

# ***PA FIRE POLICE***

## ***Establishing a Guide for Developing Effective Operating Procedures***

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This will be a two-part article to establish a guide for developing effective operating procedures for fire companies and, in the second article, writing specifically for fire police units.

Some fire departments include fire police in their SOP document, while others permit the fire police unit to develop their own SOPs. Either way, it is important that fire departments have SOPs for all members of the organization. These articles will attempt to provide insights on why SOPs are necessary and also provide some direction on what to include and how to prepare them.

First thing to explore is what to call the document. There are a variety of operational requirements and national standards, opinions and even titles given to them such as SOPs, SOGs, General Orders, Department Orders, or Executive Orders

to name a few. The courts are not concerned about the title given to the document as much as they are the factors such as Systems in place to develop and maintain SOPs/SOGs, Compatibility with regulatory requirements and National Standards, Consideration of unique departmental needs, Adequacy of training and demonstration of competence, and procedures used to monitor performance and ensure compliance.

Also, keep in mind that writing the document is more important than what you call it. Mandatory terms such as "Shall" "Will" "Must" may satisfy your desire to make the document look official, but these words indicate "there can be no deviation since it is a mandatory requirement". There is a case precedent to

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support this; the court ruled that when the word “Will” was used, there can be no deviation.

According to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), a standard operating procedure is “an organizational directive that establishes a standard course of action”. In other words, SOPs are written guidelines that explain what is expected and required of fire service personnel in performing their job. A comprehensive set of SOPs defines in significant detail how the department intends to operate.

SOPs should not be confused with pre-incident plans or pre-plans, which describe the strategies for emergency response at a specific facility. Pre-plans allow a department to gather information on designated locations, identify potential hazards, and access site-specific factors. SOPs on the other hand are more generic in nature. They address general functions such as equipment and apparatus placement, and tactical operations, and they are applicable to all emergency incidents, or at least to a specific category or type of emergency situation.

SOPs are not intended to provide step-by-step instructions for doing the job. The knowledge and skills that personnel need to perform are addressed in training programs. SOPs, conversely, describe related considerations. Safety, Equipment maintenance, Duties and rights of personnel, Command structures, Coordination with other organizations, Reporting requirements, etc. Stated differently, SOPs don’t describe how to do the job, they describe the department’s rules for doing the job.

Once the SOPs have been developed, there are three things that need to be accomplished:

1. All members must have the entire document explained to them and questions answered.
2. Each member should receive a copy of the document. (Good procedure is to have member sign and date when they received their copy).
3. Once each year members must receive a review of the document.

The information provided in this article serves as a prelude to next month’s article where we will provide insights into Fire Police Standard Operating Procedures and will also provide a generic example of SOPs for fire police.

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