

## **Who Has Determined the Culture of Your Fire Department?**

**By David Schliek, Chairman**

We have all heard of the culture that influences our fire department. What causes or determines that culture? The traditions that have been adopted or evolved came from occurrences experienced by someone. But who? I would say YOU!

In viewing a recent post on a social networking site, the following was posted with regard to the Target Corporation:

*At Target, we have a vision: to become the best – the best culture and brand, the best place for growth and the company with the best reputation. It takes the best to become the best, and we are committed to building a team that does the right thing for our guests, shareholders, team members and communities.*

If you took the word *Target* out of the vision, and inserted the name of your fire department, would the statement be true? If I were to guess, I would say yes. Let's just take a look at the part of the vision that talks about "*it takes the best to become the best*". How does your department help fire fighters become the best? Providing training that meets the needs of the scope of service you provide to your community is one way. The Fire Safety Account dollars administered through the Minnesota Board of Fire Fighter Training and Education (MBFTE) for the purpose of supplementing training budgets for fire departments across Minnesota has done a very good job in helping with this effort.

One of the ways we can view this is to consider the numbers of certification exams and participants. In fact, I would share that from January 1 thru June 30 there were 292 certification exams scheduled, and from July 1 thru December 31 there are another 85 on the docket. Successful completion of the certification examination process by June 30 stood at over 2900 individuals. That number compares to about 2100 during the entire year of 2012. By years end, the numbers of scheduled exams will top 400 and the number of fire fighters earning varying levels of certification will exceed 3000. Another fact I have shared numerous times, but always like to report is that the numbers of successful completions is increasing dramatically. Failure rates are down to just over 10%. A far cry from a year ago. Keep up the good work!

Has the fire fighter certification process become part of the culture of your fire department? It has for many organizations in all parts of Minnesota. Certification testing has become a common, if not an expected occurrence at the conclusion of training courses. Not only do departments use the certification process for new fire fighters, promotions are often based on continuing or higher levels of certification. If licensure is required in your department, then an IFSAC certification at the Fire Fighter II level is required. As attrition builds the next generation of fire fighters, certification looks to be a very popular means of molding fire fighters in becoming "the best".

I'll bet you have been a part of some or many of these efforts to develop "the best" skills and fire fighters needed to respond in an exemplary manner. In doing so, you are very much a part of determining your department's culture. You are the one that is key in developing a culture that new fire

fighters will work within. Congratulations for stepping up to the plate, and taking this responsibility seriously.