

Michelle

From: kevin.roche@phoenix.gov
Sent: Friday, July 27, 2007 3:45 PM
To: kevin.roche@earthlink.net
Subject: Fw: Charleston Update

----- Forwarded by Kevin Roche/PFD/PHX on 07/27/2007 12:44 PM -----
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07/26/2007 11:07 PM

To LynbrookFD379@yahoo.com, peter.plringer@montgomerycountymd.gov, Kevin Roche/PFD/PHX@PHXENT, Brian.Crawford@cl.shreveport.la.us, tesendelbach@msn.com

cc

Subject Charleston Update

I want to provide a brief update on where we stand regarding the Charleston project.

I spoke to Dennis Compton today about his concerns and his decision to withdraw from the project. His primary concern is the independence and transparency of the process. He does not want to be involved in a project of this importance - to Charleston and to the fire service as a whole - if there is any question regarding the integrity of the process or the participants. After speaking to the primary contact person in the Mayor's Office, he had developed serious concerns regarding their expectations and made the decision to withdraw. He emphasized that each of us should evaluate the situation and make our own personal decisions.

Ron Siarnicki is in Charleston and he had a series of meetings today with various individuals who are involved at that end. The still want "us" to do the evaluation and develop a series of recommendations as previously discussed and there seemed to be some potential flexibility in their reaction to Denny's decision....but nothing definite.

Late this afternoon I received a link to a story in today's Post and Courier, the local newspaper that has been covering the situation in great depth. Here is the text of the article:

Charleston launches own investigation into tragedy

By Glenn Smith (Contact)

The Post and Courier

Thursday, July 26, 2007

Five weeks after the Sofa Super Store store fire killed nine Charleston firefighters, the city has launched a sweeping review of the fire department's response to the blaze and its ability to handle similar emergencies in the future.

With the aid of outside experts, the city plans to examine the fire department's equipment, procedures and practices with an eye toward improving preparation and response to "critical incidents," Mayor Joe Riley said. The review should provide lessons that will benefit fire departments throughout the nation, he said.

"We've been dealing with a huge tragedy, and this is an opportunity for us to be on the offensive, looking at everything that can be learned from this," he said.

The review will be led by Riley, Fire Chief Rusty Thomas and Police Chief Greg Mullen. The city plans to bring in four to six consultants, culled from a "very distinguished" group of fire service veterans from around the nation, Riley said.

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The mayor said the citywide review will encompass everything from firefighting tactics and building codes to sprinkler requirements and programs aimed at helping all public safety workers draft wills.

Riley said the review will likely take several weeks to complete, and the results will be made public.

Many cities launch such reviews as a matter of routine after firefighter fatalities, said Larry Osborne, a vice president with the International Association of Fire Fighters and a former district chief of the Jacksonville (Fla.) Fire Department.

Florida, for example, mandates that its cities conduct internal probes following the deaths of firefighters.

The thoroughness of these reviews varies widely, depending on the make-up of the committee, Osborne said.

Some city-level reviews are diligent and thorough; others lack critical self-analysis and miss many problems later highlighted by federal investigations.

"It depends who is chosen and if you have people who are open-minded," Osborne said. "Sometimes you'll look at (federal and city reports) next to each other and say, 'Were they looking at the same fire?'"

I will let you draw your own conclusions after reading the article, however it appears to add substance to Denny's concerns. The general reaction among several individuals here at Firehouse Expo (who did not know of my potential involvement) was predictably sarcastic regarding the probability that a self-investigation strategy would produce any useful results.

I don't have to tell you that this mission is exceptionally significant and important. We have an opportunity to make a very significant contribution --- and a risk of negative consequences, both personally and professionally. Please think about it very seriously while we see what happens in the next couple of days. When we have a clear vision of the situation, each of us will have to make a decision.

One of the points that has to be discussed is potential litigation and liability. There is a very high probability that this situation will result in litigation and, if we become involved, we are likely to be called upon to testify at some point. We will need written assurance that our time and all resulting expenses would be covered by the City in that eventuality. We also need to be sure that the City will provide us with protection from any personal liability resulting from our efforts. Those provisions have to be part of any agreement.

At this point I am still tentatively scheduled to go to Charleston next week to discuss the ground rules and to do some recon and project planning. That plan might change.

I promise to update you as soon as I have more solid information. Thanks for volunteering to be part of this project. Let's see what happens next...

Gordon

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