

# **A Portland Firefighter**

Source - Portland Fire Training Manual 1968-69

To be appointed to the position of firefighter is not an insurmountable task. A man must be within a certain age level, be free of physical defects that may hinder his ability to perform strenuous physical tasks at any given moment and endure physical hardship; sometimes for many hours at a time. If the candidate can pass the written, oral and physical examinations, approximately 60% do not, he may find himself appointed to the training company at Engine 23.

We have one of the finest training programs in the Nation and by far the finest of any governmental agency in the State. A man appointed to Engine 23 must undergo 51 months of intensified training on a fire engine. This training consists of practical efforts to learn the many physical skills necessary to become an apprentice firefighter. It also necessitates knowledge gained from reading and digesting facts and figures from our many manuals and books. It is taken for granted that in this training period home study will be necessary. At the end of 55 months the trainees are given a practical examination by the Assistant Training Officer for the bureau to determine if they possess the necessary skills and dexterity to go on. This is also a check to determine if the Company Training Officer is doing the proper job. During their training period on Engine 23, the trainees are given weekly examinations by their training officer. If at any time during this period, or in the first year, a trainee is judged to be incompetent, incapable, or unsuited, he is dismissed.

After a successful tour of duty on Engine 23, the trainee is passed on to Truck 4. Here he is confronted with a whole new line of duties and responsibilities. The trainee undergoes another 51 months on this apparatus. As before, he is under the constant supervision of his training officer. Here he is also given daily and weekly tests to determine his progress. Approximately one out of every three are eliminated during this period. Near the end of this period the trainee is given two examinations by the Assistant Training Officer, a practical examination of approximately six hours duration, and a final written examination covering material taught during their eleven months training. If both of these examinations are passed and the grades from their training officer are favorable, the trainee is ready for placement in a regular fire company. This is comparable to a child graduating from grammar school, the main course is still ahead.

The trainee, after going to a company takes about a year to become fully acquainted with his new duties and responsibilities. He must learn that every man represents his department by how he acts, how he looks, and how he lives and treats others. The trainee suddenly learns that he is not through studying, but that a fireman must study throughout his whole career, and still he will not know all the answers.

Most firemen aspire to be officers, approximately one out of four or five are successful. The conscientious fire officer teaches his crew routine rules and orders as they apply to his job. He stresses safety, as the fire service, according to national statistics, loses 1 to 3 times as many men in the line of duty as any other branch of the city government. The officer presents aspects of Fire Prevention, Fire Investigation, and Public Relations to his men. With the help, of the Training Section, Fire Chemistry and Fire Tactics are also taught. The firemen are

encouraged to attend courses at the Colleges and Universities that have been offered for years in Fire Science, Fire Technology, Chemistry, Hydraulics, Public Relations, Administration, Managerial Psychology, Water Distribution, Investigation and many other related subjects.

Firemen are told that through an ever expanding field of chemical engineering and space technology we are constantly required to learn about and become familiar with new chemicals that are dangerous to the society that we are pledged to protect; to understand these chemicals, take precautionary measures against them and know how to handle them. We pick several common chemicals to illustrate this point. We have basically the same chemicals we have had for years, but now they are in much greater volume and concentration which greatly intensifies their hazards to the lives of the people we are pledged to protect. Here are two:

1. L.O.X., liquid oxygen, to the average citizen is merely air to breathe, to the fireman this product is cryogenic, stored at a minus 297 degrees below zero. Pure oxygen is capable of intensifying a fire 5 times, liquid oxygen can intensify a fire approximately 4,500 times. A hose stream used improperly with L.O.X. can cause a detonation. The vapors from L.O.X. can turn a person into a walking bomb, freeze their limbs and cause the need for amputation.
2. H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, Hydrogen Peroxide, a common name in the household medicine cabinet. A 2-3% concentration is used as an antiseptic, a 12% concentration is used as bleach, a 90% concentration is used as a rocket propellant, highly volatile and extremely dangerous to handle.

How many more chemicals have we going over our freeways, through our cities, and out of our ports? Thousands! The fire department has the responsibility of knowing all of them. We don't receive all the national publicity that some organizations get, but think about it, who has to know the most, who has the greatest responsibility, who has to make decisions, correct decisions, immediate decisions, that may affect hundreds, thousands? We do, the men of the Portland Fire Department.