

eso



2022

FIRE PREDICTIONS

What does 2022 have in store for the fire service? We know COVID-19 will continue to cast a long shadow as we navigate staffing, emerging technologies, community engagement, and responder well-being. We've compiled the trends we believe are the most important to pay attention to this year. Accompanying each trend is a recommended action you can take to help you be successful in 2022.

PREDICTION 1

Staffing will be a challenge

As we've mentioned in our EMS and Hospital Predictions, the Great Resignation, as it's known, is affecting companies and organizations across the United States – no industry is immune. This holds true for the Fire Service as well. In particular, we're likely to see volunteer departments struggling more than career departments because keeping up with certifications and training will be a real challenge. In addition to recruiting difficulties, there is an exodus of experience across the board (including senior officers). Many providers will look for new opportunities that are less stressful, more family-friendly, and, oftentimes, offer better pay. Agencies and departments will need to re-think models of engagement, the investment in and importance of training and education, as well as an approach to scheduling that gives providers more control over their lives.

TAKE ACTION

- ✔ **Create partnerships.** If you don't already have a relationship with colleges and academies that train firefighters, consider doing so. This will give you an opportunity to recruit early and often.
- ✔ **Volunteers can be essential.** If you run a volunteer program, gather data around why volunteers have left the program through exit interviews and surveys. Making adjustments to retain volunteers can be a life saver for many departments. If you don't currently have a formal volunteer recruiting program, consider starting one.
- ✔ **Understand your impact.** Generally speaking, human beings want to know they are making a difference and adding value – and this is particularly true for first responders. Simply being busy doesn't constitute impact and value. Take some time to understand how your team is having an impact in your community outside of emergency response through engagement and improvement – then look for additional opportunities for positive impact.



PREDICTION 2

Community engagement is more important than ever

As a society, we live in a fishbowl. There is ever-increasing pressure to deliver the right optics, showcase value, and the need to help fire service teams understand that pressure. City councils and local governments are demanding greater accountability into what publicly-funded services are doing to benefit the community. Additionally, limited funding is oftentimes being repurposed for other community investments (such as a walking trail) instead of a fire truck. Showing positive benefit to the community through both data (to tell the story) and engagement (to deliver the story) will pay dividends. Moreover, social media plays a key role in creating perceptions of the fire service depending on how teams engage with the community.

TAKE ACTION

- ✔ **Be proactive.** Folks in communities typically like to know that funding is going toward proactive, preventative measures that reduce the need for emergency response. Look for ways to raise your profile in the communities you serve through initiatives and programs designed to both educate and build awareness for the efforts of your teams and departments. This includes leveraging electronic media platforms that show community involvement and agency value.
- ✔ **Listen.** Meet with leaders and influencers in your communities to better understand the services wanted and needed. Understand the costs, impacts, and metrics for those services to provide an accurate picture for success.



PREDICTION 3

Provider wellness and well-being will continue to be a focus area

Fewer responders, more shifts, and a public feeling the stresses and strains of COVID-19. This is a potentially volatile mix that can (and will) have an impact on responders and providers. In addition to staffing challenges highlighted above, we also see even more violence against responders from a public that is generally disillusioned with authority figures, with more providers being placed in harm's way. Moreover, job pressure leads to fatigue, burnout, depression, and anxiety. The ability to track and respond to key events will be essential to help the fire service stay healthy and safe.

TAKE ACTION

- ✔ **Provide training and services.** Train new responders on the stresses of the job and what can be done before they start. Take the opportunity to talk openly about the stresses and strains of the job with both new and existing employees. Freely share information about services and programs that will help ensure the mental and physical well-being of your teams.
- ✔ **Provide scheduling flexibility.** Look for ways to rapidly adjust schedules, as well as provide a variety of scheduling options to ensure your staff can enjoy an appropriate work/life balance in the face of challenges both inside and outside of work. Being creative with scheduling will ensure your team is as rested and ready as possible.
- ✔ **Leverage technology.** Keep track of key events and incidents related to equipment usage, injuries, exposures, illnesses, etc., to provide data-driven insights into employee wellness.



PREDICTION 4

We will see evolving service and delivery models

There is a push/pull dynamic between government entities and the fire service around what delivery of benefits should be. This includes services like changing overhead lights on trails for safety and providing COVID-19 vaccinations in a public health capacity. There will be greater expectation – and greater pressure – for the fire service to do more than firefighting-related activities. Fortunately, there are opportunities to engage with the community to provide community risk reduction and value-based planning.

TAKE ACTION

- ✔ **Create a culture of service.** It's important for leadership to create and foster a culture of service and commitment to the community – not just about firefighting and rescue. Consider creating dynamic programs and initiatives that award groups and individuals that educate and address community-related needs.
- ✔ **Focus on the underserved.** Engage with and provide services to the underserved. This is generally a high-volume customer base, but providing education and resources to help community members help themselves – especially during major events – can help your teams focus on activities that will have the greatest impact.



ABOUT US

ESO is dedicated to improving community health and safety through the power of data. Since its founding in 2004, the company continues to pioneer innovative, user-friendly software to meet the changing needs of today's fire departments. ESO currently serves thousands of customers throughout North America with a broad software portfolio, including its modern, cloud-based **ESO Fire RMS**. For more information, visit www.eso.com.