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From: MEFIRE

Date: June 12, 2009

Re: MFTE Concerns and Resolves

With the continued issues and concerns plaguing Maine Fire Training and Education (MFTE), we would like to offer input into what we see, hear and believe to be concerns affecting MFTE. Over the last few years these concerns have grown, some becoming more important, others becoming less important, but never the less still a concern. These concerns are not only from individuals willing to bring them forward openly, but from those who have shared concerns to others or through their respective groups. Some have been reported in documents and professional reports or surveys.

We have reviewed many documents that have been created over the past few years; some addressing instructor concerns and others concerning professional reports that were commissioned by SMCC/MFTE.

We believe that many at MFTE view these concerns as insignificant but upon evaluation these items have been and continue to plague the organization to the degree that MFTE is ineffective and is in many ways, barely functional. While some senior executive staff at SMCC look at MFTE as another program, they are incorrect; MFTE is more than a SMCC program, it is by Maine State Statute (Title 20-A chapter 319), the State's Fire Training Agency, assigned to the President of the Maine Community College system, who has assigned the Program to SMCC.

Administrators at MFTE can display data, reports and graphs, showing that MFTE is doing the best it has every done. This is true in some respects, in that MFTE is providing or assisting Fire Departments providing training to Maine's Fire Fighters with increased numbers. But there is ample support that much of this training, as well as its end testing procedures, is not the standards set by authorities. For example, Pro-Board standards, that MFTE is obliged to abide by.

Our major concerns are noted below and reflect many years of organizational breakdown and repeated requests that SMCC leadership address the issues. Of these concerns, some of the insignificant matters may indeed self resolve with proper leadership. We will attempt to identify the concern, list a number of effects these concerns have on MFTE and also offer possible resolves.

First and foremost,

1. Concern: A functional Director appointed to lead MFTE.

Effect: No effective leadership, direction, or strategic support for MFTE. This has been ongoing since 2005-06. We have had three interim directors and now an acting director since December 2008, which was to be re-evaluated in April 2009. With out this leadership there have been no valid goals or plans established for years.

Resolve: Provide a national search for a State Level, Fire Service Training and Education leader and manager to provide leadership and direction to MFTE.

2. Concern: Lack of Strategic planning, short, medium and long range plan development.

Effect: Gives MFTE no direction that the leadership can follow. The stakeholders and customers receive no guidance to training needs or assessments. This allows MFTE to appear to be floundering and going in too many directions.

Resolve: Develop and implement a short range plan, develop a medium range plan and organize a strategic long range committee to continually re-evaluate the Organization as, in-state training needs and national standards change.

3. Concern: The Advisory Committee needs to be addressed with regards to membership, attendance, by-laws, rules, governance power and their role.

Effect: The stakeholders are not being represented as intended. Advisory information can not be properly provided to the leadership of MFTE if members do not attend meetings. Advisory members can not advise MFTE leadership if they do not know their roles, rules or function with in their by-laws. This again leads to the break down in the leadership, reduces the lack of direction and makes it appear that MFTE is not listening to the stakeholders/customers needs.

Resolve: Review of the committee membership make up, review the rules, by-laws and inform both the leadership and committee members of their roles as advisors.

4. Concern: Lack of review of JT Hodges report.

Effect: This is a report of a program review commissioned by SMCC. There are 31 points of recommendation in the report. This report is from a third party from Virginia. Not all 31 points of recommendation can or should be implemented. However, any issues addressed should be formally reported out to the advisory committee, the stakeholders and customers that gave input to the review. Not communicating on this report supports previous and on-going concerns that MFTE/ SMCC does not listen to the customer and/or stakeholders.

Resolve: JT Hodges recommendations that were addressed should be reported out as to their progress. Those that could or were not addressed should be explained as to why.

5. Concern: Job descriptions.

Effect: MFTE employees have job descriptions, but they are not followed, work plans are not assigned, and no employee follow up, performance reviews, or documented evaluations are completed. With this inconsistency of job descriptions relative to performance and lack of work plans; assignments are self-chosen, work is left undone or efforts duplicated, staff communications are misdirected, all of which results in inefficiency for MFTE and a lack of service to the firefighters of Maine.

Resolve: A review, update and reissue of job descriptions. Implement timely work plans to ensure efficiencies and require annual job performance design and semi-annual review to document and guarantee staff accountability.

6. Concern: Policy Review and Update.

Effect: With a lack of effective policies and procedures, comes the lack of organization. Policies guide the leadership and employees so all work together consistently to accomplish the goal. Without up to date policies, confusion takes place, which leads to communications break down and loss of control. Effective policies need to be designed to guide and keep accountability within MFTE.

Resolve: Review of policies, both internal and external effecting MFTE, along with Federal rules and laws, state rules and laws, college rules and policies and those created by MFTE. Ensure MFTE is in compliance, employees are in compliance and those polices created by MFTE that are no longer useful are changed or removed.

7. Concern: Lack of Communications

Effect: With the lack of effective communications; systems break down. Internal customers do not know what is happening to the organization. Work assignments get missed, services do not get delivered. Externally, customers feel that very little is taking place. Concerns of issues are brought forward but without adequate feedback, communications breakdown and our customers conclude that MFTE is not listening.

Resolve: Actively communicate to MFTE employees, customers and stakeholders around the state. These communications must include feedback to questions and concerns. Sometimes we don't like the question, concern or complaint but the communication cycle must still be completed.

8. Concern: Work with the Fire Protection Services Commission on regional training facilities.

Effect: The "Commission" recently attempted legislation to dissolve MFTE for what we see is the lack and unwillingness of MFTE to work on development of an All-Hazards Academy and regional training facilities.

Resolve: Establish functional knowledge concerning current training facilities and actively work with the "Commission" using training facilities grants and creating MOU's with regional facilities to progress in the direction of the goals of the Commission.

Conclusion:

These are our 8 major and broad based concerns. There are many sub-items which we can list as concerns under each base item. We believe that there are too many individual concerns to document at this time, but if we are given a chance to help with this process we can document these to help further define and resolve the concerns.

We look forward to working with SMCC/MFTE in a capacity that will actively and progressively develop positive change to our States Fire Training agency.

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