

GENDER ISSUES AND FIRE STATIONS FACILITIES

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The problem is the St. Johns County Department of Emergency Services (SJCDES) does not have a standardized policy for the provision and use of bunkrooms and restrooms for firefighters of different genders. The purpose of this research was to create a policy for the provision and use of bunkroom and restroom facilities by firefighters of differing genders. This project was conducted using the action research method.

The following research questions were posed: 1) What state or federal regulations exist relevant to the provision and use of facilities by differing genders? 2) What are the current facilities (restrooms and bunkrooms) available to male and female firefighters at fire stations in SJCDES, and how are they being used? 3) What concerns or opinions do female firefighters and station officers have regarding provision and use of fire station facilities?

An inspection of existing fire stations was conducted to determine the current bunkroom and restroom facilities available, and their current usage. A survey of female firefighters in the SJCDES was conducted to determine their preferences for the provision and use of facilities. A similar survey was conducted of SJCDES officers to determine their preference and to obtain their opinion of what female firefighters would prefer. The surveys were then tabulated and the results either expressed as a percentage or shown in a table format.

A policy was created that addresses the designation and use of bunkrooms and restrooms in SJCDES fire stations. The policy included guidelines for future fire station renovations or new construction. Survey results included a unanimous preference among female firefighters for gender specific restrooms, and agreement among all respondents that a single open floor plan bunkroom was not the most desirable sleeping arrangement.

The recommendations from this research included a) incorporating the sample policy in the department's policy manual b) providing gender specific restrooms whenever possible c) providing a means of locking all unisex restrooms d) providing partial height partitions in all multiple occupancy bunkrooms e) providing gender specific bunkrooms wherever existing facilities permit and f) conducting further research into the impact of unisex sleeping facilities on firefighter's families.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1997 St Johns County moved to consolidate the Department of Emergency Medical Services with the Department of Public Safety, creating a new Department of Emergency Services. The new department would include a EMS (Emergency Medical Services) Division and a Fire Division. Fire and EMS staff would be crossed trained, and apparatus would be assigned to share existing facilities. While they would remain separate for budget purposes, both divisions would operate under a common chain of command. According to Training Division Chief Johnny Colson, prior to the merger EMS units were housed in a main station that had multiple bunkrooms, or in temporary facilities that included one bedroom for each staff member. Fire apparatus were not staffed on a twenty-four hour basis prior to the consolidation. After the consolidation staff members began to express privacy concerns that related to sharing the single open bunkroom that was available at some stations. Concerns were also expressed when some station officers re-designated male and female restrooms as unisex facilities, due to the small percentage of female firefighters assigned to those stations (J. Colson, personal communication, September 2000).

The problem is that the St. Johns County Department of Emergency Services does not have a standardized policy that addresses the provision and use of fire station facilities (bunkrooms, showers, and restrooms) by different genders. The purpose of this research project is to develop a policy that identifies the department's future actions with respect to provision of fire station facilities and that identifies how existing facilities will be used.

This research project will use the action method of research to develop a policy that outlines the type of bunkrooms, showers, and restroom facilities to be provided in current and existing facilities. The policy will also provide standards for use of existing facilities. The following research questions were posed:

- 1) What state or federal regulations exist relevant to provision and use of facilities by differing genders?
- 2) What are the current facilities (restrooms and bunkrooms) available to male and female firefighters at fire stations in St. Johns County DES, and how are they being used?
- 3) What concerns or opinions do female firefighters and station officers have regarding provision and use of fire station facilities?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

"Most fire stations in use today were planned and built with a single-gender workforce in mind. Many of these buildings are now being used by a workforce that includes both women and men. Not surprisingly, this can result in inadequacies that are a source of inconvenience, discomfort, embarrassment, and friction for all concerned" (Women In The Fire Service, 2000).

In addressing the issue of inadequate facilities, or facilities that were developed with a single gender workforce in mind, one text states that "The underlying question that guides the development of long-range answers is whether men and women on the job should be provided with separate facilities or not" (Berkman, Floren, and Willing, 1999a, p. 71).

One author describes the impact that inadequate attention to the issue of restrooms and sleeping arrangements for mixed gender departments can have on both the department and the individuals as follows:

Under the best circumstances, bad facilities are an inconvenience which women suffer from in far greater proportion. Under the worst conditions, poor facilities can lead to problems with morale and job performance, and an increase in the occurrence of harassment. At least one discrimination lawsuit has been filed which was due in part to inadequate facilities. A lawsuit costs a lot more than a locker room, and in the end, no one wins (Willing, 1988, p. 1).

Garry Briese (2000), writing as the Executive Director of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, states "Diversity is a major trend in our society and not just in the fire service. The fire service needs to embrace the strengths of diversity so we lead and innovate and are not out of step with our society." Briese further stated that "City managers continue to perceive that the fire service is not proactive in dealing with diversity," and he suggests that fire departments will gain strength by embracing the diversity of their communities. His comments were made as part of an article discussing the challenges that will be faced by the fire service of the future.

In an article on workplace diversity Katherine Esty, a consultant on diversity issues, is quoted as saying "Policies, procedures, compensation systems, work arrangements, training at all levels, and orientation programs all need to be reviewed and modified to provide support for diversity" (Fogleson, 1997).

One chief officer points out that the option to renovate facilities to provide separate sleeping quarters for each firefighter is not an easy solution. He suggests that the costs for HVAC, lighting, doors, and other amenities increase substantially when multiple individual rooms are incorporated instead of one or two multiple occupancy rooms (Kefalas, 2000).

The only relevant sections of the current standard operating procedures for SJCDES require that "Members occupying the bunkroom shall wear a tee shirt and athletic type (jogging) shorts as a minimum while sleeping. This requirement applies to both male and female employees, and shall apply at all times when outside of bathrooms, regardless of whether employees/members of the opposite sex are present." The policy further provides that visitors are not permitted in the bunkrooms except as part of a guided tour of the facility (SJCDES, 2000).

The Fire and EMS Divisions of SJCDES employed six females as certified firefighter/EMTs or Firefighter/Paramedics in December 2000, or 7.8 percent of a total career staff of seventy-seven certified firefighters. Seven out of eight non-certified career personnel

were female. The overall percentage of female employees in the career ranks is 12.9 percent. Among volunteer firefighters 53 of 260, or 20 percent, are female.

This applied research project was conducted as a course requirement for the *Strategic Management of Change* class at the National Fire Academy. The project relates to the course content in a number of ways. The research project attempts to identify some of the conditions or factors that are relevant to managing the changing demographics of the fire service, using some of the principles or processes found in the Change Management Model, as presented during the course. The project also relates to the specific issue of managing cultural diversity issues within a fire department, similar to the cultural diversity exercise that made up one segment of the course curriculum. Interest in the topic was also stimulated by a class presentation by Executive Fire Officer Program student Alicia Mathis. Ms. Mathis discussed the positive morale boost that she and other female firefighters received when the Los Angeles Fire Department upgraded bathroom, shower, and locker room facilities for females.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Question 1.

The Florida Statutes have a section known as the Florida Civil Rights Act, and section 760.10 of that act states in part the following:

(1) It is an unlawful employment practice for an employer: (a) To discharge or to fail or refuse to hire any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicap, or marital status. (b) To limit, segregate, or classify employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities, or adversely affect any individual's status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicap, or marital status (Florida Civil Rights Act, 1992).

Florida statutes also has a section that addresses the powers and responsibilities of local government agencies, section 112.042 states the following:

It is against the public policy of this state for the governing body of any county or municipal agency, board, commission, department, or office, solely because of the race, color, national origin, sex, handicap, or religious creed of any individual, to refuse to hire or employ, to bar, or to discharge from employment such individuals or to otherwise discriminate against such individuals with respect to compensation, hire, tenure, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, if the individual is the most competent and able to perform the services required (Florida Statutes, 1999).

The Florida Division of State Fire Marshal (2000) adopts by reference parts of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) standards. In subpart 1910.141 on general environmental controls the standard requires that "toilet facilities, in toilet rooms separate for each sex, shall be provided in all places of employment" but also states that "Where toilet rooms will be occupied by no more than one person at a time, can be locked from the inside, and contain at least one water closet, separate toilet rooms for each sex need not be provided" (Occupational Safety and Health Standards, 1993, p. 428). The most current version of the standard contains the same language with respect to provision of restrooms for each sex (OSHA, 2000).

Section 2350 of California's Labor Code (2000) states that "When there are five or more employees who are not all of the same gender, a sufficient number of separate toilet facilities shall be provided for the use of each sex, which shall be plainly so designated."

The Guidelines of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance state that "The employer's policies and practices must assure appropriate physical facilities to both sexes" (Berkman, Floren, and Willing, 1999a, p. 72).

"Some states require that separate restrooms be provided for employees of each sex. An employer will be deemed to have engaged in unlawful employment practice if it refuses to hire or otherwise adversely affects the employment opportunities of applicants or employees in order to avoid the provision of such restrooms for persons of that sex" (Berkman, Floren, and Willing, 1999a, p. 71).

Research Question 2.

Virginia's Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department has in place a standard operating procedure that addresses the use, cleaning, and maintenance of bunkrooms. The policy provides that bunkrooms shall be used exclusively for a specific gender as assigned by the Station Captain. When the number of personnel on duty cannot be accommodated by normal use of the facilities the officer in charge may authorize temporary use of a bunkroom by opposite gender firefighters. The exception policy includes provisions for temporary labeling of the room to indicate a change in gender assignment, as well as requirements to document the exception to policy in a station log. The policy requires approval of the battalion chief for use of the female designated restrooms by male personnel. The policy also requires that male use bunkrooms be cleaned and maintained by the male firefighters, and female use designated bunkrooms be cleaned and maintained by female firefighters. The policy also includes a provision that no one may enter a bunkroom designated for use by the opposite gender without advance notice and consent from the occupant (Fairfax, 1991).

One accomplishment listed in a Department of Labor article about a three year female firefighter and her female colleagues in the District of Columbia Fire Department was convincing the Department to provide separate locker rooms for females (Department of Labor, 2000).

The Los Angeles Fire Department is in the process of upgrading all of its facilities to provide separate restrooms, showers, and locker rooms for male and female employees. The upgrade is expected to be completed in July 2001 and involves upgrades to over seventy existing fire stations (Mathis, 2000).

Research Question 3.

In her article "A Better Place To Be" Los Angeles Firefighter Alicia Mathis (2000) describes how she worked at two stations in her rookie years where shower, bathroom, and changing facilities were shared by male and female employees. Many of her female colleagues would shower only at home, while others showered quickly and before the male firefighters typically took their showers. While she says this arrangement was accepted as "just the way things were" she also constantly felt that she was inconveniencing someone. Mathis also discussed what made female firefighters want to join a particular fire department, and described one fellow firefighter's reply: "make the department a place where women want to be, where they don't have to feel like unexpected visitors or unwelcome intruders" (p. 2).

In a discussion of the new questions raised by the addition of women in the fire service the NFPA's *Fire Protection Handbook* states that where a common large bunkroom exists male and female firefighters "can and do share sleeping facilities with few problems." The discussion then suggests that in departments where separate bunkrooms have been created "Women may feel alienated by feeling that they are not part of the company." The text then points out that such arrangements often lack practicality, as the ratio of male to female firefighters may change on a continuous basis, requiring the provision of excess space allocated to these areas. The section also states that "having men and women sleeping in two person 'dorm type' rooms should not be allowed." The suggestion is to adopt and enforce a rule that requires all men or all women in each such room. The text further suggests that "using 1/2 or 3/4 height separation walls will provide privacy without sacrificing the company feeling that is so important to a well-functioning team of firefighters (Cricenti, 1997, p. 10-181).

A Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) publication for women firefighters describes how many fire departments deal with the entry of female firefighters by simply having them share the one common bunkroom that is already available. The text states that "Many women prefer this arrangement, because it keeps them a part of the crew and a part of the information-sharing process that begins as soon as a call comes in. On the other hand, some men and women are not at all comfortable sharing a bunkroom in this fashion" (Berkman, Floren, and Willing, 1999b, p. 53).

Clackamas County Oregon Assistant Chief James Kefalas (2000) illustrates in a recent article the type of concern many officers may experience. He asks the reader to imagine that they are an officer lying in bed at night when "You hear the pitter-patter of feet going down the hall, and then a bedroom door at the far end opening and closing" (p. 22). He suggests that you would be envisioning a number of negative scenarios, with many of them only possible since separate bedrooms were provided to address the privacy needs of female firefighters.

Kefalas (2000) also describes an actual incident that occurred with a neighboring department. A separate bedroom had been created when a female firefighter was hired. During a tour for public officials it was discovered that the firefighter had treated the bunkroom as if it was her personal space, and that she had plastered the walls with sexually explicit materials.

Summary

The various means of providing sleeping areas for firefighters (as discussed in the *Fire Protection Handbook* [Cricenti, 1997] and in the FEMA publication) were used to develop the choices for bunkroom types. Respondents to the surveys were asked to list the types in order of preference.

The discussion by the Los Angeles firefighter (Mathis, 2000) about the extent to which female firefighters felt unwelcome due to inadequate facilities raised the question of whether or not firefighters questioned their career choice, or were reluctant to accept specific assignments, based on the facilities available. A question was included in the surveys to determine if this was a significant concern to current employees.

PROCEDURES

Definition of Terms

Handicapped Accessible A bathroom with a minimum 32-inch clear width doorway, and with at least one handicap toilet and one wheelchair accessible sink.

Non-gender assignment The assignment of personnel to multiple bunkrooms based on factors other than gender or unit assignment, such as officers versus firefighters or snoring versus non-snoring.

Open floor plan A single bunkroom with multiple bunks, and without any means of separating the individual bunk areas.

Semi-private partitions A single room with multiple bunks that are separated by partial height partitions to provide some privacy, while allowing free flow of conditioned air between the individual areas.

Unit assignment The assignment of personnel to multiple bunkrooms, with all personnel assigned to a specific apparatus assigned to the same bunkroom.

Assumptions and Limitations

Limitations on this research project included the requirement to complete the project within the six months time period allowed by the NFA Applied Research Project Guidelines. Time and cost constraints prohibited the selection of a larger population group. Time and cost constraints limited the amount of time available for the interview with the County's labor law attorney.

It is assumed that when two restrooms are located in close proximity within a facility, and one of the two rooms is equipped with one or more urinals in addition to other fixtures, that the room with the urinal(s) was originally intended for males, and that the other room was designed for use by females.

Research Methodology

Research Question 1. A personal interview was conducted with Attorney John Dickinson. Mr. Dickinson is a partner with the firm of Constangy, Brooks, and Smith, which specializes in labor law issues. Mr. Dickinson was first provided with a description of the current bunkroom and restroom facilities available at SJCDES fire stations, and how they are currently being used. Following that description the following questions were posed: 1) Are you aware of any instances in which an employee has claimed discrimination based on the type of bunkroom or restroom provided (gender specific or unisex)? 2) If yes, what was the outcome of those cases? 3) In your opinion, would it be more desirable to have gender specific or unisex restrooms? 4) Would it be a violation of the Florida Civil Rights Act or other related laws to require that male and female firefighters be assigned to separate bunkrooms within a fire station? 5) In your opinion, would shared bunkrooms or single gender bunkrooms be more desirable from a legal standpoint?

Research Question 2. An on site inspection of each fire station facility owned or operated under the St Johns County Fire/EMS Division was made, and the construction date of the facility, or the date on which the last renovation of restroom or bunkroom facilities occurred, was documented. Administrative or support facilities that do not house in-service apparatus were not included. For each restroom the following information was documented: current use designation (male/female/unisex), number of showers, number of toilets, number of urinals, and whether the room was lockable and handicapped accessible. The number of fire stations that currently do not have at least one restroom designated solely for female use was calculated as a percentage. For those stations with at least two full restrooms (sink, toilets, and shower) the rooms were identified as having been originally intended for male versus female use based on the presence of urinals in one of the two rooms. The number of toilet, urinal, and shower fixtures in each were compared, and the percentage of fixtures provided for male versus female personnel was calculated.

The number of bunkrooms, and the square footage, designated use, and type for each bunkroom were also recorded. The number of career firefighters assigned to each station on a twenty-four hour basis was also recorded based on the department's current staffing plan. Where multiple bunkrooms were provided the square footage of each was compared.

Research Question 3. Two surveys were distributed. The first survey was sent to each of the female career firefighters employed by the SJCDES in November 2000. A copy of the survey for female firefighters is provided in Appendix A.

The second survey was sent to each of the officers in the SJCDES. This survey population was further identified as those officers who were employed in November 2000, and who have authority to interpret and apply departmental policies, and who have the discretion to

implement "local" procedures for their assigned stations or shifts, when department policies do not address an issue. Ranks meeting these criteria included Battalion Chiefs, Captains, and Lieutenants. A copy of the survey for officers is provided in Appendix B.

Due to the small size of the population groups a one hundred percent return of surveys was required for valid statistical significance. Each of the survey population members was personally contacted and requested to complete and return the survey. Each of the respondents was advised that the completed survey results would be provided to them upon completion of the project.

RESULTS

A sample policy describing the provision and use of fire station facilities for differing genders is shown in Appendix C.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. When asked if he was aware of any cases in which employees had claimed discrimination based on the type of bunkroom or restroom facilities provided Mr. Dickinson said that he was. He stated that there had been a number of instances in which an employee attempted to make a claim of discrimination based on the provision of unisex restrooms. When asked about the outcome he stated that these cases were generally unsuccessful, provided that the employer could show that the employee had a reasonable ability to insure privacy while in the restroom. He further stated that if the employer could show that the restroom was equipped with a means to lock the room while in use, a valid claim of discrimination would not normally be upheld. When asked if unisex or gender specific restrooms were preferable he stated that each would be acceptable, provided that privacy for the users could be maintained.

Mr. Dickinson was also asked if there would be a violation of the Florida Civil Rights Act, or other laws, to require male and female employees to stay in separate bunkrooms. Dickinson stated that a legal problem would arise if the room provided for use by female (or male) firefighters was substandard or inferior as compared to that provided for the other gender. He suggested that if female firefighters were assigned to a "small dark room off in the corner, which did not have adequate heat or ventilation" that the employer would be in violation. He stated that the rooms did not have to be identical, so long as they were comparable in comfort and use features. Dickinson was also asked if single gender or shared bunkrooms were more desirable from a legal viewpoint. He stated that single gender bunkrooms were probably preferable, as they would reduce the potential for incidents of sexual harassment.

Research Question 2. Of the eighteen fire station facilities operated by SJCDES four do not have any bunkroom facilities, and are staffed solely by volunteer firefighters operating on a call in basis. Six stations have two bunkrooms, and in all cases with different sized rooms the smaller bunkroom has at least 75 percent of the square footage of the larger room. In one station

(Station 8) each room is provided with only one bed, in all other cases each room has two or more beds. Station 2 currently has one bunkroom designated for use of the officer or crew chief, with the remaining room used by the second firefighter. In each of the other stations with two bunkrooms there is no formal designation of use for each room, and the use varies from shift to shift. Three of the stations with a single shared bunkroom have partial height partitions that subdivide the space into one or two bed areas. A table is provided in Appendix D that provides full details of the on site inspections.

Eight of the eighteen fire station facilities, or 44 percent, did not have at least one restroom designated solely for the use of female firefighters.

Fourteen fire stations are equipped with shower facilities. Of these, twelve have at least two separate bathrooms that include shower and toilet facilities. One of the twelve has an equal number of fixtures in each bathroom. Eleven of the stations have a greater number of fixtures in one bathroom, and in each case the room with the larger number of fixtures includes at least one urinal. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the twelve stations that have two bathrooms equipped with showers. Only the fixtures in the same restroom as the showers are included, other restrooms in the same facility are not included in these totals. Where the room is currently designated for unisex use, a male/female designation has been assigned based on the presence or absence of urinals. The totals shown indicate that there are more than twice as many toilets and urinals provided for males versus the number of toilets available for females, or 29.5 percent for females versus 70.5 percent for males. The totals also show that only 36 percent of the showers provided were intended for use by females.

**Table 1
Male Versus Female Restroom Fixture Comparison**

| Station | Male Toilets | Male Urinals | Female Toilets | Male Showers | Female Showers |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 01 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| 02 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| 03 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| 05 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 06 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 07 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 10 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| 11 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 12 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 14 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 17 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 18 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Totals | 16 | 15 | 13 | 21 | 12 |

Research Question 3. Of the SJCDES female firefighters surveyed 83 percent (5 out of 6) had been stationed in a fire/rescue station that did not have separate restroom facilities for male and female firefighters, and eight of nine officers had been assigned to such a station.

When asked if they had ever felt as if they were being treated as a second class firefighter because of the restroom facilities available to them 100 percent of female firefighters surveyed denied such feelings. Of the officers surveyed 33 percent believed that female firefighters had felt as if they were being treated as a second class firefighter.

When asked if they had ever felt reluctant to express their feelings about station facilities because it might make them appear to be a complainer or otherwise reduce the respect they receive only 17 percent (one of six) agreed. Of the officers surveyed 56 percent (five of nine) felt that female firefighters may feel reluctant to express their feelings.

The female firefighters all stated that they preferred separate male and female restrooms with equal facilities. Of the officers surveyed 33 percent (three of nine) preferred unisex restrooms that could be locked to separate gender specific restrooms. Seven of nine officers (78 percent) said they believed female firefighters would prefer gender specific restrooms.

Both the female firefighters and officers were asked to rank six options for type and assignment of bunkrooms. Table 2 lists the responses from the officers surveyed, with each row indicating the preference of one officer. The officers were asked to assign a numerical preference to each choice, with one indicating the most desired and six indicating the least desired option. All of the respondents indicated that a single open floor plan room would be their last or next to last choice. Four of nine indicated that gender specific bunkrooms would be their first, second or third choice, while the remaining five all selected it as their fourth choice.

**Table 2
Officer's Bunkroom Type Preference**

| Open Floor Plan | Semi-private partitions | Male/Female Rooms | Unit assignment | Non-gender assignment | Individual rooms |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 6 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 5 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 6 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 |

The officers were also asked to rate the choices again, but this time indicating the ranking they felt female firefighters would choose. All of the officers felt that female firefighters would choose individual rooms as one of their top three choices, while seven of nine officers believed

that would be the first choice of female firefighters. All of the officers indicated that they believed female firefighters would choose an open floor plan bunkroom as their last or next to last option.

**Table 3
Officer's Opinion of Female Firefighter Bunkroom Preference**

| Open Floor Plan | Semi-private partitions | Male/Female Rooms | Unit assignment | Non-gender assignment | Individual rooms |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 6 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 6 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| 5 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 |

Female firefighters were given the same choices, and were also asked to rate them from most to least desirable. All of the female firefighters (100 percent) chose a single bunkroom with an open floor plan as the least desirable bunkroom arrangement. A single bunkroom with partial height partitions for privacy was selected as the next to least desirable by eighty-three percent, with the remaining respondent (representing 17 percent of the population) choosing that as the most desirable option. Fifty percent of the population chose individual rooms as the most desirable option, and two other respondents listed it as one of their top three choices. Five out of six respondents (83 percent) chose separate gender specific bunkrooms as one of their top three choices, with the same percentage choosing bunkrooms assigned on some basis other than gender or apparatus assignment as a top three choice.

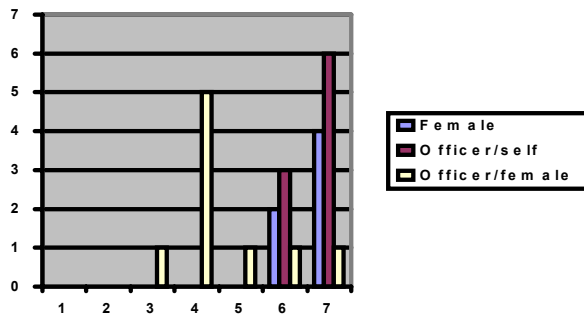
**Table 4
Female Firefighter's Bunkroom Type Preference**

| Open Floor Plan | Semi-private partitions | Male/Female Rooms | Unit assignment | Non-gender assignment | Individual rooms |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 6 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 |

Female firefighters were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement "The restroom or sleeping facilities available to me while on duty as a firefighter or EMT/Paramedic have made me feel uncomfortable with my career choice, or have sometimes made me reluctant to accept an assignment to a specific station or shift." Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed by selecting a number from one to seven, with one indicating strongly agree, and seven indicating strongly disagree. Four of the female respondents, or 57 percent, chose the number seven, and the remaining three (43 percent) chose the number six. When officers were asked to answer the same question, 67 percent (six of nine) chose the number seven, and the remaining three chose the number six.

Officers were asked to assign a numerical value to the degree to which they believed female firefighters would agree or disagree with the statement. Five of the respondents chose the number four, indicating that they believed female firefighters would neither strongly agree or disagree with the statement. The numbers three, five, six and seven were each chosen by one respondent. The results of these three questions are compared in Table 5 below.

Table 5
Do Facilities Affect Career Satisfaction



Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

A comment added by one female firefighter stated that "It doesn't matter to me as much as it matters to my spouse or boyfriend, who don't understand the situation as well."

DISCUSSION

The policy, which represents the results of this research, addresses both current and future actions to be taken relating to the provision and use of restroom and bunkroom facilities. The policy is a broad one intended to insure the privacy needs of department members and the public are met. The policy is intended to insure that the same standards are applicable in all SJCDDES facilities.

The opinion of Attorney John Dickinson with respect to the provision of restrooms was that unisex restrooms were not specifically a violation of the law, provided that a means of locking the room for privacy was provided. This is consistent with the Occupational Safety and Health Standards (1993) requirements in subpart 1910.141, except that the OSHA standard permits such rooms only when they will be limited to one occupant at a time. Having a large multi-occupancy restroom that is unisex would be a violation of the OSHA standard. In the case of at least one firefighter (Mathis, 2000) this type of multiple occupancy restroom resulted in the female firefighter having to wait an extended period of time to use the facility. If the restrooms in her case had been single occupancy she would have been on an equal footing with other firefighters waiting to use the facility. The actual result of a multiple occupancy restroom in her case was that she had to wait for the last male to exit before using the bathroom, while other male firefighters simply entered the facility ahead of her.

In some cases state laws are more restrictive, for example, California requires separate restrooms when there are more than four employees not all of the same gender (California Labor Code, 2000). This is consistent with the information provided in the FEMA publication *Many Women Strong, A Handbook for Women Firefighters*, which also indicates that some states will require separate restrooms for each sex (Berkman, Floren, and Willing, 1999a).

Most of the SJCDES fire stations have facilities that were designed for use by a specific gender, although not all are being used in that manner. In practice, St Johns County currently provides a mixture of unisex and gender specific restrooms. The trend in other departments seems to be towards gender specific restrooms that are comparable in size and facilities. The Los Angeles Fire Department (Mathis, 2000), District of Columbia Fire Department (Department of Labor, 2000), and Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department (Fairfax, 1991) have all moved to the provision of gender specific restrooms and shower facilities. The Fairfax policy on the use of their facilities has specific language designed to insure that these areas remain private and accessible only to a single gender, while containing provisions for unusual circumstances.

Female firefighters employed by the SJCDES unanimously preferred gender specific restrooms over unisex restrooms. Two-thirds of the officers with the department also preferred gender specific restrooms to unisex facilities.

Female firefighters in the department indicated that they did not feel as if they were being treated as a second class firefighter because of the restroom facilities available to them. This was consistent with the commentary in one text suggesting that "Women and men in the workforce--and particularly women, if they are in the minority or are the newest firefighters--will usually adapt to situations that are less than ideal" (Berkman, Floren, and Willing, 1999a). The *Fire Protection Handbook* does not appear to recognize any dispute on the best way to provide restroom facilities. The text simply states that "Separate facilities for men and women should include sinks, toilets, showers, and lockers, as well as closets for linen" (Cricenti, 1997, p. 10-182).

From the facilities provided at the newer fire stations it seems clear that station designers intended that the primary restrooms available to the staff should be gender specific. It should also be noted, however, that the restroom intended for male firefighters often had more fixtures,

including both toilets and showers, than the restroom provided for female firefighters. While this may have been based on the actual ratio of male to female employees, it is more likely that it results from a stereotype that views firefighting as a primarily male occupation. The provision of unequal sized facilities just reinforces the message that females are never expected to be on an equal basis with male firefighters, at least in terms of numbers.

St Johns County does not currently require separation of genders in bunkrooms. The department has a mix of several different types and uses of bunkrooms, including large common open rooms, common rooms with partial height partitions, and dual rooms without a specific use assignment. From the discussion in one text (Crecenti, 1997, p 10-181) it would seem that each of these alternatives have some advantages and disadvantages. The one prohibition the text does make is that having a male and a female firefighter share a two-person room should not be permitted. Since most of the SJCDES facilities are currently staffed with only two firefighters at night the same effect results from any arrangement that does not require the crew to separate, whenever a mixed gender crew is present. The text does not elaborate on the reasons against this type of sleeping arrangement, but it may be reasonably assumed that it is intended to reduce the opportunities for both sexual harassment and inappropriate consensual sexual activity.

Overall, female firefighters employed by SJCDES chose single occupancy bunkrooms as the most desirable. They also clearly indicated that an open floor plan bunkroom was the least desirable. After single occupancy rooms the female firefighters indicated a mixed response for their second and third choices, but separate male and female bunkrooms were included in the top three choices of 83 percent of the female firefighters. Slightly more than half of the officers surveyed picked separate gender specific bunkrooms as one of their top three choices. Both groups also indicated that a single open room with partial height partitions was not a preferred alternative. This appears to be in specific disagreement with the suggestion in one text that many female firefighters would prefer the use of a single open bunkroom to maintain the atmosphere of one common crew (Berkman, Floren, and Willing, 1999b).

In the survey results all of the officers and female firefighters indicated that they preferred a bunkroom with partial height partitions versus an open floor plan bunkroom. One text indicates that many fire departments implement partial height partitions as a low cost means of addressing privacy concerns in existing facilities with a single open floor plan bunkroom. The text points out that partial height walls may be constructed at less cost than full height walls, and that heating and air conditioning, communications, and fire detection or suppression systems would not need to be changed as they might with the addition of full height walls (Berkman, Floren, and Willing, 1999a, p. 72). SJCDES can make an immediate step forward in providing for the privacy of its firefighters by implementing partial height partitions in those facilities with open floor plan bunkrooms, while other more costlier options are considered for future action. The survey did not ask employees to indicate the degree to which one option was preferred over another. While the survey indicates that many respondents preferred single occupancy rooms, it did not address the cost impacts. If the cost of their preferred method meant that other station amenities would be eliminated many firefighters might prefer a less desirable sleeping arrangement.

Departments should also insure that the creation of semi-private spaces does not become an invitation to behavior that would not be permitted in more public areas of the facility. The potential for sexual harassment as identified by Attorney John Dickinson, and suggested by Chief Kefalas (2000) in his article should be addressed by any department that provides semi-private sleeping areas. Policies should clearly indicate that these spaces are not the private domain of their occupants, and that posters or other materials that are not permitted in the public areas will also not be permitted in the bunkrooms or restrooms. The policies should also limit access to semi-private areas to reduce the potential for sexual harassment or inappropriate consensual behavior.

Both female firefighters and officers in SJCDES were asked to identify the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement "The restroom or sleeping facilities available to me while on duty as a firefighter or EMT/Paramedic have made me feel uncomfortable with my career choice, or have sometimes made me reluctant to accept an assignment at a specific station or shift." All of the females and officers surveyed indicated that they disagreed with the statement. This is consistent with the earlier quote indicating that employees will adapt to situations that are less than ideal (Berkman, Floren, and Willing, 1999a, p. 72). Both the survey and the text do not address another possible issue, and that is the possibility that prospective employees, who are not yet adapted to inadequate facilities, may choose not to apply with the department.

One female respondent included a statement that "It doesn't matter to me as much as it matters to my spouse or boyfriend, who don't understand the situation as well."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The SJCDES should adopt the policy for provision and use of bunkroom and restroom facilities for firefighters as shown in Appendix A. The SJCDES should also include training on the policy as a component of training against harassment of employees. The training should emphasize that the goal is to insure that the privacy needs of all employees, volunteer members, and visitors, are respected.

The department should distribute the results of the two surveys, as well as the proposed policy, and they should be discussed at a management team meeting. Support should be sought for implementation of the policy, and any issues raised at that time should be addressed. Restroom designations should be changed to provide separate gender specific restrooms whenever possible, as described in the policy. Appropriate signage should be provided for all restrooms, and locking devices should be provided for all unisex restrooms.

The SJCDES should immediately move to provide partial height partitions in all open floor plan bunkrooms, regardless of whether or not they house mixed genders. Other fire departments with open floor plan bunkrooms should also consider the provision of partial height partitions as an interim measure to improve the level of privacy provided to employees.

In stations with multiple bunkrooms male and female bunkrooms should be formally designated, and personnel of opposite genders should not be permitted to occupy the same bunkroom unless no other option is possible. This recommendation should only be implemented when the rooms assigned for male and female use are comparable in amenities provided.

The SJCDES, and other fire departments, should seek input on the types of sleeping facilities to be provided from representatives of both male and female employees whenever planning remodeling of existing facilities and construction of new facilities. Employees should be involved in the cost/benefit analysis of various options.

Further research is needed to assess the impact of inadequate facilities on efforts to recruit female firefighters. Research into the concerns of firefighter's families raised by unisex sleeping facilities is also needed. The impact this has on the firefighter and career stability should be investigated.

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Appendix A
Survey Questionnaire--Female Firefighters

1. Are you now, or have you in the past been, stationed in a fire/EMS station that did not have separate restroom facilities for men and women firefighters?

(Circle) YES NO

2. Have you ever felt as if you were being treated as a "second class" firefighter because of the restroom facilities available to you?

(Circle) YES NO

3. Have you ever felt reluctant to express your feelings about fire station facilities for female firefighters because it might make you appear to be a "complainer" or otherwise reduce the respect other firefighters have for you?

(Circle) YES NO

4. Please indicate which type of restroom/shower facilities you prefer:

_____ One or more unisex restrooms that are shared by all, with provisions for locking during use.

_____ Male and Female designated restrooms that are restricted to use by a single sex, with equivalent facilities in each.

5. Please number (1-6) the following choices in order of personal preference:

_____ One open floor plan bunkroom facility for all personnel assigned to a station.

_____ One common bunkroom, with partial height partitions to provide semi-privacy for each bunk area.

_____ Two (equal sized) multiple occupancy bunkrooms, with one designated for use of each sex.

_____ Two or more multiple occupancy bunkrooms, with all members assigned to a specific apparatus being assigned to the same bunk room.

_____ Two or more multiple occupancy bunkrooms, with use based on factors other than gender (ie. "snoring" versus "non-snoring").

_____ One sleeping area per firefighter, with full separation from all other sleeping areas (ie. Full height walls and doors).

6. Please circle the number below indicating the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The restroom or sleeping facilities available to me while on duty as a firefighter or EMT/Paramedic have made me feel uncomfortable with my career choice, or have sometimes made me reluctant to accept an assignment to a specific station or shift."

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

(strongly agree)

(strongly disagree)

Appendix B Survey Questionnaire--Fire Officers

1. Are you now, or have you in the past been, stationed in a fire/EMS station that did not have separate restroom facilities for men and women firefighters?

(Circle) YES NO

2. Do you believe that female firefighters have ever felt as if they were being treated as a "second class" firefighter because of the restroom facilities available to them?

(Circle) YES NO

3. Do you believe that the female firefighters may feel reluctant to express their feelings about fire station facilities for female firefighters because it might make them appear to be a "complainer" or otherwise reduce the respect other firefighters have for them?

(Circle) YES NO

4. Please indicate which type of restroom/shower facilities **you** prefer:

_____ One or more unisex restrooms that are shared by all, with provisions for locking during use.

_____ Male and Female designated restrooms that are restricted to use by a single sex, with equivalent facilities in each.

5. Please number (1-6) the following choices in order of **your** personal preference:

_____ One open floor plan bunkroom facility for all personnel assigned to a station.

_____ One common bunkroom, with partial height partitions to provide semi-privacy for each bunk area.

_____ Two (equal sized) multiple occupancy bunkrooms, with one designated for use of each sex.

_____ Two or more multiple occupancy bunkrooms, with all members assigned to a specific apparatus being assigned to the same bunk room.

_____ Two or more multiple occupancy bunkrooms, with use based on factors other than gender (ie. "snoring" versus "non-snoring").

_____ One sleeping area per firefighter, with full separation from all other sleeping areas (ie. Full height walls and doors).

6. Please circle the number below indicating the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The restroom or sleeping facilities available to me while on duty as a firefighter or EMT/Paramedic have made me feel uncomfortable with my career choice, or have sometimes made me reluctant to accept an assignment to a specific station or shift."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(strongly agree)

(strongly disagree)

7. Please indicate which type of restroom / shower facilities you believe **female** firefighters would prefer:

_____ One or more unisex restrooms that are shared by all, with provisions for locking during use.

_____ Male and female designated restrooms that are restricted to use by a single sex, with equivalent facilities in each.

8. Please number (1-6) the following choices in the order you believe female firefighters would prefer them:

_____ One open floor plan bunkroom facility for all personnel assigned to a station.

_____ One common bunkroom, with partial height partitions to provide semi-privacy for each bunk area.

_____ Two (equal sized) multiple occupancy bunkrooms, with one designated for use of each sex.

_____ Two or more multiple occupancy bunkrooms, with all members assigned to a specific apparatus being assigned to the same bunk room.

_____ Two or more multiple occupancy bunkrooms, with use based on factors other than gender (ie. "snoring" versus "non-snoring").

_____ One sleeping area per firefighter, with full separation from all other sleeping areas (ie. Full height walls and doors).

Appendix C

Policy for Provision and Use of Fire Station Restroom and Bunkroom Facilities

General

1) Purpose: To insure that fire station facilities, especially bunkrooms, restrooms, and locker areas, are provided and used in a manner that provides for the privacy concerns of employees, volunteer members, and visitors, and to prevent discrimination as related to the provision or use of those facilities. To insure compliance with Federal OSHA standards regarding provision of restroom facilities for employees.

2) Scope: This policy shall apply to all facilities under the direction or control of the St Johns County Fire and EMS Divisions.

Designation and Use of Restrooms and Bunkrooms

3) In all fire stations with at least two restrooms having a sink, toilet, and shower one of the restrooms shall be designated as a male restroom and one shall be designated as a female restroom. All entrance doors to the room shall be clearly marked as "Male" or "Female", and such signs shall also include a pictorial indicator.

4) In those fire stations having only one restroom fully equipped with sink, toilet, and showers the restroom shall be designated as a unisex restroom.

5) When there is only one handicapped accessible restroom within a facility, that restroom shall be designated as a unisex restroom, and shall be clearly marked with text and pictorial signs indicating its unisex and handicapped accessible status. These restrooms shall be provided with a means of locking all entrance doors while in use.

6) Women shall be responsible for maintaining and cleaning all restrooms and bunkrooms designated for female use.

7) Men shall be responsible for maintaining and cleaning all restrooms and bunkrooms designated for male use.

8) When no personnel of one gender are assigned to a station on a given shift the personnel assigned shall be responsible for cleaning and maintaining all of the facilities provided. To prevent potential embarrassment to visitors or other staff, a sign shall be posted to indicate when facilities are being cleaned or maintained by members of the opposite gender.

9) Except for inspection by supervisors, tours authorized by the station officer, maintenance, or an emergency, no individual shall enter a space designated for use by the opposite gender. Under no circumstances shall anyone enter a bunkroom or restroom facility designated for use by the opposite gender, without advance notice and permission from the occupant.

10) When entering any restroom designated for unisex use, all employees and volunteer members shall first knock and determine that the facility is empty. Employees and volunteer members shall lock the entrance door when using a restroom designated for unisex use.

11) In those fire stations where two multiple occupancy bunkrooms are provided one shall be designated as a male bunkroom, and the other shall be designated as a female bunkroom. (Stations 1, 2, 3)

12) The department shall, within the current or next fiscal year, provide partial height partitions between each individual bunk area in all bunkrooms that contain two or more bunks. First priority shall be given to those facilities that currently have one open floor plan bunkroom and twenty-four hour staffing. (Stations 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14)

Future Actions

13) The department shall recommend that all future facilities be planned and constructed with a minimum of two restroom facilities, each having an equal number of fixtures and being comparable in features.

14) When planning for construction of new stations, or for remodeling of existing facilities, the department shall give a high priority to including any changes needed to provide at least two restroom facilities, with comparable fixtures and amenities. When provided one shall be designated for male and the other for female personnel.

15) The department shall recommend that a committee, including both male and female employee representatives, be utilized to evaluate the design and provision of bunkroom facilities in all new construction or renovation of fire stations. The committee should consider options designed to maximize the privacy provided to employees and volunteer members, while also considering the costs and impact on the project budget for each option.

Appendix D Existing Fire Station Restroom Facilities

| Station/ Year Built | Room | Assigned use | Handicap Accessible | Toilets # | Urinals # | Showers # | Lockable Y/N |
|------------------------|------|------------------|------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 01/1999 | A | Unisex (visitor) | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| | B | Male | Y | 2 | 2 | 3 | N |
| | C | Female | Y | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| 02/1999 | A | Unisex (visitor) | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| | B | Male | Y | 2 | 2 | 3 | N |
| | C | Female | Y | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| 03/2000 | A | Unisex (visitor) | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| | B | Male | Y | 2 | 2 | 3 | N |
| | C | Female | Y | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| 03A/? | A | Unisex | N | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| 04/1978 | A | Unisex | N | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| 05/1985 | A | Male | Y | 1 | 1 | 1 | Y |
| | B | Unisex | Y | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| 06/1992 | A | Unisex | N | 1 | 1 | 1 | Y |
| | B | Unisex | N | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| | C | Unisex | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| 07/? | A | Male | Y | 2 | 2 | 1 | N |
| | B | Female | N | 2 | 0 | 1 | N |
| 08/1997 | A | Unisex | N | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| | B | Unisex | N | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| 09/1998 | A | Male | N | 1 | 1 | 0 | Y |
| | B | Female | N | 2 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| 10/1993 | A | Male | N | 1 | 1 | 4 | N |
| | B | Female | N | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| | C | Unisex | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| 11/1977 | A | Male | Y | 1 | 1 | 1 | Y |
| | B | Female | Y | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| 12/1995 | A | Unisex | Y | 1 | 1 | 1 | Y |
| | B | Unisex | Y | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| 13/1999 | A | Unisex | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| 14/1994 | A | Male | Y | 1 | 1 | 0 | N |
| | B | Female | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | N |
| | C | Male | N | 1 | 1 | 1 | N |
| | D | Female | N | 1 | 0 | 1 | N |
| 15/1980 | A | Unisex | N | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| | B | Unisex | N | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| | C | Unisex | N | 2 | 2 | 2 | Y |
| 17/1993 | A | Male | Y | 1 | 1 | 0 | N |
| | B | Female | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | N |
| | C | Male | N | 1 | 1 | 1 | N |
| | D | Female | N | 1 | 0 | 1 | N |
| 18/1993 | A | Unisex | N | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| | B | Unisex | N | 1 | 0 | 1 | Y |
| | C | Male | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |
| | D | Female | Y | 1 | 0 | 0 | Y |

Format changes have been made to facilitate reproduction. While these research projects have been selected as outstanding, other NFA EFOP and APA format, style, and procedural issues may exist.

Appendix E Existing Fire Station Bunkroom Facilities

| Station | Staff/shift (a) | Room number (b) | Square footage | Designated use | Room type |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| 01 | 2 | 1 | 195 | None | Open |
| | | 2 | 252 | None | Open |
| 02 | 2 | 1 | 195 | Officer | Open |
| | | 2 | 252 | Firefighter | Open |
| 03 | 0 | 1 | 195 | None | Open |
| | | 2 | 252 | None | Open |
| 05 | 2 | 1 | 296 | Shared | Partial height partitions |
| 06 | 4 | 1 | 335 | Shared | Partial height partitions |
| 07 | 0 | 1 | 418 | Shared | Open |
| 08 | 2 | 1 | 97 | Single | Single |
| | | 2 | 124 | Single | Single |
| 10 | 2 | 1 | 288 | Shared | Partial height partitions |
| 11 | 0 | 1 | 200 | Shared | Open |
| 12 | 2 | 1 | 340 | Shared | Open |
| 14 | 2 | 1 | 680 | Shared | Open |
| 15 | 2 | 1 | 182 | None | Open |
| | | 2 | 182 | None | Open |
| 17 | 0 | 1 | 680 | Shared | Open |
| 18 | 0 | 1 | 152 | None | Open |
| | | 2 | 210 | None | Open |

- (a) Indicates the number of career staff assigned to the facility for a twenty-four hour shift. Does not include firefighters assigned to the facility for a daytime shift.
- (b) Room number is arbitrarily assigned for ease of reference.

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