



# 2023

## FIRE SERVICE PREDICTIONS

What does 2023 have in store for the fire service? With economic challenges looming and a still-uncertain supply chain, fire departments will again have to navigate staffing, budget, and equipment challenges. We've compiled the trends we believe are the most important to pay attention to this year.

Accompanying each trend are some recommended actions you can take to help you be successful in 2023.

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## PREDICTION 1

### Budget restraints loom in the current economic situation.

We are seeing economic indicators similar to 2008, which impacted fire service budgets and resources. The budget restraints and considerations will cause a ripple effect across many of the services agencies provide today. We will see a change in deployment models, with fewer engines on the road and a greater increase in commercial-type vehicles (SUVs). Staff will be asked to do more across a broader geography as resources become tighter. For the long term, we expect to see a more significant impact on budgets in 18 months as cycles get discussed and finalized in 2023 for 2024.

## TAKE ACTION

- ✓ **Manage current resources more efficiently.**  
Departments will need to implement more controls and practices for efficiency. This should include the ability to manage medication rotation to control expiration dates, avoid critical shortages while eliminating excess inventory ordering, and ensure testing and routine maintenance of units and equipment is completed as recommended to decrease significant repair costs. Using tools like inventory tracking and asset management will increase visibility and provide better resource control.
- ✓ **Take advantage of grants and grant-writing services.** Submit grant applications based on the priorities of the Notice of Funding Opportunity to increase your chances of obtaining funding. Make sure you highlight the need with the required facts – not just anecdotes. Carefully understand the nature of your grant and outline its details in the application (e.g., the cost share if a matching cost is needed to cover). If you hire a professional grant writer, request those expenses as administrative costs in the grant application to help decrease the financial burden.



## PREDICTION 2

### We'll continue to see staffing shortages for public service roles.

Last year, we predicted staffing issues would be a challenge. This year is no different. We are seeing indicators that the number of individuals applying for public service roles has fallen significantly over the last 3-4 years, making the applicant pool smaller. Additionally, more and more responders are retiring for a variety of reasons, putting extra pressure on agencies and departments to identify qualified personnel to fill both senior and entry-level roles. Moreover, evidence shows that approximately 40 percent of new recruits last about three years, creating high turnover rates that impact morale and institutional knowledge. Agencies and departments will need to adapt new recruiting approaches to attract, hire, and retain the most qualified candidates.

## TAKE ACTION

- ✓ **Identify new recruitment partners.** The traditional draws to the fire service – like maintaining family legacy or chasing firefighting aspirations as a kid – are not effective with today's workforce. To help address this, departments need to work with new partners and groups to create potential employees. Consider partnering with high schools to introduce public safety development programs as part of the base curriculum or working with community colleges to support intern programs from all types of degree plans – such as law enforcement, nursing, allied health programs, or technical and mechanical programs. This experience provides exposure to the career and enables a personal recruitment opportunity.
- ✓ **Understand why people are leaving.** It's a competitive world and people will always come and go. Request exit interviews or surveys to find opportunities to improve the department in areas identified in your interviews.
- ✓ **Diversify your workforce.** Does your department reflect your community with diverse races, genders, and ages? Focus on thoughtful and culturally appropriate recruitment that meets your community where they are. Curate experiences for populations – such as women or the next generation of workers – by building a culture that reflects their priorities and communicating those benefits in outreach events or recruiting collateral.



## PREDICTION 3

# Supply chain and logistics issues will affect equipment availability and safety.

The current global supply chain issues we are experiencing will continue to affect the fire service as well. We are seeing challenges ordering and receiving fire trucks, self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), personal protective equipment (PPE), and more – which will affect the agencies' abilities to replace items in time to meet industry standards.

Additionally, safety concerns for firefighters will be on the rise as gear breaks down and needs to be retired. Moreover, rural agencies will be particularly affected by these issues. Agencies and departments that better manage existing supplies (such as brake pads and tires on trucks) and anticipate key needs will place orders early in the process to ensure proper equipment is maintained and replaced regularly.

## TAKE ACTION

- ✓ **Be proactive and not reactive when it comes to the basics.** Sometimes, that's easier said than done. But a technique here is to stock up on routinely changed-out and high-use items for your stations, fleet, and response supplies. Evaluate your annual use and set your minimum on-hand items higher to get an earlier lead time for orders.
- ✓ **Diversify your vendors.** Find and contract multiple vendors before you need items so you can lean on an alternate supplier when your primary supplier is either unable to supply or cost-prohibitive.
- ✓ **Track your assets.** Does your department have an easy way to track turnout gear and PPE? If not, 2023 is the time to start. Find ways to notify your agency of testing, early warnings for expiration, and test results that your members can see and update as authorized. These resourcing and budget actions during tight economic times (and not to mention delays in delivery) will be critical to keep gear compliant while avoiding excess inventory and other critical shortages.



## PREDICTION 4

# Organizations will need to rely on technology to combat health, training, and community challenges.

Technology will play an increased role in all aspects of the fire service, including response, education, safety, recruiting, and more. For example, we'll see more affordable mounted thermal-image mask cameras with heads-up displays, an improved ability to monitor body temperatures of firefighters assigned to interior operations, and enhanced fire by-product monitors for firefighters (which will create a need for more data collection and analysis). Additionally, we will see a need to correlate weather to incidents to help get a better understanding of the impacts of weather on outcomes.

We will also see the evolution of continuing education in a format that matches the workforce, including a blend of video and simulation interaction delivered in an on-demand format with live skill performance. Moreover, agencies will need to demonstrate the value of services and the diversity of services tied to reporting to drive recruitment and retention, as well as justify budget requests.

## TAKE ACTION

- ✓ **Take advantage of on-demand learning opportunities.** Firefighters today should be familiar with a hybrid education model delivered online. Several may have completed higher-level education completely online in distant learning environments. Consider providing them with a similar fire-service education platform that allows members to participate at their stations or homes during “off-peak” hours. It will not only improve skills and knowledge retention, but this approach will also help with staffing challenges and slow response times caused by out-of-service units training or attending in-services.
- ✓ **Ensure data are actionable for first responders.** As technology provides more valuable information, we run the risk of overwhelming first responders with too much data during critical situations. Imagine initial command is trying to track response status, accountability, and remote air monitoring while simultaneously watching a remote screen for an interior thermal imager camera. Be sure any impractical workflows and “flashy” data are eliminated. Keep the amount of information simple, relevant, and actionable.





# ABOUT US

ESO (ESO Solutions, Inc.) 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 EMS agencies, fire departments, hospitals, and state EMS offices. ESO currently serves thousands of customers throughout North America with a broad software portfolio, including the industry-leading ESO Electronic Health Record (EHR), the next generation ePCR; ESO Health Data Exchange (HDE), the first-of-its-kind healthcare interoperability platform; ESO Fire RMS, the modern fire Record Management System; ESO Patient Registry (trauma, burn and stroke registry software); and ESO State Repository. ESO is headquartered in Austin, Texas. For more information, visit [www.eso.com](http://www.eso.com).



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