

Service provision heightens return of private fire services

The primary task of a private fire service is to protect the company's assets and the continuity of the business operations. Extra services can be added to that base task, which will increase the return of the private fire service. A win-win situation for the company: valuable personnel capacity is used more efficiently and the company can reduce costs for outsourcing tasks to external service providers. For private fire services it is important that they are 'visible' for their client companies and show which added value they have for the company, on top of their incident control tasks. A brief outline of some practical examples.



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From a business operational perspective there is a dilemma: the risk profile of the company or the rules and regulations from the government demonstrate that a private fire service is required, but that is a relatively expensive solution. After all, the bulk of a firefighter's working hours is not spent on response tasks, because incidents are 'scarce'. Of course a part of the workable hours is spent on preparation, like training, practice and education, but still valuable waiting hours are lost. Hours in which additional tasks could be executed. Those could be safety related tasks, like checking and maintaining handheld fire

extinguishers and stationary extinguishing facilities, training operational health and safety workers, drafting corporate emergency plans and general safety oversight. But in accordance with the client, other additional services could be performed as well. For example, technical maintenance of the company's assets and service vehicles. Of course these tasks should be of such a nature that they can be halted safely at any time when the incident alarm sounds.

Other shift schedule means more workable hours

Crucial in determining how much leeway a private fire service has to perform additional tasks outside of the operational task, is the available number of workable hours. Those in turn go hand in hand with the design of the organization and the

▼ An example of added value services by an industrial fire service: small scale workshop for SCBA refilling and testing.



► Testing and small repairs on fire hydrants by an industrial fire service, at the same time gaining experience with the water mains.

underlying shift schedule. If we assume a professional private fire service with dedicated staff, there are a number of shift systems. Often, there is a 'classic' shift schedule in place. In the Netherlands this means that a private fire service crew is ready at the fire station for 24 hours, after which time the next crew takes over the shift. Of those 24 hours, the evening and night are reserved for rest and sleep. Essentially leaving about two thirds of the shift unprofitable hours, because the firefighters are ready at the station, but do not perform any activities. There are other options too. Various professional firefighting organizations have other shift schedules with multiple shifts in a 24-hour period. The experiences gained both in the Netherlands and elsewhere teach us that such alternative schedules have more workable hours available.

Even more fundamental than the shift system, is the choice whether a company wants or needs a dedicated firefighting service. An alternative organizational model is to task employees in regular production functions with emergency response. These employees will be trained as firefighters, but are not on-call at a fire station. Only when there is an incident are they called away from their regular work, maximizing their productivity. This model is especially interesting for companies with a lower incident frequency. Then the costs and efforts of exploiting a dedicated response organization with incident control as main function are not proportional to the number of actual deployments. Moreover, must the company activities and regular work processes of the 'on-call firefighters' be thus that them being called away for incident response tasks does not create costly additional disruption of the business continuity. This model of non-consigned firefighting personnel is used by relatively many companies.

More involvement

What are arguments for accommodating added value tasks within the private fire service? In the first place, strengthened involvement of the private fire service in the company. A private fire service is a vital chain in safeguarding the process



continuity for a high-risk company. By employing at-the-ready firefighting personnel for other tasks inside the company during their scheduled shift, they become an integral part of the process. That increased involvement leads to a better knowledge of the buildings, installations and processes, which makes it so that the firefighting team knows its way around during an incident, has a clear image of the risks and points of attention and can set well founded priorities.

A second point is the aforementioned heightened revenue of the organization. For tasks like control and maintenance of extinguishing facilities and installations, and executing safety inspections, other external service providers are often hired. If the company possesses a team of trained professionals for whom safety is core business, why could that capacity not be used for such tasks? Accommodating these value added services with the private fire service can have the following advantages:

- Available manpower is utilized more efficiently;
- The private fire service receives a broader set of tasks and more meaningful work;
- More involvement in business operations heightens risk and process knowledge;
- Hiring external service providers for safety related tasks is prevented or limited.

Chemelot/Sitech Case

A few practical cases from private fire services who combine their response task with additional service provision for their clients. First of all, the private fire service of the Dutch chemical cluster Chemelot, in Geleen as provided by facility services company Sitech. Fifteen firefighter technicians are on watch 24/7 to provide collective emergency services for over 60 plants. The value added tasks realized here by the shift crew on duty can be divided in two: a part of the crew performs its regular shift at the station, ready for incident alarms. Another part of the crew is outsourced to various places across the factories in order to perform maintenance and repair work (technical crew, vehicle maintenance, machines and installations). A quick first response is secured by the station crew, while additional personnel move to the station from their working location in case of an alarm. The Sitech private fire service works with a five-shift system in shifts of eight hours, which maximizes the number of available workable hours. By rotating periodically, all firefighters of Sitech switch regularly between waiting shifts and maintenance.

OMV Petrom Case

A case comparable to Sitech is the private fire service of OMV Petrom in Romania. This refinery has outsourced the fire services to an external firefighting specialist (Falck), with a strength of 17 employees on two sites, a number of industrial extinguishing vehicles and an



◀ Providing net cost reduction: Workshop for large scale SCBA cleaning, refilling and testing.

own emergency call and dispatch centre. For this refinery, net cost reduction was the most important driver to incorporate some additional tasks within the private fire service. Aside from the maintenance of their own vehicles, breathing apparatus, clothing and equipment, the private fire service also maintains the handheld fire extinguishers (a couple thousand apparatuses on site), as well as maintains and inspects the on-site fire water mains and instructs operators on their role in case of emergencies.

Moreover, the team provides gas detection apparatuses to contractors who have to execute on site activities. The big advantage for OMV Petrom of this last additional task: all contractors use one type of gas detector, checked and certified according to the strict requirements of the company. This prevents contractors from bringing in their own equipment which may not comply with the demands of the organization, which would in turn delay their work. Another safety related additional task is preparing the crisis management location of the company. The private fire service of OMV Petrom works in two shifts of 12 hours.

Sohar and Amsterdam

Finally, two collective private firefighting organizations that are still in the process of being built, but in which extra tasks form an integral part of the organizational plan. First of all, the Sohar Emergency Response Organization (SERO) in Sohar, Oman which is to become operational in 2021. One collective organization with 6 firefighters, 2 medics, 1 dispatch offer, 1 duty officer, all

dedicated and several operational vehicles is built to protect against the normative scenarios of the young, industrial port of Sohar. Following a meticulous process to draft the dimensions of the needed emergency response organization, and agreeing upon the desired organizational model, the port has chosen to outsource the collective emergency response to an experienced external service provider. A key element in the tender process, which is now in its final stages, is the provision of value added services to the ports approximately 20 companies and thereby net cost reduction. Especially given Sohar's relatively low incident rates, SERO is to become a partner that helps improve the ports safety, rather than providing solely incident response. A starting point is to minimize outsourcing of the inspection and maintenance of SERO's equipment and vehicles, and by extension provide such services for the ports companies. Even more fundamentally, SERO is to focus on ensuring an effective connection with the client companies during incident to ensure a more effective incident response. Activities may range from assisting with emergency plans, to inspection and maintenance of stationary extinguishing systems or training of companies internal emergency personnel, such as a company representative.

This also outlines the developmental plan for the Unified Industrial Fire and Rescue Service Amsterdam (UIFRSA). In this public-private collective fire service for the Western Port Area of Amsterdam, the Amsterdam-Amstelland Safety Authority,

the Port of Amsterdam and a cooperation of the companies settled in the area are working together. The organization will start operations on April 1st 2020. This private fire service will work with an alternative shift schedule, with two shifts of 9 and 15 hours, which makes additional workable hours available. The UIFRSA is based on a six-person firefighting crew that is at the ready 24/7 in the port area. Instead of just the morning and afternoon, each day is comprised of 3 day parts with workable hours, including the evening. These could be control activities for the firefighting organization, but also delegated additional tasks for the member companies. On a yearly basis, that allows 1095 dayparts to be filled with preparatory and/or value added tasks. In close collaboration with the member-companies, the UIFRSA is looking at which extra tasks they can perform for the companies. This process of acquiring new knowledge and exploring organizations is in full swing.

'Be visible for the client!'

Visibility and accessibility are important conditions for a private fire service to strengthen the contacts with corporate management and the collective exploration of possibilities for added value. As support for such a process, examples from elsewhere in the branch can serve a purpose. Benchmark to experience how your peers are organized, and learn from their best practices. The abovementioned practical examples where value added services are already a part of the sets of tasks or are being developed as such, prove that many private fire services and their clients already see the added value of a private fire service as a structural partner for business continuity. The benefits go both ways: the company can save on the extra costs of hiring an external service and can trust to have an involved private fire service that knows the ins and outs of the business processes. On the other hand, the private fire service can add value to its own set of repressive tasks, which allows for variation and fills the workable hours with more meaningful work.

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