the remaining high hazard occupancies inspected by the fire marshal.

The department provides adequate staff with the specific expertise to meet the program goals and objectives. The use of qualified and certified on-duty captains to conduct inspections with their crews of all low and moderate-risk commercial occupancies within their respective inspection districts further enhances the capabilities of the division.

Through annual appraisals, the bureau has established goals and objectives to determine program measurements. These include: engine company expectations, fire marshal expectations, plans review turnaround time, and response time measurements to address fire hazard complaints. These objectives are designed to promote risk reduction in the community. These objectives are published within the organization and the department's annual report document.

Current fire prevention division policies meet the needs of the community to ensure code enforcement. It is recommended that the department consider technology, e.g. tablets or Toughbooks, for inspection documentation to streamline productivity, and to help with analytical data. The information obtained can ultimately be beneficial to foresee trends, drive improvements in training, and reduce potential risks in the business community.

Criterion 5C – Public Education Program

Columbus Fire and Rescue delivers a comprehensive public education program through its public education division that is mandated to provide fire and injury prevention educational programming to the community. The programming is aimed at changing unsafe behaviors, ultimately resulting in the reduction of death, injury, and property loss by using an all-hazards risk reduction approach. The public education division consists of one public education officer, but also implements on-duty firefighters for public education demonstrations.

The department has a public education program in place and directed towards identifying and reducing specific risks in a manner consistent with its mission. The public education program is

directed towards identifying and reducing specific risks in a manner consistent with the department's mission. The department targets its specific risks and risk audiences based on seasonal incidents, demographics of the community, and anecdotal analysis when prioritizing life safety programs. The use of program data analysis has been implemented since the beginning of the accreditation process, but has not provided sufficient information to change the public education priorities.

The public education programs implemented by the department vary based on their targeted audiences. These include: the fire safety trailer for kindergarten through fourth grade students; pedestrian, bicycle, and babysitting safety for kindergarten through 12th grade students; juvenile fire prevention counseling for at risk teenagers; a smoke alarm installation program for residents with low income, senior citizens, and children; a fire and fall safety program for senior citizens; and disaster preparedness training for all age groups. The department also provides child passenger safety seat installations to anyone who requests the service.

The department intends to monitor the program data analysis provided by the record management system and modify its public education as needed. National and statewide trends will continue to be considered in an effort to prevent or reduce those incidents from happening in Columbus. The department has local partnerships with many community groups and businesses to help promote its public education programs.

The public education program has current policies and standard operating procedures in place to provide direction and to meet the needs of the department. The policies address the organizational structure, job context, and description for the position of the fire safety educator. The fire safety educator is responsible for the management and operation of the public safety education division and evaluates all programs implemented. The educator also manages all public education activities conducted by shift personnel during fire prevention month in October.

An appraisal is conducted by providing an annual program report to the fire chief. This report provides an overall evaluation of the public education programs; it outlines program goals, objectives, performance measures, and future needs.

Previously, the report was only based on the number of activities conducted by the public safety educator and shift personnel. Since 2012 the report now provides a pre-test and post-test appraisal that identifies performance measurements. These results provided information that confirmed: the need to continue fire and life safety prevention programs, as established; increase awareness of hazards for low income citizens through various outreach programs; increase safety information through various community events; and continue to participate in local, state, and national partnerships advocating fire safety and risk reduction efforts.

The department has an excellent program that provides an avenue for public safety education on a full-time basis. The focus is on local hazards, but also considers state and national trends. It is recommended that the department update the record management system software to include a public education module in order to obtain usable analytics.

Criterion 5D – Fire Investigation Program

Columbus Fire Rescue has a dedicated fire investigation unit to conduct origin and cause investigations of all reported fires within the city. The unit is led by the assistant fire chief and assisted by lead investigators with arrest powers. The fire investigators work closely with one police

department representative to complete thorough investigations and to process criminal charges, where appropriate.

The department operates an adequate, effective and efficient program directed toward origin and cause investigation and determination for fires, explosions, and other emergency situations that endanger life or property. The 2006 edition of the *International Fire Code* authorizes the agency's fire investigation program. The code establishes the authority to investigate the origin, cause, and circumstances of any fire or explosion. The bureau investigates fire deaths, injuries to civilians and staff, and arson. All investigators have full police powers and are integrated into the city's criminal justice system.

Mandated investigations are scientifically conducted by the fire investigators using the *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 921: Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations, 2011 Edition*. The assistant chief and lead investigators are provided with mandated overview training on the content of the standard to ensure that they are familiar with the overall expectations of an investigation.

The current staffing level allows the department to adequately meet its mandate of conducting fire cause determination and fire injury investigations. All fire investigators are qualified to *NFPA 1033: Standard for Professional Qualifications for Fire Investigator, 2009 Edition*. The assistant chief and lead investigators have achieved Mississippi law enforcement certification.

Current fire investigation procedures provide standard operating guidance to direct the fire cause and investigation program. The department follows *NFPA 921* as a general guideline for all fire investigations.

A general appraisal is conducted annually to determine the effectiveness of the department's fire investigation program. The department also collaborates with the police department during this appraisal process that is led by the assistant chief. Resources are typically realigned annually, based on recommendations from the annual report.

Criterion 5E – Technical Rescue

Columbus Fire and Rescue provides a wide range of technical rescue programs to its residents including, but not limited to: dive rescue and recovery, high angle, confined space, structural collapse, overland search and rescue, swift water rescue, and trench rescue. All technical rescue vehicles and equipment are located at one station, with support personnel responding from all stations. All first-due companies have at a minimum operations level training. The department maintains an extensive vehicle and equipment cache that is utilized to provide an urban search and rescue (USAR) response within the state.

The on duty battalion chief is the initial safety officer for all incidents. During business hours, the chief of training and staff officers can and assume the responsibility of site safety officer. When dictated by the incident, and after business hours, an engine captain or off duty staff officer will assume the safety officer role. All captains and chief officers are certified as safety officers based on the *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1521: Standard for Fire Department Safety Officer*. The safety officer is formally expected to notify the incident commander of any unsafe operations. The department has sound standard operating guidelines to reinforce a safety culture.

The department operates an adequate, effective, and efficient program directed toward rescuing trapped or endangered persons from any life-endangering cause. The department expectations for all technical rescues are clearly stated through the use of standard operating guidelines (SOGs). These SOGs are current and reviewed annually during the annual report process. There is input from all members of the technical rescue personnel.

The department annually appraises the effectiveness of its technical rescue program. The department's record management system has the capability to extract data required to properly evaluate the technical rescue program. Battalion chiefs monitor the response reports for their particular shift in the department's records management system. They identify trends and contributing factors in public and firefighter injuries and deaths as well as the related losses associated with properties and the environment. The results are shared and reviewed at monthly command staff meetings. Recommendations resulting from those reviews are typically acted upon immediately and any necessary adjustments to operations and practices are institutionalized through changes to the SOGs and the standards of cover, as appropriate. All new objectives and goals are stated in the annual report.

The department's response and deployment standards are based upon the suburban population density and the technical rescue demands of the community. Five fire stations provide citywide coverage; department staffing is based upon station location, incident type and frequency. The targeted service level objectives in the standards of cover benchmark statements are based on industry standards and best practices, as identified earlier in this report in Category II – Assessment and Planning. The objectives have been approved and adopted by fire department management and the city council. The department's benchmark service level objectives are as follows:

For 90 percent of all technical rescue incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the first-due unit, staffed with 2 firefighters and 1 officer, shall be 5 minutes and 45 seconds in suburban areas. The first-due unit shall be capable of: establishing command; sizing up to determine if a technical rescue response is required; requesting additional resources; and providing basic life support to any victim without endangering response personnel.

For 90 percent of all technical rescue incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the effective response force (ERF), staffed with 13 firefighters and officers including the technical response team, shall be 12 minutes in suburban areas. The ERF shall be capable of: establishing patient contact; staging and apparatus set up; providing technical expertise, knowledge, skills, and abilities during technical rescue incidents; and providing first responder medical support.

The department's baseline statements reflect actual performance during 2010 to 2013. The department does not rely on the use of automatic aid or mutual aid from neighboring fire departments to provide its effective response force complement of personnel. The department's actual baseline service level performance is as follows:

For 90 percent of all technical rescue incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the first-due unit, staffed with 3 firefighters and 1 officer, is 7 minutes and 12 seconds in suburban areas. The first-due unit is capable of: establishing command; sizing up to determine if a technical rescue response is required; requesting additional resources; and providing basic life support to any victim without endangering response personnel.

For 90 percent of all technical rescue incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the ERF, staffed with 13 firefighters and officers including the technical response team, is 12 minutes and 32 seconds in suburban areas. The ERF is capable of: establishing patient contact; staging and apparatus set up; providing technical expertise, knowledge, skills, and abilities during technical rescue incidents; and providing first responder medical support.

It was verified and validated by the peer assessment team that Columbus Fire and Rescue demonstrated a trend of improvement in its actual baseline performance for 2010-2013.

Technical Rescue - 90th Percentile Times – Baseline Performance		2010-2013	Jan-Nov 2013	2012	2011	2010
Alarm Handling	Pick-up to Dispatch	2:11	2:46	1:32	2:04	2:11
Turnout Time	Turnout Time 1st Unit	1:46	2:06	1:38	2:00	1:31
Travel Time	Travel Time 1st Unit Distribution	4:28	4:38	4:44	4:00	2:00
	Travel Time ERF Concentration	7:53	5:32	12:32	8:45	5:11
Total Response Time	Total Response Time 1st Unit On Scene Distribution	7:12	7:01	6:27	7:20	5:00
	Total Response Time ERF Concentration	12:32	10:46	17:15*	13:14	8:08

*8 technical rescue incidents in 2013

*28 technical rescue incidents from 2010-2012

Criterion 5F – Hazardous Materials (Hazmat)

Columbus Fire and Rescue has a comprehensive approach to hazardous materials emergencies wherein all first-due companies are trained to a minimum operations level and they can request additional technician level equipment and personnel when necessary. As the lead hazardous materials emergency response agency in the community, the fire department manages, delegates, and coordinates other civic emergency departments and industry resources.

The department equips all front-line engines, ladders, and rescues with a small equipment cache to handle minor gas and fuel leaks. Larger hazardous materials responses are handled by a shift level response. Annual hazardous materials training is conducted to ensure that all members of the program meet at least the minimum hours of training as mandated by the state. The specially-designed hazardous materials response unit at station two is cross-staffed by the crew assigned to the engine in the station, on an as-needed basis.

The on duty battalion chief is the initial safety officer for all incidents. During business hours, the chief of training and staff officers can and assume the responsibility of site safety officer. When

dictated by the incident, and after business hours, an engine captain or off duty staff officer will assume the safety officer role. All captains and chief officers are certified as safety officers based on the *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1521: Standard for Fire Department Safety Officer*. The safety officer is formally expected to notify the incident commander of any unsafe operations. The department has sound standard operating guidelines to reinforce a safety culture.

The department operates an adequate, effective, and efficient hazardous materials program directed toward protecting the community from the hazards associated with fires and uncontrolled releases of hazardous and toxic materials. The department has developed SOGs to provide a central core of directives from which personnel can effectively, efficiently, and safely meet the level of response for hazmat events. The department policy that requires a complete review of SOGs every year as part of the annual report is being followed.

An appraisal process is conducted annually in order to determine the effectiveness of the hazardous materials program. The department uses incident data including times, incident command benchmarks, and other scene data. The battalion chiefs and hazardous materials coordinators review data from the records management system in order to provide performance measures that indicate the level of achievement. During the annual report process, data is evaluated and goals and objectives are established for the next year. Additionally, data from post incident analysis is also utilized in the annual appraisal process.

The department's response and deployment standards are based upon the suburban population density and the hazardous materials response demands of the community. Five fire stations provide citywide coverage; department staffing is based upon station location, incident type and frequency. The targeted service level objectives in the standards of cover benchmark statements are based on industry standards and best practices, as identified earlier in this report in Category II – Assessment and Planning. The objectives have been approved and adopted by fire department management and the city council. The department's benchmark service level objectives are as follows:

For 90 percent of all hazardous materials response incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the first-due unit, staffed with 2 firefighters and 1 officer, shall be 6 minutes and 15 seconds in suburban areas. The first-due unit shall be capable of: establishing command; sizing up and assessing the situation to determine the presence of a potential hazardous material or explosive device; determining the need for additional resources; estimating the potential harm without intervention; and begin establishing a hot, warm, and cold zone.

For 90 percent of all hazardous materials response incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the effective response force (ERF), staffed with 13 firefighters and officers including the hazardous materials response team, shall be 9 minutes and 15 seconds in suburban areas. The ERF shall be capable of providing the equipment, technical expertise, knowledge, skills, and abilities to mitigate a hazardous materials incident in accordance with department standard operating guidelines.

The department's baseline statements reflect actual performance during 2010 to 2013. The department does not rely on the use of automatic aid or mutual aid. The department's actual baseline service level performance is as follows:

For 90 percent of all hazardous materials response incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the first-due unit, staffed with 2 firefighters and 1 officer, is 8 minutes and 43

seconds in suburban areas. The first-due unit is capable of: establishing command; sizing up and assessing the situation to determine the presence of a potential hazardous material or explosive device; determining the need for additional resources; estimating the potential harm without intervention; and begin establishing a hot, warm, and cold zone.

For 90 percent of all hazardous materials response incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the ERF, staffed with 13 firefighters and officers including the hazardous materials response team, is 10 minutes and 24 seconds in suburban areas. The ERF is capable of providing the equipment, technical expertise, knowledge, skills, and abilities to mitigate a hazardous materials incident in accordance with department standard operating guidelines.

It was verified and validated by the peer assessment team that Columbus Fire and Rescue demonstrated a trend of improvement in its actual baseline performance for 2010-2013.

Hazardous Materials - 90th Percentile Times – Baseline Performance		2010-2013	Jan-Nov 2013	2012	2011	2010
Alarm Handling	Pick-up to Dispatch	2:54	2:12	2:26	4:02	3:57
Turnout Time	Turnout Time 1st Unit	2:26	1:56	2:11	2:47	2:39
Travel Time	Travel Time 1st Unit Distribution	4:32	4:10	4:13	4:32	4:35
	Travel Time ERF Concentration	6:20	5:34	5:17	5:51	7:28
Total Response Time	Total Response Time 1st Unit On Scene Distribution	8:43	6:39	6:59	9:00	10:00
	Total Response Time ERF Concentration	10:24	7:57	9:51	9:24	11:00

Criterion 5G – Emergency Medical Services

Columbus Fire and Rescue responds to emergency medical services (EMS) situations to provide emergency medical technician-basic (EMT-B) response support to Baptist Memorial Hospital Ambulance Service (BMHAS), a third-party advanced life support and transport agency. The department deploys one engine staffed with a minimum of three personnel to life threatening medical events. Department staff is capable of providing first responder emergency medical response support with automatic external defibrillation (AED) until the third-party service arrives. In those cases where the third-party provider arrives first, the fire department provides the personnel from that agency with support.

All line fire department personnel are trained, at a minimum, to the EMT-B level. All new hires are required to complete EMT-B certification within one year. The department staffs 19 EMT-B providers on-duty per 24-hour shift. These providers are spread out over five stations.

Each front-line apparatus is equipped with adequate equipment, including an AED, to meet support requirements for EMS incidents, as defined by the state and medical control.

The on duty battalion chief is the initial safety officer for all incidents. During business hours, the chief of training and staff officers can and assume the responsibility of site safety officer. When dictated by the incident, and after business hours, an engine captain or off duty staff officer will assume the safety officer role. All captains and chief officers are certified as safety officers based on the *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1521: Standard for Fire Department Safety Officer*. The safety officer is formally expected to notify the incident commander of any unsafe operations. The department has sound standard operating guidelines to reinforce a safety culture.

The department operates an EMS program that provides the community with a designated level of out-of-hospital emergency medical care. The department has developed SOGs in collaboration with BMHAS so that responding personnel from both agencies can effectively, efficiently, and safely work together to provide the optimum level of service. The department also follows the protocols established by the medical director.

A patient care record is created and maintained for each patient encountered by the department. These records receive an independent review through the ambulance service. The training division meets monthly to review calls with the director of BMHAS to review and identify areas for improvement. The training division develops remedial and in-service training when necessary. All patient care records are maintained per local and state requirements.

The department has a patient confidentiality compliance program in place that meets Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requirements. All personnel have received proper training to this act. Members of the department are responsible for maintaining privacy and confidentiality of an individual's personal information in accordance to local, state, and federal protocols. The department trains each new employee on its procedures during initial EMT training and for all members during continuing education training.

The department conducts an appraisal to determine the effectiveness of the EMS program in collaboration with the director of BMHAS on an annual basis. The training staff evaluates EMS level skills during monthly in-service training and quarterly exercises. The results of the appraisal are discussed during the annual report held by the command staff. Any necessary major changes to the program are subsequently implemented.

The department's response and deployment standards are based upon the suburban population density and the medical support demands of the community. Five stations provide citywide coverage; department staffing is based upon station location, incident type and frequency. It is recommended that the department expand its emergency medical services responses to include all emergency 911 emergency medical incidents. The department currently only responds to five life-threatening types of EMS calls.

The targeted service level objectives in the standards of cover benchmark statements are based on industry standards and best practices, as identified earlier in this report in Category II – Assessment and Planning. The objectives have been approved and adopted by fire department

management and the city council. The department's benchmark service level objectives are as follows:

For 90 percent of all EMS responses, the total response time for the arrival of the first-due unit, staffed with 2 firefighters and 1 officer, shall be 7 minutes in suburban areas. The first-due unit shall be capable of: assessing scene safety and establishing command; sizing-up the situation; conducting an initial patient assessment; obtaining vitals and patient's medical history; initiating mitigation efforts within one minute of arrival; providing first responder medical aid including AED; and assisting transport personnel with packaging the patient.

For 90 percent of high risk EMS response incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the effective response force (ERF), staffed with 7 firefighters and officers, shall be 8 minutes and 45 seconds in suburban areas. The ERF shall be capable of: providing incident command and producing related documentation; completing patient assessment; providing appropriate treatment; performing AED; and initiating cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

The initial arriving fire department company shall have the capabilities of providing first responder medical aid including AED, until the third-party provider arrives on scene. If the third-party provider unit arrives on scene first, its personnel shall initiate care and the staff from the initial fire department company shall provide support as needed.

The department's baseline statements reflect actual performance during 2010 to 2013. The department does not rely on the use of automatic aid or mutual aid from neighboring fire departments to provide its effective response force complement of personnel. The department's actual baseline service level performance is as follows:

For 90 percent of all EMS response incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the first-due unit, staffed with 2 firefighters and 1 officer is 7 minutes and 38 seconds in suburban areas. The first-due unit is capable of: assessing scene safety and establishing command; sizing-up the situation; conducting an initial patient assessment; obtaining vitals and patient's medical history; initiating mitigation efforts within one minute of arrival; providing first responder medical aid including AED; and assisting transport personnel with packaging the patient.

For 90 percent of high risk EMS response incidents, the total response time for the arrival of the ERF, staffed with 7 firefighters and officers, is 9 minutes and 14 seconds in suburban areas. The ERF is capable of: providing incident command and producing related documentation; completing patient assessment; providing appropriate BLS treatment; performing AED; and initiating CPR.

The initial arriving fire department company has the capabilities of providing first responder medical aid including AED, until the third-party provider arrives on scene. If the third-party provider unit arrives on scene first, its personnel initiate care and the staff from the initial fire department company provide support as needed.

It was verified and validated by the peer assessment team that Columbus Fire and Rescue demonstrated a trend of improvement in its actual baseline performance for 2010-2013.

EMS - 90th Percentile Times – Baseline Performance		2010- 2013	Jan - Nov 2013	2012	2011	2010
Alarm Handling	Pick-up to Dispatch	1:54	1:42	1:51	2:02	2:15
Turnout Time	Turnout Time 1st Unit	2:17	1:58	2:04	2:29	2:33
Travel Time	Travel Time 1st Unit Distribution	4:40	4:23	4:33	5:01	4:44
	Travel Time ERF Concentration	5:59	5:53	6:16	7:00	4:49
Total Response Time	Total Response Time 1st Unit On Scene Distribution	7:38	7:02	7:13	8:05	8:15
	Total Response Time ERF Concentration	9:14	8:38	9:15	11:00	8:59

Criterion 5H – Domestic Preparedness Planning and Response

The Lowndes Emergency Management Office is responsible for the development of the multi-jurisdictional emergency operations plan (EOP) that serves as an all-hazards plan. The EOP used by Columbus Fire and Rescue is a multi-jurisdiction plan covering Lowndes County and the city of Columbus.

Through its involvement with the county, the department operates an all-hazards preparedness program that includes a coordinated multi-agency response plan, designed to protect the community from terrorist threats or attacks, major disasters and other large-scale emergencies occurring at or in the immediate area. The EOP covers all emergency support functions and all phases of emergency operations. This comprehensive all-hazards plan provides an appropriate multi-agency organizational structure and authorizes those agencies to carry out predetermined functions and duties. The purpose of this planning document is to provide guidance and specific procedures for responding to a broad spectrum of hazards, emergencies, or disasters such as terroristic threats, earth quakes, hurricanes, and nuclear and radiological emergencies. The all-hazards plan conforms to the standards reflected in the National Response Framework. The department participated in the development of the EOP.

The plan is reviewed annually and updated as necessary. The county conducts multi-jurisdictional exercises every two years. Table top exercises are conducted annually. All participants train and operate under the National Incident Management System (NIMS). The department provides personnel to support the county command positions. Support and advice is provided from the office of emergency management coordinator and senior representatives of the municipal councils and emergency response agencies affected by the particular emergency.

The county has overall responsibility for the review and maintenance of the standard operating guidelines that direct the department’s domestic preparedness planning and response activities; however, there is extensive involvement of the participants in the system to ensure local needs and

adaptations are recognized and addressed. Local communities are expected to complete a review annually so as to allow the county time to complete the final review and approval of the guidelines.

The emergency operations center is well-equipped to support field activities. In order to facilitate interoperability with other county agencies, the EOC operates under NIMS during activation. The center has the ability to patch all radio frequencies to ensure communications. The county also has the ability to deploy a mobile communications trailer.

Category VI — Physical Resources

Columbus Fire and Rescue maintains five fire stations, one technical rescue building, a shared storage building, and two administrative office spaces. The fire stations are located: within the jurisdictional boundaries as established by the city charter; based upon the recommendations from the Mississippi State Rating Bureau; and to meet the service level objectives outlined in the standards of cover. The department operates a response fleet of 4 engines, 2 engines with 50 foot aerial devices, 1 aerial with a 95 foot platform, 1 tender with 2,500 gallon capacity, and various command and support vehicles, appropriate for the functions served. The city provides its own fleet maintenance department that is accordingly staffed to maintain the apparatus and equipment used for emergency response activities.

The department ensures the development and use of physical resources is consistent with its established plans. A systematic and planned approach to the future development of facilities is in place. All elected officials, command staff and line personnel are involved in the planning for physical facilities as part of the annual budgeting process and through the development of the strategic plan. The strategic plan also provided an avenue for input from community leaders and external stakeholders.

The department's fixed facility resources are designed, maintained, managed and adequate to meet its goals and objectives. The baseline performance data indicates that the physical facilities are adequate and meet the department's performance objectives for travel time. Each station meets department expectations and supports program needs; however, the limitations of station four may not support additional growth. Currently there are only two apparatus that can fit within the apparatus bay.

All buildings comply with the building codes and ordinances at the time of construction. Fire stations two and three and the public education office are the only facilities that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. A facility committee was established to develop a plan to bring all facilities into ADA compliancy. This plan will be presented to the mayor and city council during the budget process.

The stations do not currently have vehicle exhaust removal systems in them. It is recommended that the department secure funding and install vehicle exhaust removal systems in all of the stations at the earliest opportunity.

The department's apparatus resources are designed and purchased to be adequate to meet its goals and objectives. The department ensures the appropriate distribution and concentration of the apparatus to continuous capability to meet its standards of cover objectives. The department's baseline performance data demonstrates that the current strategic deployment of apparatus allows it to currently meet its existing goals for the delivery of emergency response services. The department places specialized apparatus in locations where they would most likely be required.

The inspection, testing, preventive maintenance, replacement schedule and emergency repairs of all apparatus are well established and meet the emergency apparatus service and reliability needs. The apparatus maintenance program is established and being conducted by the department. It provides limited general repairs; the city garage provides scheduled maintenance and repairs, and licensed third party vendors are utilized for certification testing. Currently, there are no emergency vehicle technicians (EVT) on staff; also, the city garage mechanics are not authorized service center (ASC) certified. All parties conduct all maintenance according to the manufacturers' recommendations. All major repairs are provided from manufacturer authorized third party vendors.

The department as well as the city garage keeps a records management system capable of tracking every vehicle in the fleet. There is direct communication to and from the maintenance division to the battalion chiefs to schedule service work, based upon preventive maintenance schedules.

Department policies and a written directive from the city garage manager provide standard operating guidelines. The preventative maintenance program is driven by daily apparatus and equipment checks, and weekly preventative maintenance checks; they are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure continuity of operations and a consistent approach to keeping the fleet well maintained.

The tools and small equipment resources are adequate and designed and maintained to meet the agency's goals and objectives. The engineers and firefighters, according to department policy, conduct the maintenance, tests, and inspections of tools and small equipment for all stations. Qualified department personnel provide testing for the self-contained breathing apparatus and certified third party vendors conduct testing for ground ladders and extrication equipment.

The chief of training inspects personal protective gear on an annual basis. Repairs needed are then repaired by a third party vendor. There is an adequate records management system for the equipment testing and maintenance program.

Safety equipment is adequate and designed to meet the agency's goals and objectives. The department has a comprehensive safety program that appropriately identifies and distributes a high quality supply of safety equipment for its employees. Chief officers are responsible for the regular inspection of the safety equipment. Personal protective gear is currently stored in the apparatus bay and directly exposed to engine exhaust. Implementation of the earlier recommendation for the installation of station exhaust systems will eliminate this exposure.

The department has guidelines in place to conduct monthly personal protective gear inspections following the *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1851: Standard on Selection, Care, and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting, 2008 Edition* as a guideline. The department is planning on sending two members to a manufacturer approved *NFPA 1851* class that includes advanced inspections.

The cascade system has been being serviced twice a year for air quality until this fall. The deficiency was corrected when it was discovered by the command staff; the system is now being scheduled for quarterly inspections in accordance with *NFPA 1989: Standard on Breathing Air Quality for Emergency Services Respiratory Protection, 2008 Edition*.

Category VII — Human Resources

The human resources functions for Columbus Fire and Rescue are provided through the city's human resources director. The branch is comprised of the director and a payroll clerk; both positions have distinct responsibilities. The director is charged with managing the city's personnel systems, such as discipline, hiring, employee benefits, compensation and the management of the city's employee handbook. The payroll clerk performs general clerical duties, processing of time and pay statements, and maintaining the city's salary software system.

General human resources administration practices are in place and are consistent with local, state, and federal statutory and regulatory requirements. Human resources staff administers the necessary city policies, procedures, and directives to ensure compliance with all of the related demands. The city's human resources director is designated as the one person responsible for all human resource activities for city departments. The human resources director is a senior administrative appointed position that reports directly the city's chief operations officer.

Systems are established to attract, select, retain, and promote qualified personnel in accordance with applicable local, state, and federal statutory requirements. The department has comprehensive processes to screen, qualify, and test candidates for new and promoted positions. Detailed within the city's employee handbook is the process utilized for screening and qualifying candidates for the recruitment of initial, lateral, and promotional candidates. The city also maintains a civil service rules handbook that clearly states the minimum standards and entrance qualifications for applicants. The department uses a third party accredited vendor to administer written tests to ascertain legal requirements are met.

The department has a well laid out initial hiring processes that encompass multiple layers such as the application itself, candidate physical ability test, written exam, background screening, interview, and a physical exam.

The department has a defined, supervised probationary process to evaluate new and promoted members. The city's civil service rules outline the probationary period for both new and promoted members. The probationary period for new member is initially set for one year, but can be extended beyond one year if the civil service commission deems there are extenuating circumstances. The probationary period for promoted members is six months. The department has self-identified an area for improvement in the probationary period for promoted members within the department. When members are promoted they are evaluated based on job performance and semi-annual performance reviews. In the future the department will evaluate methods to incorporate objective, skill, and knowledge assessments into the probationary process for promoted members.

It is recommended that the department continue efforts to bridge the large gap in the makeup of the racial composition of the department so that workforce composition is better reflective of the service area demographics. Currently, the department is comprised of 85 percent Caucasian and 15 percent African American. The city's population base is comprised of 65 percent African American and 35 percent Caucasian. The department is also encouraged to continue recruiting efforts to recruit a broad base of applicants.

The department does not have a new member orientation program to ascertain that new members receive consistent orientation subject matter. It is recommended that the department establish a formal new member orientation program to ascertain that new members receive consistent guidance as it relates to the essential information that new members receive, such as: performance expectations, policies and procedures, jurisdiction familiarization, and other topics the department deems important.

The department could benefit from a well-rounded recognition program that encompasses all positions within the department. Currently, the department takes steps to recognize its employees; however, the program is largely based on one-time individual accomplishments rather than a program that is all encompassing and consistent in nature. It is recommended that the department establish a comprehensive recognition program to ensure that department members are properly recognized with consistency.

Personnel policies and procedures are in place, documented and used to guide both administrative and personnel behavior. The city's personnel policies are kept current by the human resources director. Employees are trained on the city's personnel policies; they are given to each employee during the orientation process. After the orientation process employees are advised of and are subsequently trained on new or revised policies. The department maintains copies of personnel policies at the five fire stations.

The city has two clear policies that define and prohibit discrimination, or related harassment. The equal employment opportunity addresses practices to eliminate forms of discrimination based upon race, color, religion, sex, national origin, veteran's status, disability, or any other characteristic that is prohibited by law. The policy against harassment prohibits harassment of any manner, to include verbal, physical, and visual forms of harassment. Both policies apply to all city employees.

Human resources development and utilization is consistent with the agency's established mission, goals and objectives. The department has a position classification system in place whereby, on an on-going basis, assessments of job functions and job descriptions are accomplished. The city's job descriptions policy ensures that all city employees work under a job description. The human resources director is responsible for establishing new job descriptions as the need arises. The department also maintains a job descriptions policy; the policy identifies each position within the department. The human resources director and the fire chief are responsible for auditing each position to ascertain that job descriptions remain consistent with current duties and responsibilities.

A system and practices for providing employee and member compensation is in place. All members are provided with documentation of the salaries and benefits derived from that process. The compensation for department staff is aligned with comparable employees in other city departments.

Occupational health and safety and risk management programs are established and designed to protect the organization and personnel from unnecessary injuries or losses from accidents or liability. The department has an occupational health and safety program that was designed and implemented to meet legislative compliance, to reduce workplace health and safety incidents, and to promote health and wellness in the workplace. Currently, the chief of training is the designated individual responsible for the implementation of the department's occupational health and safety program, although the fire chief has the ultimate responsibility. All members of the department have designated responsibilities in this program to ensure compliance with program guidelines, to report accidents and injuries, and to prevent them wherever possible.

The department's chief for training serves as the safety officer and is mandated to respond to all second alarms as well as all situations where a firefighter injury occurs. Typically, until a second alarm or higher is activated, the responsibilities for monitoring for site safety are initially filled by company officers. Scene safety responsibilities are further supported through the dispatch and arrival of staff officers. All personnel expected to fill the role of safety officer have received appropriate recognized training. The safety officer is formally expected to notify the incident commander of any unsafe operations. Similar expectations extend to all emergency response personnel.

It is recommended that the department consolidate the existing components of its occupational health and safety program in a more formalized way in accordance with *NFPA 1500: Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program, 2013 Edition*. The department could benefit from an organized group comprised of a wide variety of department personnel to monitor occupational health and safety activities.

The department has a wellness and fitness program for recruit and incumbent personnel and provisions for non-compliance by employees and members are written and communicated. Each firefighter recruit receives an occupational medical evaluation, conducted by the city's employee health services (EHS), prior to the start of the academy. EHS also conducts annual medical evaluations on all sworn personnel. The annual medical evaluation includes a complete history and physical exam along with a series of tests that are in line with industry best practices. The department requires a rehabilitative medical evaluation of members after an injury or significant illness to determine the eligibility of the member to return to full duty.

The department takes a proactive approach to physical fitness standards and all members have access to physical fitness equipment. Prospective employees must pass a candidate physical ability test (CPAT) prior to being tendered a job offer. Incumbent members are required to participate in a job related physical ability assessment. These assessments are administered semi-annually to ensure members are fit for duty.

The department will continue to require regular medical evaluations for incumbent members through a department sanctioned and funded process. Incumbent members currently also have the opportunity to voluntarily obtain a medical physical from their personal physician. The voluntary medical physical is covered to the extent defined in the employer's sponsored health plan.

The department's policies and procedure manual address firefighter health and wellness. The items in this document address both wellness and fitness components. Physical fitness assessments are also completed for all firefighters on a semi-annual basis.

The department provides an elliptical trainer for each station; however, any other fitness equipment is provided by the personnel themselves. The result is that some stations have strength training equipment and others do not. In addition, the space allocated for fitness activities is very limited. It is recommended that the department explore avenues to provide improved access to fitness facilities and equipment.

The department provides basic exercise instruction through the physical fitness assessment vendor, North Greenville Fitness. The department members would benefit from peer fitness trainers on site. It is also recommended that the department explore opportunities to train members on exercise instruction so that firefighters have access to readily available fitness consultation.

Category VIII — Training and Competency

Columbus Fire and Rescue provides an all hazards training program that is recognized by the State of Mississippi. Emergency medical services (EMS) training sessions are conducted to meet the standards set by the state and Baptist Memorial Hospital Ambulance Service protocols. All initial fire training for new members is conducted at the state fire academy in Jackson. Initial EMS training is provided by the department prior to state fire academy recruit attendance.

A chief of training oversees the entire program and ensures that all classes administered meet at least the minimum required standards for each discipline. The program is further supported by the specific technical rescue coordinators and other members of the department with specialized training.

A training and education program is established to support the agency's needs. Program areas and required training needs are identified based upon federal, state, and local laws, as well as administrative requirements. The process ensures the training program delivers: programs that the department is legally mandated to offer; programs that meet state requirements for maintenance of existing certifications held by department personnel; and training needed to acquaint personnel with new equipment acquisitions or technologies.

The department is dedicated to training firefighters as it maintains a robust training schedule and is very proactive in extending external training opportunities to the workforce. However, the department would greatly benefit from the establishment of a staff development program to provide firefighters a pathway for future success and career opportunities within the organization. It is recommended that the department establish a formal staff development program to provide firefighters a pathway for future responsibilities and to ensure the department has qualified members to carry out future mission requirements.

Training and education programs are provided to support the agency's needs. The training program is organized and meets the needs of the department and its members; it also meets the state certification requirements. All members of the department meet the Firefighter Level II requirements of the *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1001: Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications, 2013 Edition* prior to the end of initial recruit training.

The department's training program includes a wide variety of specialty training such as emergency medical services, hazardous materials, and technical rescue. The department ensures that training and education programs are based upon the departments stated levels of service. The department has the unique opportunity to conduct live fire structure burns on dilapidated houses at a rate of approximately ten times per year. The department utilizes this opportunity to teach multiple training evolutions to firefighters. All fires are conducted in accordance with *NFPA 1403: Standard on Live Fire Training Evolutions, 2012 Edition*.

The department utilizes performance based evaluations to ensure its members and companies are competent in performing the job. The department incorporates written and skill-based testing into the development and delivery of its training programs and emergency response exercises. The fire instructors utilize lesson plans to conduct department training that includes performance based measurements; all lesson plans are approved by the chief for training prior to instruction. The department regularly participates in local and regional exercises that involve mutual aid partners.

Although the department does keep training records for employees, current methods are inefficient and unorganized. The department does not currently maintain individual training records for its members. It was observed by the peer team that records are mainly kept in file folders with employees lumped into single files based on certification or training subjects. It is recommended that the department establish and maintain individual training records to ensure that all members training activities and certifications are organized and readily available.

Training and education resources, printed and non-printed library materials, media equipment, facilities and staff are available in sufficient quantity, relevancy, diversity and they are current. The department currently uses various city buildings and acquired structures in support of the training needs. While the department does not currently have a fire department training center, the department has done a good job in improvising and utilizing resources available within the city to support training requirements e.g., the use of dilapidated structures for live fire training, as identified above.

To support training needs, the department utilizes front line response equipment as well as two reserve engines. The department also possesses a host of specialty equipment to support the department's training needs

It is recommended that the department take steps to establish a dedicated fire department training center to better support its training objectives. It is also recommended that the department increase training classroom area within the five fire stations to better foster a learning environment that meets department needs.

Nationally recognized training materials are being utilized. In corroboration with the chief for training, the department's training coordinators continuously evaluate the existing training materials to make sure they reflect current practices and needs. The training staff also regularly receives recommendations from administrative and operational personnel for new training materials that go through the same evaluation process prior to being added to the department's training resources.

Category IX — Essential Resources

Criterion 9A – Water Supply

Columbus Fire and Rescue receives its water from two suppliers to ensure the provision of a well-maintained, reliable, and adequate water system. A solid working relationship exists between the two entities and includes the regular exchange of information to identify areas where the water supply system can be improved. Both systems are well maintained.

The water supply resources available to the department are reliable and capable of distributing adequate volumes of water and pressures to all areas of agency responsibility. All areas meet fire flow requirements for emergencies. The department has assigned the fire marshal to work with the water departments and building code officials for coordination purposes to review and approve the required fire flow for all significant new construction developments. This ensures the department is able to conduct effective fire suppression efforts.

Nearly all built up areas of the city are adequately served by the domestic water supply with over 3,000 hydrants. The distribution system and hydrant distances are meeting best practices of 300 feet for commercial areas and 500 feet for single family newer residential areas.

The hydrant locations and alternate water sources are maintained in both hard-copy and electronic format. Responding crews have access the information through the map books located on the apparatus. There is an appropriate system in place for the sharing of information between the fire department and the water department related to any problems that develop with the pressurized water system.

Should the domestic water supply be rendered inoperable, the fire department is prepared to draft from portable drop tanks. The department's water tender is outfitted with hard suction hoses for drafting. The department has one water tender that is cross-staffed and utilizes automatic mutual aid for additional water sources.

Criterion 9B – Communication Systems

Columbus Fire and Rescue receives its communication services from the Lowndes County Communications Center (LCCC). The center provides dispatch services for police, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS). A governing board, with a county appointed director, oversees operations of the LCCC.

The LCCC is staffed with four dispatchers, with one dedicated to fire and EMS responses. The fire dispatcher is also responsible for answering all 911 generated calls. A supervisor is one duty at all times and is one of the four dispatchers. The LCCC received a significant hardware and software upgrade in 2011.

The public and the department have an adequate, effective and efficient emergency communications system. The system is reliable and able to meet the demands of major operations, including command and control within fire and rescue services during emergency operations, and meets the requirements of other public safety agencies having a need for the distribution of information.

The radio system is based on UHF and VHF technology. The department assigns personal portable radios to all department personnel. The LCCC has the ability to patch all county radio systems when needed to ensure interoperability in the field. All command staff are issued department cell phones. The fire station alerting uses outdated technology.

The communications center has adequate provisions for meeting the incoming call volume associated with emergencies. All staff in the center are cross-trained and able to assume call taker or dispatch functions should the need arise during times of high call volume. The on-duty supervisor can be pressed into similar service, if necessary, but it is recognized that this should be avoided, if at all possible, to ensure appropriate supervision capability continues to be in place at all times. A county communications trailer can be deployed for significant incidents.

The center operates under comprehensive internal standard operating guidelines (SOGs) that provide a central core of directives from which personnel can effectively, efficiently, and safely meet the expected levels of service for all emergency events. All SOGs are reviewed annually. Selected personnel assigned to the call taking and dispatch functions work with the supervisory staff to complete the initial review; the board of governors reviews and approves any recommended changes that affect overall service delivery. The fire chief has the ability to implement SOGs to maintain proper procedures and responses for the department. The department has developed a dispatch process SOG as a guideline for the center that will be shared with the incoming communication center director. This SOG follows the standards set in the *National*

Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1221: Standard for the Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems, 2013 Edition.

Criterion 9C – Administrative Support Services and Office Systems

Columbus Fire and Rescue internally provides most all of the office systems support to meet its needs. Limited support is also available from the city through a shared services approach, primarily intended for unusually busy administration periods such as year-end financial reporting. Responsibilities for each of the internal systems reside within department divisions and are accompanied by policies and procedures for their governance and use. The department has a comprehensive records management program. It is supervised by the administrative assistant and command staff who oversees the records area and ensures that all department records are in compliance with the city's records management policies and procedures.

Administrative support services and general office systems are in place with adequate staff to efficiently and effectively conduct and manage the department's administrative functions, such as organizational planning and assessment, resource coordination, data analysis, research, records keeping, reporting, business communications, public interaction and purchasing.

The department operates under specific city directives and guidelines that outline the required and authorized support resources based upon specific metrics; considerations include its size, function, complexity, and mission. The department is operating at the authorized levels and, as such, is adequately staffed and managed to meet its administrative goals and objectives. The staff members are a strong resource to the various functions and support the divisions of the fire department and play a large part in the process of continuous improvement.

Category X — External Systems Relationships

Columbus Fire and Rescue has four written mutual aid agreements. The agreements include a hazardous materials response agreement, an agreement for all hazards response to a city school located outside of city limits, an agreement with Columbus Air Force Base, and a statewide mutual aid compact (SMAC) with all 82 counties in Mississippi. The SMAC authorizes any department within the state to request all hazard aid from another department at the assisting department's discretion. The agreement is authorized by a state code wherein fire departments are authorized to go outside municipal limits and liability is limited. The department also responds as one of the three regional urban search and rescue task force teams within the state.

The department's operations and planning efforts include relationships with external agencies and operational systems that affect or may influence its mission, operations or cost effectiveness. The department understands the value of outside relationships that support its mission and operations. The department has developed and currently maintains these relationships that have proven to be cost effective and have benefitted the community it serves. The department actively participates in regional hazardous materials responses and disasters throughout the state as members of the urban search and rescue team.

The department has been the recipient of significant state grants for its participation in the urban search and rescue task force, which has allowed the department to purchase a complete technical rescue equipment cache and appropriate apparatus to transport it. This equipment is used for

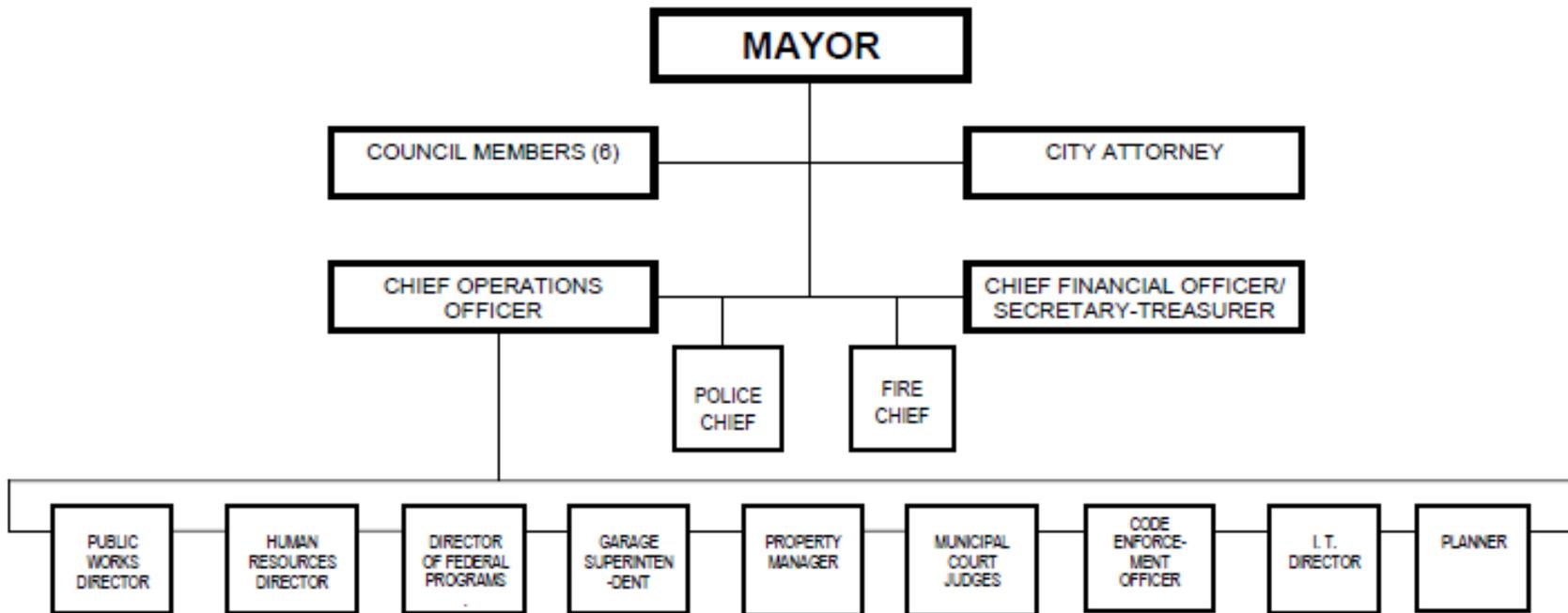
technical rescue responses within the department's jurisdiction, as needed when not deployed, which has proven to be very cost-effective.

The department has well-developed and functioning external agency agreements. The system is synergistic and is taking advantage of all operational and cost effective benefits that may be derived from external agency agreements.

All of mutual aid agreements are current and support the organizational objectives. The hazardous materials response agreement has an indefinite clause, but is evaluated quarterly during meetings between all parties involved. The other agreements have all been reviewed and updated within the last year and are scheduled to be reviewed either annually or once every two years according to the terms of each agreement. All agreements have been reviewed and approved by the city's legal department.

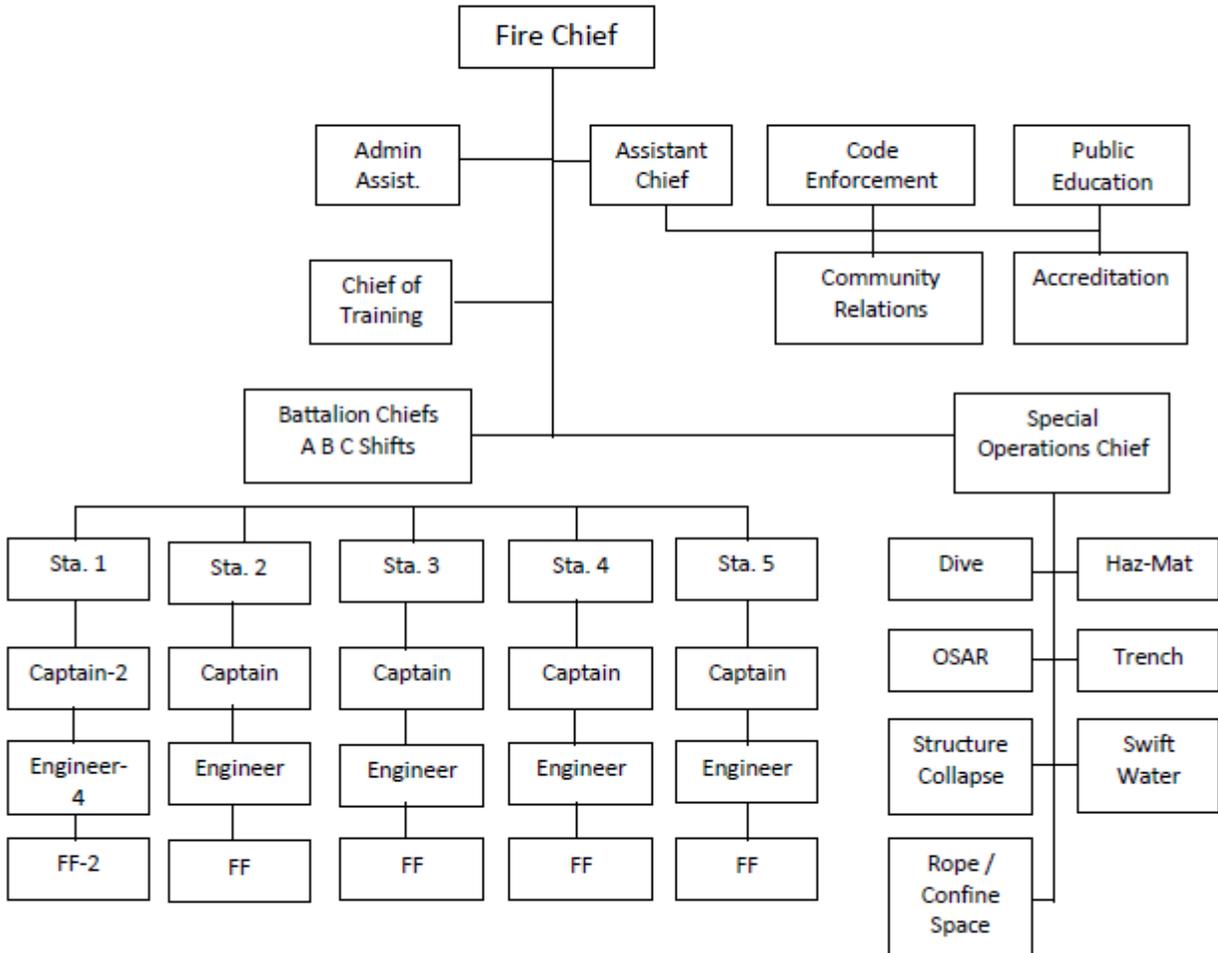
CITY OF COLUMBUS

Organization Chart



Columbus Fire and Rescue

Organization Chart



*1 Shift is short an engineer