

Union: Study Shows Yonkers Firefighters At Disadvantage In High-Rise Blaze

by Matt Bultman | Police & Fire | 15 hours ago | Comments (2)



A new federal study shows Yonkers Fire Department may be at a disadvantage in high-rise fires, according to the union chief. Photo Credit: *File*

YONKERS, N.Y. – A new study shows Yonkers firefighters may be ill-equipped to handle blazes in high-rise buildings, according to union leaders.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology, a branch of the U.S. Department of Commerce, issued a report Wednesday which found larger crews (six or more firefighters) are better able to fight fires than are smaller crews (three firefighters) in buildings seven stories or taller.

That's important, firefighters union leader Barry McGoey said, as the Yonkers Fire Department typically maintains crew sizes of four firefighters. These teams are essentially reduced to three during a fire as the driver typically stays outside the building, making water connections and performing other tasks, he said.

And in a city like Yonkers, which has dozens of high-rise buildings and even more along the waterfront in the planning stages, having too few firefighters on a truck can have devastating consequences, McGoey said.

"Everybody knows a bigger fire is more dangerous," he said in a statement. "This new study shows that current crew sizes in Yonkers put firefighters at a disadvantage in a high-rise fire, which will allow fires to get bigger and more dangerous to building occupants and fire personnel simply because we don't have enough firefighters on each rig."

In the study, conducted on a vacant, 13-story office building in Crystal City, Virginia, NIST said it found on average, a crew of six firefighters was able to rescue trapped victims and extinguish a high-rise fire nearly twice as fast as a three-person crew.

That's because it takes smaller crews longer to carry out essential tasks than it does crews with more firefighters, the report stated.

And simply sending more trucks to account for smaller crew sizes isn't enough, the report said. Even when additional trucks were sent, it still took firefighters more time to conduct search and rescue operations and get water on the fire, the report said.

Ultimately, that means the fire grows larger and more lives are put at risk, it said.

“Another problem with this “just send more trucks” strategy is that doing so will strip the rest of the city of any fire protection until mutual aid can be called in from neighboring towns or additional firefighters can be called in from home,” McGoey added.

Fire Commissioner Robert Sweeney said Wednesday the fire department would review NIST’s findings as well as the department’s procedures for high rise fires.

“The Yonkers Fire Department continuously reassesses our resources and equipment necessary to provide the highest level of protection to the residents of Yonkers,” he said.

Sweeney noted that the department had also recently bought two high-rise nozzles which are carried daily by a pair of engine companies.

“This piece of equipment gives the Incident Commander on scene another option to extinguish a high rise fire,” he said.