

# SECTION 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Center for Public Safety Management, LLC (CPSM) was retained by the City of Billings to conduct an Operational and Administrative Analysis for its fire department, including a detailed review of department operations, its interaction with AMR, workload, staffing, fire stations, fire apparatus, and deployment practices. This analysis includes a thorough review of the organization structure, training, performance measures, prevention activities, and its service responsibilities in the Billings Urban Fire Service Area (BUFSA). Specifically, CPSM was tasked with providing recommendations and alternatives regarding fire department operations, staffing levels, and alternative modes of operation for current service demand and in terms of options that can best position the department to respond to the community's anticipated growth.

CPSM analyzed performance data provided by the Billings Fire Department (BFD) and also conducted a firsthand examination of the department's operations. Fire departments tend to deploy resources utilizing traditional approaches, which are rarely reviewed. To begin the review, project staff asked for certain documents, data, and information. The project staff used this information/data to familiarize themselves with the department's structure, assets, and operations. The provided information was supplemented with information collected during an on-site visit to observe the performance of the department and to compare that performance to national benchmarks. CPSM will typically utilize benchmarks that have been developed by organizations such as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), Center for Public Safety Excellence, Inc. (CPSE), the ICMA Center for Performance Measurement, as well as others.

Project staff conducted a site visit on October 14–16, 2020, for the purpose of observing fire department and agency-connected support operations, interviewing key department staff, and reviewing preliminary data and information. Telephone conference calls as well as email exchanges were conducted between CPSM project management staff, the city, and the fire department so that CPSM staff could affirm the project scope, and elicit further discussion regarding this analysis.

The Billings Fire Department (BFD) is a highly skilled and progressive organization that is making exceptional progress in dealing with a very significant and growing workload. The personnel with whom CPSM interacted are truly interested in serving the city to the best of their abilities and demonstrated a unified goal of achieving excellence in service delivery. As service demands increase and the department is faced with providing expanded services, it is essential that the organization continue its strategic planning efforts, organizational team building, performance measurement, and goal setting. The challenges in Billings are not unique nor are they insurmountable. CPSM will provide a series of observations and recommendations that we believe will enable the BFD to become **more efficient** and **smarter** in the management of its emergency and nonemergency responsibilities.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Billings Fire Department provides a range of excellent services to its citizens, local businesses, the university, and visitors to the area. The department is well-respected in the community and by city leadership. For an organization of the caliber of the BFD, the recommendations provided in our analysis are minor in comparison to the department's performance and do not denote major flaws in its day-to-day operations or overall efficiencies. In an organization such as the Billings Fire Department, which is achieving a high level of performance, the real challenge becomes the drive to maintain—in its line personnel and managerial staff—the continued pursuit of excellence and ongoing improvement.

**Thirty-four** recommendations are listed below and are also found in applicable sections within this report. The recommendations are based on best practices derived from the NFPA, CPSM, ICMA, the U.S. Fire Administration, the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

These recommendations are listed in the order in which they appear in the report.

1. In future negotiations with the IAFF, the city should pursue a reduction in the number of Kelly Days awarded to each employee and a corresponding increase in the number of hours in the firefighter workweek. (See discussion on p. 9.)
2. The Billings Fire Department should consider the use of two-person EMS squad units to handle EMS and non-emergency service calls in the city's busiest service districts. (See discussion on pp. 9-11.)
3. The Billings Fire Department should consider the implementation of a *Dynamic Staffing* policy that utilizes peak-period deployment during high service demand periods. (See discussion on pp. 11-12.)
4. Billings should revise its interpretation of *time worked* when considering overtime eligibility for fire personnel and exclude any leave time taken as hours worked when determining overtime eligibility. (See discussion on p. 12.)
5. BFD should consider the expansion of program management duties for field personnel and utilize these assignments to enhance career development and subsequently consider successful fulfillment of these duties as a factor in the promotional process. (See discussion on pp. 14-16.)
6. The City of Billings should negotiate changes to the promotional requirements for Fire Equipment Operator (Engineer) and Fire Captain which expand the use of objective testing and competitive skills assessments and reduce the dependence of seniority in making appointments. (See discussion on p. 16.)
7. BFD should expand the training requirements, certifications, and college education prerequisites for the Fire Equipment Operator (Engineer), Fire Captain, and Battalion Chief promotional processes. (See discussion on pp. 16-17.)
8. The City of Billings should negotiate a reduction in the 15-year time-in-grade requirement for eligibility to enter the Battalion Chief promotional process. (See discussion on p. 17.)
9. BFD should redefine the purpose of employee performance reviews and utilize these appraisals as a key component when considering employee promotions, step increases, and merit reviews. (See discussion on pp. 17-18.)
10. The City of Billings should conduct periodic audits of the CrewSense™ payroll and scheduling process utilized by the Fire Department. (See discussion on p. 18.)

11. The Billings Fire Department should institute a Quality Assurance-Quality Improvement (QA/QI) review process for its fire incident reporting. (See discussion on p. 18.)
12. The city should undertake a comprehensive fire station capital improvements program and earmark upwards of \$3 million from the recent CARES Act to supplement the funding available for repairs and renovations to existing facilities. (See discussion on pp. 19-22.)
13. The city should work with AMR to implement a common radio frequency that is utilized by ambulance and fire first responders on all EMS calls. (See discussion on pp. 27.)
14. The Billings Fire Department should conduct a formal fire risk assessment that concentrates on the city's downtown, strip commercial establishments, big-box occupancies, high-rise structures, and industrial, processing, and institutional properties. (See discussion on pp. 29-32.)
15. Billings should consider working toward CPSE Fire Accreditation in the future. (See discussion on pp. 36-37.)
16. The BFD should consider hiring seasonal fuel crews who can provide fuel management and wildfire mitigation efforts in the community. (See discussion on pp. 47-49.)
17. BFD should develop an integrated risk management plan that focuses on structure fires in the areas of the community that demonstrate the highest risk of occurrence. (See discussion on pp. 49-51.)
18. The City of Billings should move to an Ambulance Provider Services Agreement with AMR and which specifies the terms and conditions for providing these services to the city. (See discussion on p. X.)
19. BFD should evaluate its efforts to maintain ALS first response capabilities with its primary response units. (See discussion on pp. 51-52.)
20. BFD should work with the 911 Dispatch Center to implement response protocols that alter the BFD response mode when calls are determined to be minor or non-emergency. (See discussion on pp. 54-55.)
21. BFD should work with AMR, the 911 Dispatch Center, area hospitals, and social service providers to develop a Billings FD-Mobile Integrated Health/Community Paramedicine program. (See discussion on pp. 55-56.)
22. BFD should implement a series of performance measures that enable ongoing review of service outcomes. The process of developing these measures should utilize input from BFD members, the Fire Union, the community, the City Council, and City Administration. (See discussion on pp. 79-82.)
23. The City of Billings should increase its fees for fire plans review, inspection, and permitting in order to recover the full cost of providing these services in the community. (See discussion on p. 84.)
24. The City of Billings should lobby the Montana Building Codes Council to reinstate the International Residential Code (IRC) requirements for automatic fire sprinklers in newly constructed single- and two-family residential structures. (See discussion on pp. 84-85.)
25. Billings should consider adopting a Wildland Urban Interface Code for its service area. (See discussion on pp. 85-86.)
26. BFD should restructure the format of its 12-week recruit firefighter training academy and include both Firefighter 1 & 2 as part of this curriculum. (See discussion on p. 89.)
27. The Billings Fire Department should institute written and practical skills testing as part of the department's comprehensive fire training program. (See discussion on p. 90.)

28. BFD should institute an annual physical fitness evaluation process for all emergency response personnel, including chief officers. (See discussion on p. 90.)
29. BFD should institute annual medical physicals in accordance with NFPA 1582 for all emergency response personnel, including chief officers. (See discussion on p. 91.)
30. BFD should institute an Employee Safety and Injury Avoidance Program aimed reducing the number of line-of-duty injuries and lost time. (See discussion on pp. 91-92.)
31. The City of Billings should initiate an effort with the City of Laurel, the Town of Broadview, and Yellowstone County to establish an Emergency Management Leadership Team to support planning and operational assignments in the joint County-Municipal Emergency Management process. (See discussion on pp. 92-93.)
32. The City of Billings should designate a city Emergency Manager from a key department (Police, Fire, or City Administrator's Office) who would be responsible for implementing the city's emergency management planning and operational efforts in cooperation with Yellowstone County. (See discussion on p. 93-94.)
33. The City of Billings should initiate an effort in which every city department develops and exercises a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). (See discussion on p. 94.)
34. The City of Billings and Yellowstone County should conduct an operational and architectural review of the Emergency Operations Center facility and make immediate plans to either initiate a comprehensive renovation of the facility or begin an effort to relocate the Joint County-City EOC to a more functional facility. (See discussion on p. 94.)