

## **Preparing and Promoting Acting Officer in Charge Firefighters**

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## CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that the following statements are true:

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Madeira & Indian Hill Joint Fire District (MIHJFD) has experienced many changes in the past few years. The department has had several members retire, and now there are six newly-hired and inexperienced firefighters. The problem this research addressed is the failure of MIHJFD to select, prepare and properly train firefighters for the position of Officer in Charge (OIC). The position of OIC is as important as the one of the company officer. MIHJFD has varied their approach to promoting the OIC. Firefighters that serve as OICs are not required to have any certifications. The training that they might have is voluntary and not required for the position. Multiple publications have been included in the research as well as Line of Duty death reports, one internal and one external survey. The questions that this research addresses are: How can MIHJFD prepare firefighters to be OICs? What certifications and requirements should MIHJFD require for the position of OIC? What is an effective promotional process to select an OIC?

This descriptive research utilized multiple publications, an internal survey and an external survey within the neighboring departments of MIHJFD. As a result of this research, it was established that there are ways to prepare firefighters to serve in the role of OIC, and that MIHJFD would benefit from a standardized process to select their OIC. The conclusion was drawn that more training is needed for firefighters who serve as OIC for MIHJFD.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

In 2007, seven MIHJFD firefighters were injured in a structure fire. The first and second arriving units did not have an officer present due to the lieutenant being off. There was no officer on the scene until minutes after the backdraft/flashover that caused the firefighters' injuries. The OIC (Officer in Charge) responded in Engine 64 with a crew of four. The fire ground (FG) assigned to the incident was FG 3 but the crew from Engine 64 was operating on FG 2. The OIC failed to identify the mistake, and they operated on the wrong fire ground. "Though this FG was somewhat effective from initial attack through the Mayday, the possibility for disaster was recognized." (After-Action Review: Firefighter Injuries in Backdraft, 2007)

The three most senior firefighters in the department do not have any fire officer training and only one of the three is an instructor. One of these firefighters serves as OICs every shift when there is not an officer on duty.

One of the OICs in the MIHJFD is the most senior firefighter in the department and has served many years as an acting officer in charge. However, he also has been disciplined for multiple incidents. In a recent example, this firefighter was acting as the officer in charge when he responded in the first due truck to a report of a strange smell inside a house. He made entry to the residence without any respiratory protection or fire gear. This incident resulted in a verbal reprimand for the firefighter.

*The problem for the Madeira & Indian Hill Joint Fire District (MIHJFD) that this project will address is: The failure of the current program to select, prepare, and train*

*firefighters who serve in the role of acting officer in the absence of a designated lieutenant or captain.*

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide research based information to assist the department in designing a proper process to prepare a firefighter to be an OIC. The Descriptive Research method was used to conduct this project. It will examine the issue as experienced by other fire departments and survey the potentially affected members to arrive at a recommendation of implementation for the department's consideration.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions will be answered by this descriptive research:

1. How can MIHJFD better prepare firefighters to be OICs?
2. What certifications and requirements should MIHJFD require for the position of OIC?
3. What is an effective promotional process to select an OIC?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The Madeira & Indian Hill Joint Fire District (MIHJFD) is a combination part-time / full-time fire department. It provides Fire and EMS services to 24 square miles that include The Village of Indian Hill and The City of Madeira. According to the 2010 Census, the city of Madeira has an estimated population of 8,936 and the Village of Indian Hill has an estimated population of 5,808.

The Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire District functions under Ohio law as a statutory fire district. The law allows the fire district to provide Fire and EMS services to two or more municipal corporations. The main funding for the operations is split equally between the two cities. The district is overseen by a 12-member board, composed of six members from each city. The department currently has 17 full-time firefighters, including one fire chief, two captains, and three lieutenants. The MIHJFD also has approximately 17 part-time firefighters / paramedics.

In addition to Fire and EMS, the Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire District also has personnel trained in technical rescue disciplines, including water, rope, trench, auto extrication, confined space and structural collapse. The department responds to approximately 1,000 EMS runs and 600 fire calls per year.

The district provides coverage from two firehouses. Station 1 is the headquarters, located in The Village of Indian Hill. The minimum staffing is 2, and maximum staffing is four for Station 1. Monday through Friday, from 0800 to 1700, staffing is normally composed of one captain, one lieutenant and two firefighters. At night and on weekends, there are three firefighters and one lieutenant. The fire chief and two clerks are also in Station 1, Monday

through Friday, from 0800 to 1700. Station 1 houses one primary rescue / pumper, a spare engine and a support vehicle.

Station 2 is located in the City of Madeira. The minimum staffing is 2 for Station 2, and the maximum staffing is 4. Monday through Friday, from 0800 to 1700, staffing is normally composed of one captain and three firefighters. During the night and on weekends, the staff is comprised of four firefighter/paramedics. There is no officer routinely present during this time. Station 2 has two ambulances, one Quint and one support vehicle.

Firefighters for MIHJFD are responsible for multiple programs and projects, in addition to their primary roles as paramedics and firefighters in emergency response. These programs and projects support the primary mission in many ways and require time and attention by the MIHJFD staff.

Every full-time firefighter is required to be an inspector. The district has approximately 677 businesses that are inspected once a year. Many of these businesses have a pre-plan that contains critical information during emergencies, such as: water supply, electrical access, and the presence of hazardous materials. These pre-plans are created and maintained by MIHJFD firefighters. The department is also responsible for underground tanks and tent inspections. Twice a year, all 1,630 hydrants in the district are serviced by firefighters, once during the spring and again during the fall. In 2016, firefighters from MIHJFD inspected 104 car seats for residents and non-residents of the district. MIHJFD has a “premise history program” where residents can provide the department with medical information that is placed in a folder in the ambulance. When the squad is dispatched, the dispatcher will advise the responding units of the

existence of the premise history. This allows paramedics to have important information in case the patient is not able to communicate. The premise history also provides access information or any special consideration, such as hospital preference, allergies and medical history.

Additionally, The Madeira & Indian Hill Joint Fire District also makes and installs address signs for residents of the district. The signs provide an aid to first responders to locate addresses where the department might be dispatched.

In addition to fire suppression and emergency medical interventions, the two captains split several supervisory and administrative duties. One of these duties is the operations of the Management Information System. This consists of maintaining hardware and software for the operations of the fire department's database management, State of Ohio incident reporting, and data analysis. Another responsibility that is assigned to one of the captains is to lead the inspection bureau. Included in this bureau are business inspections, managing the removal of underground storage tanks and record keeping. Training is also a responsibility that one captain coordinates. This includes scheduling trainings, assigning training topics to department instructors, and making sure that the department is in compliance with mandatory trainings. Another primary duty for one of the captains is the management of the staff, which includes scheduling, request for leave, payroll and record keeping. (MIHJFD Captain 1 and Captain 2 Job Description, September 2006)

In 2015, nine firefighters acted as officers in charge for a total of 2,900 hours. Of these nine firefighters, only one has fire officer training. One of the two stations in the district has no promoted supervisor present on a regular basis. In the past, the department has relied on a

seniority based system to designate an acting officer in the absence of the company officer. The difficulty is that the department's OICs did not have to qualify for the role by taking a test, or complete any leadership or strategy courses. Simply being the senior firefighter was all that was needed to be the designated acting OIC. This not only affects the operations of that firehouse, but it also sends a crew to mutual aid dispatches without a formally prepared supervisor.

Several years ago, the firefighters' union negotiated their first contract with a provision that the senior firefighter would serve as OIC. In later negotiations, management was able to renegotiate a process or method to designate an OIC. After the most recent lieutenant hiring process, an acting OIC for each unit was designated by the chief, rather than by seniority. Two of these OICs were chosen based on their performance in the lieutenant process. However, to cover all three shifts, the department needed to identify one more OIC, even though there were no more candidates from the promotional process. Therefore, the OIC was chosen by the chief based on overall job performance.

A department document Advisory: Officer Selection 2016, MIHJFD defines the company officer: *“as a first and middle level supervisor. Supervisors have the daily and on-going responsibility to assure that all types of appropriate workplace standards are maintained. The supervisor assures standards of performance are delivered. It is the fire Department Officer that is key to department accountability, responsibility, and discipline. It is through the supervisor that department policies and values are displayed and department mission accomplished.”*

With the current operational configuration in place, during the night and on weekends, there is one supervisor for eight employees. This is the maximum ratio of span of control according to the National Incident Management System (Homeland Security, 2008).

MIHJFD has mutual aid agreements with all the surrounding departments. In 2015, MIHJFD responded to 60 fire responses to other departments in the area. In the current configuration, a unit responds with four firefighters, and the majority of the time, without a promoted officer.

In order to be eligible to participate in the lieutenant promotional process for the MIHJFD, one needs to have at least have worked two years as a full-time firefighter with the Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire district. The candidate should write a letter of application. There is also an assessment center test that includes: a written exam, presentation, in-basket exercise, and a fire scenario (Promotional Opportunity: Lieutenant, Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire District, 2015).

Until this year, the acting OIC position was based on seniority when the company officer was not present. The position pays an additional two dollars per hour.

Recently, the Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire District had a lieutenant promotional process. The department had three candidates from a list of seven firefighters who were eligible to apply. In the process of deciding what changes were needed to help the new officer succeed, the topic of acting officer in charge was revisited. The current department officers did not want to continue with the seniority based practice. However, there were not enough applicants for the officer position to pick one lieutenant and three OICs. Between the current officers, it was

decided to make the two candidates remaining from the process OICs. Then, the MIHJFD assigned another firefighter that the current officers felt had the qualifications to be an acting officer in charge.

The department made this decision with some hesitation. The officers recognized the need for a newer, fairer process, but they did not have enough time to focus and create it. The department needed to complete the shift changes in time to choose vacation days for the 2016 calendar year. The Madeira Indian Hill officers considered that the appointment of the three acting OIC's was more important than to continue with the seniority based selection. Despite making progress, MIHJFD does not have a defined selection process or training for OIC firefighters.

The potential impact of this study for MIHJFD is the improvement of the quality and amount of training provided to firefighters who will serve as OIC. Another effect will be the standardization of the process in which MIHJFD selects their OICs. By improving the preparation and adding a monetary incentive to serve as an OIC, firefighters will be motivated to participate in the process of becoming productive and effective OICs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examined industry standards together with examples of successful programs in other departments, as well as internal documents from the MIHJFD.

The Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire District lists the lieutenant's supervisory duties as the person responsible for not only the day-to-day operations of the unit to which he or she is assigned, but also for the safety, skill development and general supervision of the crew. (Duties of Lieutenant, Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire District, September 2006). MIHJFD requires the company officer to hold several qualifications, but the only current requirement for acting OIC is to be at the top of the seniority list.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) developed a series of standards for the fire service nationwide. Even though these standards don't have to be adopted by local fire departments, they serve as an important guide for fire departments. On NFPA 1021, the standard states that the candidate for Fire Officer I should be a Firefighter II and an Instructor. Additional requirements are listed as follows: candidates should possess fundamentals of leadership, the ability to operate under the Incident Management System, have completed human resources training, should possess strong communications skills during emergencies and in day-to-day operations (National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1021 (2014)). The standards also recommend that the Fire Officer I have fire inspection and investigator knowledge. The IAFC defines a Fire Officer I as an individual who supervises a single fire suppression unit or a small administrative group within a fire department (IAFC. Fire Officer: Principles and Practice, 2010)

NFPA 1021 is included in the Officer Development Handbook, which was written by the International Association of Fire Chiefs. The IAFC expands on the requirements set by NFPA 1021. In their handbook, the IAFC explains the elements that they believe will prepare the candidate to become an effective supervising company officer. Included in their elements are training, education, experience and self-development (IAFC, 2003). This handbook was used as a reference for this paper due to its credibility and national recognition.

The International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) developed the Fire and Emergency Services Company Officer Manual. In this manual, the IFSTA lists recommended requirements for the company officer in terms of knowledge and skill. These recommended requirements include understanding of the structure, policies and procedures of their organization, effective communication skills, basic knowledge of human resources, how to protect their personnel, building construction, planning, inspection procedures and how to deliver company level training (IFSTA, 2007, p4).

In the Chief Officer Manual, IFSTA proposes that the elements in the promotional process should include preparatory training, vacancy availability, vacancy advertising, applicant certification, written examination development, skills testing, assessment centers, applicant interviews and successful candidate posting (Chief Officer [IFSTA] 2014). The manual states: *Succession planning should prepare all personnel for advancement at least to the next level through an established career development plan.* (Chief Officer [IFSTA] p63)

In his book, Fire Command, Alan Brunacini explains the importance of the first responder to arrive to an incident (Fire Command, 2002) Brunacini explains: *If we miss the*

*initial command window, we will never get that initial effectiveness opportunity back again-in fact, in some incidents, if we lose the front end, we lose the whole event.* (Fire Command, 2002, p68) Brunacini also explains that regardless of rank, the first arriving unit should establish command, which could be a company officer, firefighter or any other personnel.

The Crew Resource Management manual developed by the International Fire Chief Association emphasizes the importance of good leadership. Even though safety is a responsibility of everyone, the ultimate accountability is assumed by the leader of the crew. Another important topic mentioned in the manual is the importance of developing and supporting future leaders (Crew Resource Management; IAFC, 2002)

On March 2015, a firefighter in Ohio died after falling from the fifth floor, down an elevator shaft. The NIOSH report identified one of the key contributing factors as “Acting officers in several key positions” (NIOSH 2015)

In November 2006, a Georgia firefighter died after sustaining injuries during a house fire. After conducting an investigation, NIOSH issued a series of recommendations. One of these recommendations was: “Fire departments should ensure that fire fighters serving as acting officers are adequately trained” (NIOSH 2009, Recommendation#9).

The City of Longwood utilizes their lieutenant promotional announcement in a way to define and explain the position of Ride up Lieutenant or acting OIC (City of Longwood, 2015 (p.2). Their announcement explains in detail the lieutenant position, the eligibility, the process, the requirements and more importantly, the opportunity to participate in the process to become a lieutenant or to be eligible to be an acting OIC. The City of Longwood utilized the assessment

center process for both lieutenant and acting OIC. The requirements for both positions are very similar. For example, both positions need to be a Paramedic, Fire Officer I, three years of service with their department, and Firefighter II. The candidate for lieutenant must have a minimum of one year as an acting officer in charge, or OIC. The Officer in Charge or Ride-Up Lieutenant candidate must also be a pump operator.

In an internal survey completed by Haller (2013) of the Sidney Department of Fire and Emergency Services (SDFES), eighty-two percent of respondents agreed that testing is needed for the selection of an OIC. However, members surveyed did not agree as decidedly as to what kind of testing was needed. “On-the-job training, general knowledge, SOPs, administration regulations, and table top command exercises were all considered to be test-worthy material” (p. 29). Some others recommended that OICs take the same test lieutenants take including the Fire Service Assessment Center. During his research, Haller also conducted an external survey, which was within the state of Ohio, but outside of his department. The results of the external survey were as follows: over 71% of departments utilized OICs, but only 25.6% of the departments provided training for their OICs. Also in his research, Haller found that “Forty-three percent of the departments utilize seniority as the only determinant in selection of acting officers.”

One way to test knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) is utilizing the Fire Service Assessment Center. This Assessment Center simulates a day in the life of the position being tested by utilizing a series of exercises. *The exercises require you to exhibit your ability to do the job. To determine the exercise used, testing agencies break down the job tested into behavioral*

*dimensions. The dimensions categorized the KSAs of the job into major groups. (Mastering the Fire Service Assessment Center, 2006, p.7)*

In conclusion, this literature review provided the researcher with a significant amount of published resources, including industry standards on the topics of officer selection, training and leadership. These publications provided additional reinforcement on the importance of a properly identified and trained OIC. The information discovered provided guidelines and examples to establish and implement a standardized process to identify and prepare OICs at MIHJFD based on national fire industry standards and other successful departments.

## PROCEDURES

The type of research used in this project was descriptive. The research examined the current promotional process of the MIHJFD. The researcher also inspected how MIHJFD was training and preparing firefighters to function as the acting officer in charge. This research also reviewed the current MIHJFD Standard Operating Guidelines, (SOGs) and the current job descriptions to determine if updates were necessary.

A Boolean search was used to identify materials that could provide a guide for the research. Keywords utilized include “Promotional process,” “Acting in charge,” “Officer in charge” and “fire department succession plan.”

The National Fire Academy and the Ohio Fire Executive databases were searched in order to examine previous research completed on the topic of acting in charge and promotional processes.

Multiple books and manuals provided an overview on how the fire industry was trending in reference to promoting and preparing firefighters. Fire Officer: Principles and Practice 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, The Officer Development Handbook and Crew Resource Management are some of the references utilized to guide the research.

Two online surveys were conducted in order to provide data for this research paper. One external survey was sent via e-mail to 82 fire chiefs of all the surrounding counties of MIHJFD including: Hamilton, Butler, Clermont, and Warren County. This external survey attempted to gather an overview of how the neighboring fire departments address the acting OIC role, including: selection process, preparation, and training. The second survey was an internal inquiry

of the MIHJFD personnel. This survey was conducted to specifically determine how the staff of the MIHJFD perceives the selection and preparation of the acting officer in charge. Eleven anonymous surveys were sent via e-mail to all full-time firefighters that have the possibility to be in the acting OIC position on any given day.

Both surveys were conducted with the online service Google Drive. Google Drive allowed the researcher to send questions to the subjects of the survey, collect the data, and synchronize the data into spreadsheets for easy data analysis.

An opportunity to research outside of the State of Ohio was available, and the researcher took advantage of this opportunity. A questionnaire was sent to Captain Daniel Ripley of the Lincoln Fire & Rescue Department in Lincoln, Nebraska and to Division Chief Josh Stefancic of the Largo Fire Rescue in Largo, Florida. Captain Ripley's and Chief Stefancic's opinions were requested as a result of peer networking during conferences such as the Fire Department Instructor's Conference (FDIC) and IFSTA. Lincoln Fire & Rescue and Lincoln Firefighters Local 644 pride themselves for having a great working relationship to have the most comprehensive and fair promotional process. Lincoln Fire & Rescue has also created a program to not only prepare their firefighters to be acting lieutenants and company officers, but to prepare company officers for the position of district chiefs.

### **Definition of Terms**

Acting Officer in Charge. A member of a lower rank temporarily assigned to fill a position of higher rank.

Fire Ground. Radio channel or Talkgroup assigned by the dispatcher. This channel is use by all personnel in any given incident.

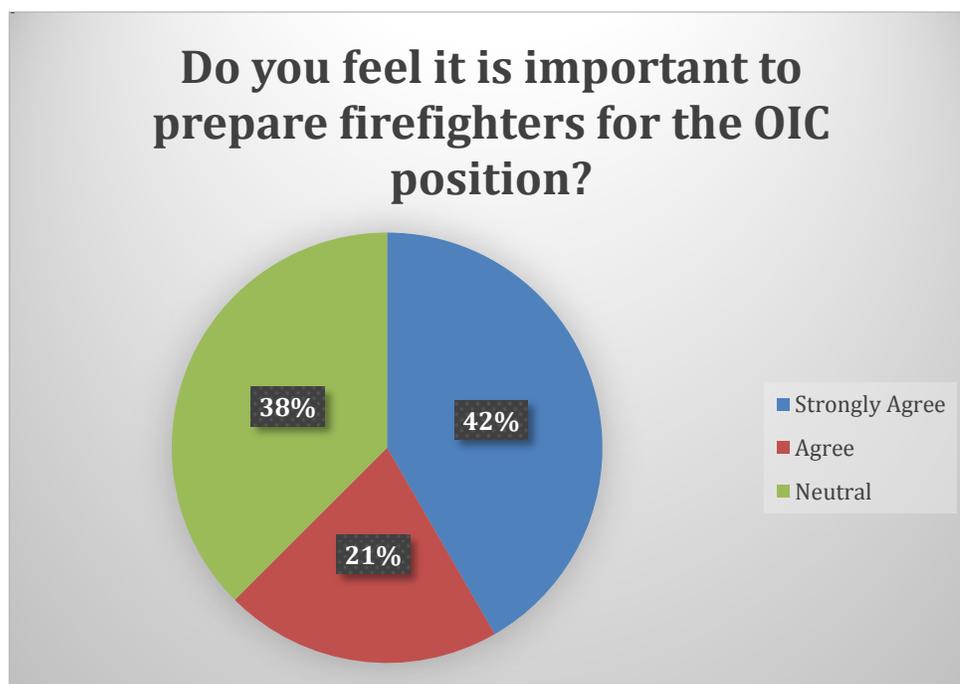
### **Limitations of the Study**

The external survey was sent to 82 fire chiefs in Hamilton County and the surrounding counties. The e-mail addresses were obtained from the office of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association. The returned sample was disappointing, only 22 responses were received. It is difficult to know if all the e-mails reached the people that the researcher intended.

There is the possibility of some bias in some of the responses of the internal survey. This is due to the fact that the author is the direct supervisor of some members being surveyed.

## RESULTS

To understand how other departments in the area select and prepare their OICs, an external survey was sent to 82 departments of Hamilton County and the surrounding counties of Butler, Clermont, and Warren. Twenty-two surveys were returned. All respondents were Chief Officers. Fifty percent of the respondents utilized the OIC role. Of the departments that utilize OICs, five have two fire stations, four have one station, two have three stations and one has four stations. All of the participants in the survey were asked if they thought that it was important to prepare firefighters for the position of OIC. Forty-two percent strongly agreed, 21 percent agreed and the remaining 37 percent were neutral. None of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that it was important to prepare firefighters for the role of OIC.



**Figure 1**

The first two questions that this research addresses can be combined into one group.

*How can MIHJFD prepare firefighters to be OICs?*

*What certifications and requirements should MIHJFD require for the position of OIC*

Figure 2 shows the certifications needed to function as an OIC in the departments in the surrounding counties that use the position of OIC. Eight-two percent of the departments that utilized the OIC position required Fire Officer I as one of the certifications.

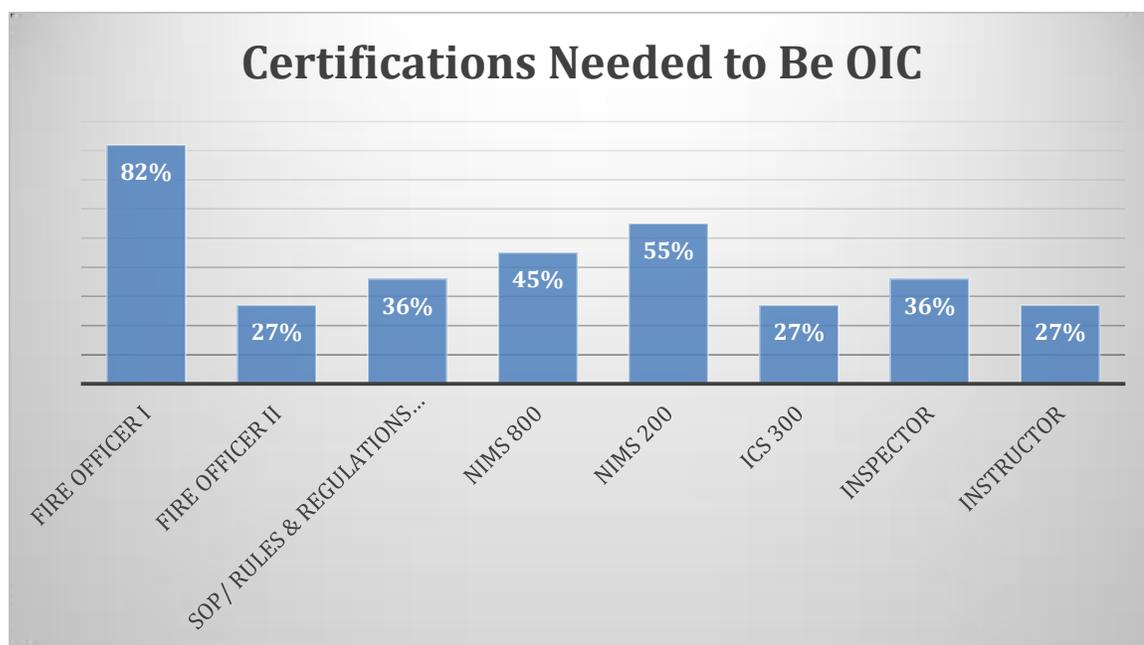
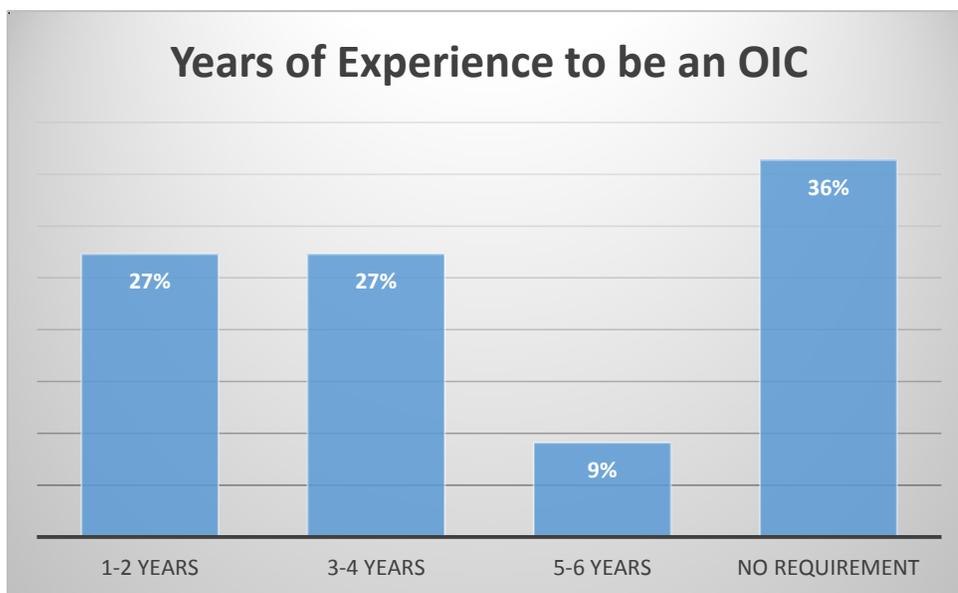
**Figure 2**

Figure 3 displays the results of the external survey regarding the minimum years of service required to be eligible to serve as an OIC.



**Figure 3**

Twenty-six percent of respondents required 1-2 years of experience, the same percentage required 3-4 years. Nine percent required 5-6 years and 36 percent had no requirements.

Another important aspect that the research has revealed is the importance of Fire Officer I to serve as a requirement for an OIC. Fire Officer I is the one certification that consistently ranks highest in this survey, various research projects conducted in the State of Ohio and the national Fire Academy.

An internal survey was sent to all full-time firefighters that could serve as OIC for MIHJFD. The survey was designed to see what qualifications firefighters have in order to serve

as OICs. This internal survey was also intended to capture the perceptions of the department regarding the current OIC selection process for MIHJFD. The survey can be found on Appendix 2.

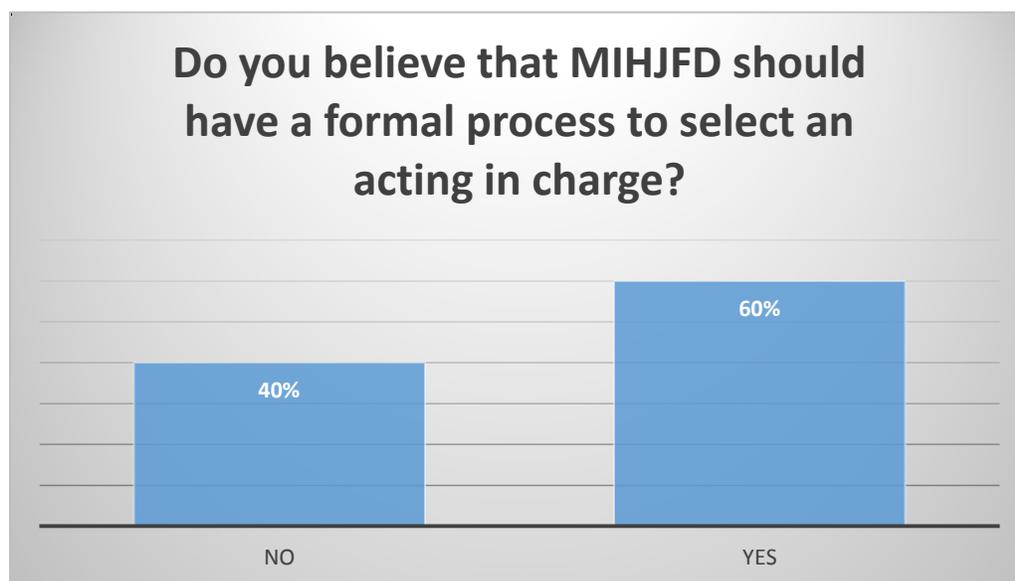
MIHJFD personnel were asked about the certifications they possess to compare their qualifications with those of the other departments included in the external survey.



**Figure 4**

Sixty percent of the respondents had Fire Officer I, 10 percent had Fire Officer II, 80 percent have taken Incident Command classes, 30 percent had some leadership training, 60 percent have taken classes in building construction and fire behavior, and 20 percent were instructors.

The specific question was asked the firefighter of the MIHJFD that are eligible to act as OIC: Do you believe that MIHJFD should have a formal process to select an acting in charge?



**Figure 5**

Sixty percent of the respondents believed that MIHJFD needs to have a formal process to select an OIC. This question was followed by the opportunity to elaborate as to why they answered this way. Some of the reasons given in support of having a formal selection process were:

*“This is vital to the safety of not only the personnel within the district, but also the citizens to who [SIC] we respond.”*

*“Assumption is often the current process; just like assumptions on fire ground ops this method is dangerous.”*

*“To prevent a senior firefighter that may not be qualified for AIC. If he or she is prepared they should have no problem scoring well on test.”*

*“Assist is establishing operational and administrative consistency and minimum standards.”*

*“With our staffing levels, especially when we switch back to running out of two stations, there will be a lot of times that a full-time firefighter/paramedic is riding in charge. Most of the time this person will be riding seat on Quint 65 which is our busiest mutual aid apparatus for fires. Even if there isn't a process, I think there should at least be formal training required in order to ride in charge/above grade.”*

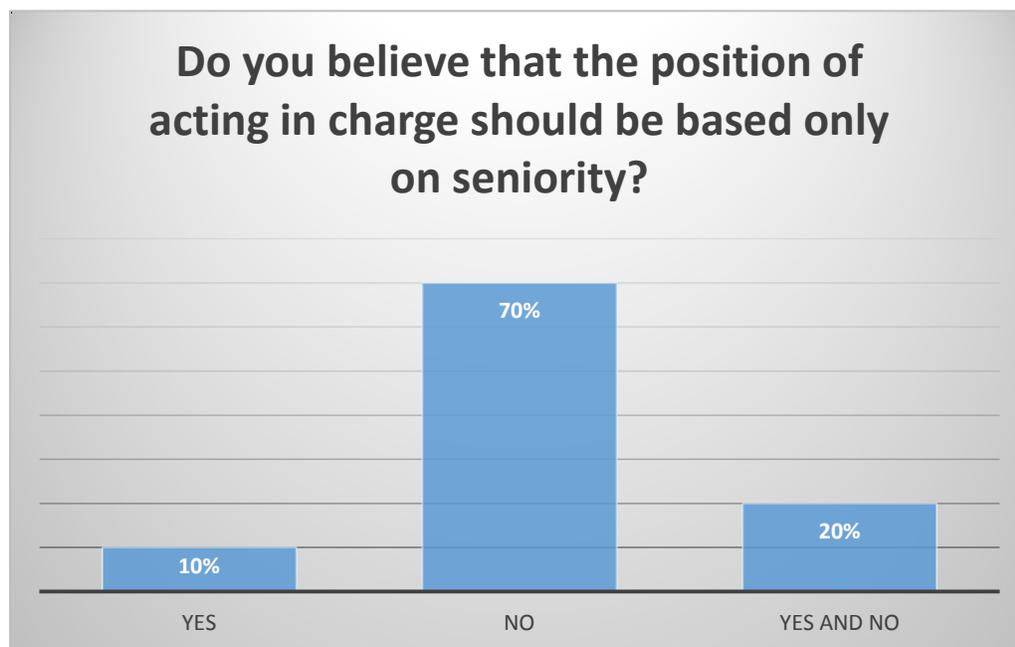
The other 40% of respondents who felt that a process was not needed stated:

*“Acting in Charge is important, not saying that it's not. I believe the shift LT can tell on a day-to-day basis who is ready for the position. Informal training on firehouse entries and expectations should be enough.”*

*“Anyone with at least 5 years with MIHJFD should know what the AIC does every shift”*

The internal survey also examined the respondents' opinion of the role of seniority on the

OIC position.



**Figure 5**

Ten percent believed that the position should be based on seniority only, 20 percent responded yes and no, and 70 percent responded that they didn't think seniority should be the only qualification for the position of OIC.

The third question asked in this research was:

*What is an effective promotional process to select an OIC?*

A questionnaire was sent to Captain Daniel Ripley from the Lincoln Fire & Rescue Department (LFR) in Lincoln, Nebraska. In his response to the questionnaire, Captain Ripley described how labor management and the fire administration were able to collaborate and create a promotional process together. He explained, "We go over everything together, from individual questions to assessment center benchmarks." LFR uses the term "acting out of grade" instead of

acting in charge. LFR has used their current process for at least ten years. Their process is change-based on management policy and union contract. LFR establishes a promotional list for company officer, riding out of grade is created on rank order from the test results. The candidates for acting out of grade must have been in the department for at least six years. Acting out of grade officers also must have Fire Instructor I, Fire Officer I and Fire Officer II certifications.

In order to better prepare their firefighters, Lincoln Fire & Rescue Department has created a task book for the company officer. This task book acts as a check list that firefighters must complete prior to testing for the position.

For employees hired after 2013, LFR also requires satisfactory completion of the following courses from an accredited postsecondary institution: English Composition I, Building Construction for Fire Protection, Fire Protection Systems and Structural Firefighting Strategies and Tactics. (Lincoln Fire & Rescue, Promotional Process to Fire Captain, 2016) The promotional process for LFR includes a 100 question multiple choice exam. The top 20 scores move to an assessment center. Candidates also have the potential to receive seniority points up to nine percent added to the end of the process.

Another questionnaire was sent to Division Chief Josh Stefancic of the Largo Fire Rescue (LFR) in Largo, Florida and member of the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA). Chief Stefancic explains that Largo Fire Rescue utilizes an acting lieutenant and acting district chief programs. These two programs have been in place for more than seven years. To serve as acting lieutenant, firefighters must have at least five years in the department, be an engine driver / operator and be a State of Florida Fire Officer II. Candidates also must attend an

acting lieutenant class. This class is maintained by the training division and contains a written exam. After completing the class, each candidate must ride-up with a lieutenant for six shifts.

## DISCUSSION

This research was done to evaluate the current procedures for selecting and preparing firefighters for the position of OIC in MIHJFD. The requirements for the position of lieutenant at MIHJFD are defined in the Duties of Lieutenant document. The OIC for MIHJFD acts in the lieutenant position when the company officer is off. The OIC must cover the position without any of the training and qualifications of the officer who is being replaced. When the only qualification the department has is years of service, it is very difficult to prepare firefighters to serve in the role of OIC. In order to define what qualifications MIHJFD should require of the OICs, the researcher studied the requirements of company officers in other departments. The researcher also looked at the recommendations found in multiple publications utilized in this research.

NFPA 1021 functions as a guide for many officer development books. NFPA 1021 recommends that a company officer should have the following qualifications:

- Fire Fighter II
- Fire Instructor I

As well as job performance requirements which include:

- General Knowledge
- Human Resource Management
- Community and Government Relations
- Administration
- Inspection and Investigations

- Emergency Service Delivery
- Health and Safety

NFPA 1021 does not mention the position of OIC or any similar positions. Fire related books and manuals make references to fire officers but there are few mentions of the acting in charge position. Although the OIC position is not specifically mentioned, one can assume that the standard refers to the position of supervisor or the person in charge. The fire officer can be a captain, a lieutenant, and in some cases a firefighter functioning as an OIC. It can be interpreted that the qualifications are for the position of anyone in charge, and not specific to the rank. The majority of published papers that addressed the OIC were found in programs like Ohio Fire Executive and the National Fire Academy.

The line of duty death reports in Ohio and Georgia demonstrate the importance of having acting officers who have the proper training and preparation to serve in replacement of company officers. In the Georgia LODD report recommendation #9 explains:

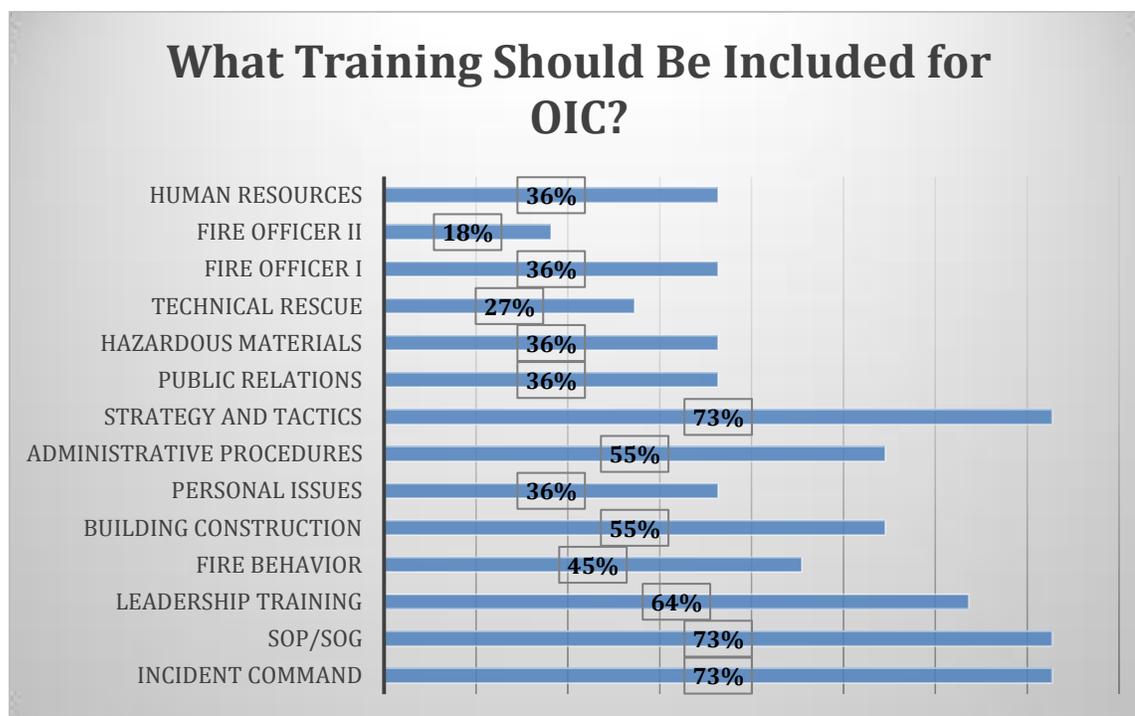
*“Recommendation #9: Fire departments should ensure that fire fighters serving as acting officers are adequately trained.*

*Discussion: The engine company officer that was supervising the victim was not a full-time officer but instead an acting officer. Many departments utilize acting officers as staffing needs arise, but a basic responsibility the department must accept is to adequately prepare these acting officers and provide effective company officer training in subjects such as: size-up, accountability, communications, hazard recognition, and many other supervisory issues. Using*

*fire fighters as acting company officers is something that many departments must do, but effective and competent training for those members should be required by the department.”*

These recommendations from the LODD are in line with the research results on the importance of preparing the OIC in knowledge, skills and abilities.

The results returned in the external survey were disappointing but they still show a small sample of the fire departments in the southeast area of Cincinnati. Out of the 11 departments that utilized the acting in charge, 36 percent did not have a requirement for years of service and 27 percent required one to two years of service. The remaining 36 percent required three years or more. Another significant result in the external survey was that 82 percent of the departments required Fire Officer I. In the external survey, the question was asked about what training should be included for an OIC.



**Figure 6**

The highest responses point to Standard Operating Procedures, Incident Command and Strategy and Tactics. This shows that the departments surveyed that use the OIC position have a stronger focus to emergency operations than other aspects like leadership or human resources.

In order to understand the opinions of the full-time members of MIHJFD, an internal survey was sent to 11 members who were eligible to be OIC. Ten out of eleven firefighters responded to the survey. The results from the internal survey showed that six out of ten participants believed that MIHJFD should have a formal process to select an OIC. One respondent explain “*Any formal process right or wrong is better than assumptions*”

Within the firefighters that responded to the survey, 60 percent felt that they had not received the proper training to act as an OIC. At the same time, 90 percent feel that they are comfortable being in the position of OIC.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research was to guide MIHJFD with their selection and preparation of the position of Officer in Charge. The researcher looked at literature related to officer development, national standards, as well as multiple research papers from The National Academy and The Ohio Fire Executive programs. Surveys were sent to internal personnel and to fire departments in the surrounding areas of MIHJFD.

The researcher believes that the following recommendations would help MIHJFD with the development of OICs and consequently company officers.

1. In coordination with labor and management, MIHJFD should formalize a promotional process for the position of OIC. This process should be a simpler version of the Fire Service Assessment Center testing that is completed for the lieutenants and should include the following elements:
  - a. Standard Operation Procedures from all three manuals of MIHJFD.
  - b. Questions from the Southwest Ohio EMS protocol.
  - c. An in-basket exercise
  - d. A fire incident simulation
2. In order to compensate and motivate the OIC, MIHJFD should, in agreement between labor and management, increase the OIC's pay rate two additional dollars per hour on a permanent basis. This means even when the company officer is present, the OIC will still earn an additional two dollars per hour, thus

increasing the salaries for the OICs. This will have an economic impact on the budget of MIHJFD of approximately \$24,528 per year.

3. MIHJFD should implement a mentoring program. This program should be developed by a committee that will include all three lieutenants, both captains with the final approval of the fire chief.
4. MIHJFD should provide funding to provide certifications for the full-time personnel. These certifications should include:
  - a. Fire and EMS Instructor
  - b. Fire Officer I
  - c. Fire Officer II
  - d. Technical rescue certifications
5. The yearly training for the MIHJFD should include:
  - a. Leadership
  - b. Incident management
  - c. SOP review
  - d. Narrative quality assurance

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## APPENDIX 1 – EXTERNAL SURVEY

### OFE External Survey

Hello. My name is Francisco Caceres and I'm a lieutenant with the Madeira and Indian Hill Joint Fire district. I'm also a student with the Ohio Fire Executive program. We are trying to develop a program to better prepare Acting in Charge personnel. I'm currently conducting a survey in preparation for a research paper on this topic for the Ohio Fire Executive class, and would like to request your help. If you could answer these questions in this online survey, I would greatly appreciate it. If you are not the correct person in your department to answer these, feel free forward this e-mail to the appropriate person. Your response to this brief survey will be very helpful for our research. Thank you very much in advance for your help.

**1. What is your rank?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Firefighter  
 Lieutenant  
 Captain  
 Chief Officer

**2. What is the number of personnel in your department ?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. How many stations does your department have?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- 1  
 2  
 3  
 4  
 5+

**4. What certifications your company officers need to obtain as a pre-requisite prior to testing for promotion? Check all that apply.**

*Check all that apply.*

- Fire Officer I  
 Fire Officer II  
 SOP/ Rules & Regulations Test  
 NIMS 800  
 NIMS 200  
 ICS 300  
 Inspector  
 Instructor  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. **Does your department utilize "Acting in Charge" role?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No

6. **Does your department provide training to prepare and promote firefighters to the position of Acting in Charge?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No

7. **How many years of experience does your department require to be eligible for the Lieutenant position?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- No requirement  
 1-2 years  
 3-4 years  
 5-6 years  
 6-10 years

8. **How many years of experience does your department require to be eligible for the acting in charge position?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- No requirement  
 1-2 years  
 3-4 years  
 5-6 years  
 6-10 years

9. **If you provide training for firefighters Acting in Charge, is the training:**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Mandatory  
 Voluntary  
 Not Applicable

10. **What certifications must an Acting in Charge firefighter need to function in that role? Check all that apply.**

*Check all that apply.*

- Fire Officer I
- Fire Officer II
- SOP/ Rules & Regulations Test
- NIMS 800
- NIMS 200
- ICS 300
- Inspector
- Instructor
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

11. **What certifications must an Acting in Charge firefighter need to obtain or need as a pre-requisite prior to testing for promotion? Check all that apply.**

*Check all that apply.*

- Fire Officer I
- Fire Officer II
- SOP/ Rules & Regulations Test
- NIMS 800
- NIMS 200
- ICS 300
- Inspector
- Instructor
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. If your department has a training program for firefighters Acting in Charge. What is included in your department's training program?**

*Check all that apply.*

- Incident Command
- SOP/SOG
- Leadership Training
- Fire Behavior
- Building Construction
- Personnel issues
- Administrative procedures
- Strategy and tactics Public
- Relations Hazardous
- Materials Technical rescue
- Fire Officer I
- Fire Officer II
- Human Resources Other:
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_

**13. In your opinion, what do you think should be included in a training program for firefighters Acting in Charge?**

*Check all that apply.*

- Incident Command
- SOP/SOG
- Leadership Training
- Fire Behavior
- Building Construction
- Personnel issues
- Administrative procedures
- Strategy and tactics Public
- Relations Hazardous
- Materials Technical rescue
- Fire Officer I
- Fire Officer II
- Human Resources Other:
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_

14. **Do you feel that preparing firefighters for the Acting in Charge role is important for your fire department:**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. **Does your department have a budget dedicated to staff development?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

16. **If you answered yes. what is your budget for Staff development?**

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## APPENDIX 2 – INTERNAL SURVEY

### OFE Internal Survey

Hello. I'm currently conducting an anonymous survey. We are trying to develop a program to better prepare Acting in Charge personnel. in preparation for a research paper on this topic for the Ohio Fire Executive class, and would like to request your help. If you could answer these questions in this online survey, I would greatly appreciate it. Your response to this brief survey will be very helpful for our research. Thank you very much in advance for your help.

1. **Do you feel that you are prepared to assume the role of acting in charge?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

2. **Do you feel that you have received the proper training to be an acting in charge?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

3. **Are you comfortable to be in the position of acting in charge?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

4. **If MIHJFD provided more training to prepare you for the position of acting in charge, would you take advantage of the opportunity?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

5. **If no, why?**

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6. Which of this certifications or classes have you taken? Check all that apply.

*Check all that apply.*

- Fire Officer I
- Fire Officer II
- Incident Command
- SOP/SOG
- Leadership Training
- Fire Behavior
- Building Construction
- Instructor
- Personnel issues
- Administrative procedures
- Strategy and tactics
- Public Relations
- Hazardous Materials
- Technical rescue
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. How many years of experience does your department require to be eligible for the Lieutenant position?

*Mark only one oval.*

- No requirement
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5-6 years
- 6-10 years

**8. Which of this certifications or classes would you like to take?**

*Check all that apply.*

- Incident Command
- SOP/SOG
- Leadership Training
- Fire Behavior
- Building Construction
- Personnel issues
- Administrative procedures
- Strategy and tactics
- Public Relations
- Hazardous Materials
- Technical rescue
- Fire Officer I
- Fire Officer II

**9. Do you believe that MIHJFD should have a formal process to select an acting in charge?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

**10. Why? or why not?**

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**11. If you answer yes to number 8; What do you think should be included in this process?**

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**12. Do you believe that the position of acting in charge should be based only on seniority?**

*Check all that apply.*

- Yes
- No

13. Why? or why not?

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**APPENDIX 3 – TITLE OF APPENDIX**

Insert your content...