Report Calls for New Fire Service Data System

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 A report published by the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), National Fire Service Data Summit Proceedings, summarizes the findings of a two-day conference dedicated to identifying the data needs of the fire service that was conducted earlier this year. Dan Greensweig, Assistant Administrator, League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust, attended the meeting on behalf of the National League of Cities. The conference was funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as part of a multi-year study on firefighter safety and deployment.

The goal of the meeting was to provide a roadmap to a future where the fire service has the data it needs to support "science-based decision making." The summit report concludes that a major research project is needed to develop a national fire service data collection and reporting system to determine the effectiveness of decisions related to staffing levels, response time frames, training needs, and prevention programs.

While the stated objectives of the project are to reduce firefighter injuries and deaths, reduce civilian deaths, and reduce property loss, it is also recognized that better data is critical in an era of fiscal austerity and competition for local government resources.

The development of the proposed data collection and reporting system will be a long and costly process involving the identification of data elements and desired outcomes, the development of metrics (such as time to water on fire), standard reports, and standard definitions. Then there is the need to explore systems and technologies, as well as ways to import and export data to the national database.

During the meeting, NLC raised questions about the availability of federal funding for the project and expressed the concern that participation in the new data system could eventually become a new federal mandate. Other participants at the meeting were mainly representative of the fire service, federal govern- ment, and the research community. The report is a joint effort between NIST, the Commission on Fire Accreditation, International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, the Urban Institute, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. To view the report, click here.

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