

City of Albany, OR

Performance Indicators

- **Customer satisfaction among those having contact with the fire department within the past 12 months**
- **Customer satisfaction among those having contact with the emergency medical services (EMS) within the past 12 months**

For FY 2006, the city of Albany reported that among customers having contact with the fire department, 97 percent rated the quality of contact as excellent. The mean and median values for all jurisdictions reporting were 71 percent and 78 percent, respectively.

That same year, among customers having contact with the EMS service, 96 percent rated the quality of contact as excellent. The mean and median values for all jurisdictions reporting were 82 percent and 89 percent, respectively.

Employees provide fire suppression, medical aid—and other assistance

When asked how the city achieved such high satisfaction ratings for its fire and EMS services, Albany's fire chief attributed much of this success to employees' drive to meet not only customers' direct emergency fire and medical service needs, but also other needs that become apparent while they are responding to a call. The chief noted that all fire and EMS staff are empowered and encouraged to assist customers directly or by referral in meeting needs for food, shelter, home repair, and other services. Moreover, employees have responded by doing such things as purchasing and delivering groceries to a needy family, performing yard work for an ill resident, replacing doors and windows damaged while gaining emergency access to residences, arranging and funding hotel accommodations for fire victims, and much more.

Staff state that customer service is not simply talked about at the Albany Fire Department; it is embedded in the culture.

City staff noted that Albany's emergency call volume makes the city one of the busiest fire departments in the state of Oregon (on a per capita basis), yet department employees continue to strive to meet customer needs well beyond those normally associated with an emergency response. Staff state that customer service is not simply talked about at the Albany Fire Department, it is embedded in the culture.

Community outreach is essential

Albany officials explained that the department also has an active community outreach program, which enables staff to interact—and build relationships—with citizens in settings beyond direct service provision, further promoting positive customer impressions.

- **Safety equipment provision**—Through its Community Assistance Fund and other public outreach programs, the fire department distributes

Case Profile

Population:

46,610

Square miles:

18

Median household income:

\$39,409

Form of government:

Council-manager



For additional information about the practices described in this case study, please contact Kevin Kreitman, fire chief, at 541/917-7701 or kevin.kreitman@cityofalbany.net.

safety equipment like bike helmets, smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, home escape ladders, residential key boxes, and grab bars for seniors and disabled residents—all free of charge. One very popular program allows residents to borrow water safety vests. Being home to a public pool, water park, and multiple waterways, water safety is a priority in the city. Since the vest loan program was introduced in 2006, there have been no drowning deaths in the district.

The department also provides residential sprinkler systems in Habitat for Humanity homes (in cooperation with fire sprinkler contractors), taxi rides when an ambulance is unwarranted, and college scholarships.

- **Emotional support**—Albany’s fire department has a chaplain who provides services to department members and members of the public. The chaplain also responds on emergency calls, providing comfort and assistance to victims and their families.
- **Neighborhood activities**—The department also hosts an annual treasure hunt when residents are invited into their local firehouses for family activities like fire engine rides, equipment demonstrations, and other family-friendly fire safety activities. The event helps to show firefighters and EMS personnel as neighbors and friends and promotes the development of positive relationships between department staff and residents.
- **Safety instruction**—The department also offers fire and personal safety classes to schools, child care centers, recreation centers, and other programs serving children and senior citizens, including two four-day summer day camps for children entering the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. During the camps, children are able to interact with firefighters and police officers informally and participate in various safety programs and activities in a fun, interactive environment.

Customer service training enhances outreach

In addition to its outreach efforts, the department requires in-depth customer service training for firefighters and EMS personnel to ensure that they provide the most compassionate care possible. The training begins with new employees. At the academy, all employees are taught that excellent customer service is required of all employees—and that it is important “not to disqualify the customer with our qualifications,” in other words, to speak and interact with customers in a manner that makes customers comfortable and that they can understand.

The department also provides several hours of refresher training in customer service each year. This training covers several topics:

- How to comfort trauma victims
- How to manage bystanders
- What customers are saying on their customer service surveys
- “Stations and equipment belong to the community”
- “Every citizen is a customer and shareholder regardless of their social or economic status.”

City publicizes performance data

Albany publishes a quarterly performance report that includes these and other measures. It is available on the Internet and is shared directly with the city council and other local government officials.

Another report, regarding the Albany Fire Fighters Community Assistance Fund (AFFCAF) and its activities, is also distributed by e-mail every two months. This report is shared with all fire department employees and the city manager.