

# News Release

For immediate release

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## **Outside experts evaluate Beaufort police, fire departments for emergency service performance**

Pro-active, prevention-based efforts by the Beaufort Fire Department and Beaufort Police Department earned “best practice” kudos from a recent comprehensive study conducted by the International City/County Management Association for Beaufort.

Those effort help save lives and reduce loss of property, ICMA experts said Thursday as they presented their findings to the Beaufort City Council during an afternoon work session.

The reports addressed strengths of both departments as well as areas where improvement is needed, said Scott Dadson, Beaufort’s city manager.

“We brought ICMA and their experts in to take a close look at the services we provide in public safety, and to help us identify how we can make an already good thing better,” Dadson said. “The reports indicate we’ve made good progress but still have room to improve, and we now have a new roadmap for that improvement.”

Chief among the recommendations is to work with the Beaufort County Emergency Management Division to upgrade the dispatch system and related software that tracks call response time and time on call for both police and fire.

The report on Beaufort’s fire department showed that only 1.1 percent of all calls involved actually fighting fires, but 66 percent of all calls were for medical emergencies that firefighters acted on as first responders.

Put another way, in February 2010:

- 85 percent of City firefighters’ time was spent on medical calls
- 1 percent of their time was spent on fire suppression
- 6 percent of their time was dedicated to fire prevention and public education about fire safety
- And the remaining approximate 8 percent went toward firefighting training, according to updated operational data from the City.

“We are in the business of preventing fires,” said Sammy Negron, interim fire chief for Beaufort. “We’re not in the business of requesting more firefighters or more equipment so we can fight more fires. If we are responding to 1.1 percent calls of actual fires, we want to reduce that to 0.5 percent or less. It’s all about preventing fires and property loss from fires.”

The consultants recommended an improved method of dispatching, called Priority Medical Dispatching, the better routes emergency calls to the right responding agency. Using such a system could reduce the amount of time firefighters spend answering EMS calls – time that could be better spent working to prevent fires and fire losses, Dadson said.

All 911 dispatching is handled by the County’s Emergency Management Division.

“Anytime there is a fire, there is a loss of some sort,” Negron said. “That could be a loss of property or just the loss of time and money in sending a crew and pumper (truck) to a debris fire. The more we can work to prevent those fires in the first place, the more we can reduce those losses.”

Similarly, a majority of law enforcement calls in Beaufort originated with police officers, according to the ICMA study.

“We have 76 percent of our call volume being officer initiated,” Dadson said. “That’s a big part of our pro-active community policing effort. Our officers are on the street, they’re on the roads, they’re keeping an eye out for suspicious people and behavior, and that helps make Beaufort a safer place.”

Police Chief Matt Clancy earned a “best practice” commendation from ICMA for using “community resource teams” to shift police teams to focus on particular geographic areas when problems arise.

“It’s really a force multiplier by constantly shifting our resources to where they are needed most, whether that’s focusing on burglaries or purse snatchings or dealing with loud motorcycles downtown,” Clancy said.

Over the past three years, crime has dropped in Beaufort, largely through an increase in officer-initiated calls and the emphasis on pro-active, preventive law enforcement.

When crimes do occur, though, the City police outperform the national average for closing cases, ICMA said. The FBI reports the national average for clearing cases of burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft is 19.9 percent; the Beaufort Police Department cleared 35.4 percent (260 cases investigated, 92 cleared).

Both the police and fire studies acknowledged the Lowcountry’s geographic challenges in providing emergency services.

The International City/County Management Association works to create excellence in local governance. The organization provides an information clearinghouse, technical assistance, training and professional development to more than 9,000 city, town and county groups throughout the world.

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