

Alan Sorum, Project Manager
Prince William Sound Regional Citizens Advisory Council
P.O. Box 3089
130 S. Meals Ste 202
Valdez, AK 99686

Dear Mr. Sorum,

I am very grateful to have been chosen as the PWSRCAC's contractor for this year's Marine Firefighting Symposium. I'm proud of the finished product and anticipate that the Board will be pleased as well. The project was ambitious in scope and somewhat tight in timeline, but my team produced a Symposium that was very well received and which I hope paves the way for the Symposium to grow and continue to provide much-needed training to Alaska's firefighters. In this report, I've detailed the steps I took to develop the Symposium, the challenges the team faced and how we overcame them, and recommendations for future Symposiums to continue to improve the event.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with this service. I look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely,



Jill Missal

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	3
1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW	4
2.0 SPONSORS	6
3.0 TRAINEES	7
4.0 VESSELS	7
5.0 CERTIFICATION CLASS	9
6.0 REVIEWS AND RATINGS	9
7.0 CHALLENGES	11
7.1 ORGANIZATION	11
7.2 FEDERAL BUDGET ISSUES	12
7.3 VENUES	13
7.4 TRAVEL	14
7.5 REGISTRATION	14
7.6 WEB-BASED INFORMATION	15
7.7 CERTIFICATION	16
7.8 TRAVEL FUNDING	17
7.9 TIMING	17
7.10 ATTENDANCE	18
7.11 ATTENDEE QUALIFICATIONS	18
8.0 SUMMARY	19

ABSTRACT

Background: Every two years, the PWSRCAC hosts an event for Alaska's fire service to provide training regarding land-based firefighters' response to maritime emergencies, in recognition of the risk of fires in the maritime transportation of oil. Funded via a combination of funding sources, the Symposium is open to firefighters throughout Alaska, and usually features events like practical drills, classroom topics, and tours and exercises on working vessels. This event has historically been held in Valdez, Alaska every other year for the past ten years. In 2013, the PWSRCAC opted to move the event to Seward, Alaska, and to do so released an RFP for planning and facilitation of the Symposium. Missal, LLC, dba Jill Missal, was selected as the contractor to provide the requested services.

Results: The 2013 Marine Firefighting Symposium was held in Seward, Alaska from October 9-11 and included an informational panel discussion, a Marine Dockside Awareness certification class, a practical skill-building day, and a day of full-scale drills on working vessels. Forty-one firefighters from fourteen departments attended, and all expressed positive views on the Symposium's offerings. Seward-area organizations and businesses were highly supportive and helpful throughout the planning process and the Symposium itself.

Conclusions: The Marine Firefighting Symposium remains an important event for Alaska's firefighters, and can successfully be offered at new locations in Alaska. The following report details the Symposium and the planning process that led to the successful event.

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

The objective of this year's Symposium was to move the event to a new location in Seward, Alaska in order to provide balanced access for all PWSRCAC communities. This objective was not without its challenges, as Seward is a much different area without a history of involvement with the Symposium. The team's regular contacts in Valdez wouldn't be relevant to the new location. In order to accomplish the task, the RCAC put the project out to bid and hired Missal, LLC to conduct the project. The Missal team was able to successfully identify new partners and venues, secure industry participation, and create added value despite the challenges of starting from scratch to develop the Symposium in the new location.

We launched the Symposium with a beautiful reception with food and non-alcoholic beverages at the incredible Seward Sea Life Center, hosted by the Seward Chamber of Commerce. At the reception, Sponsors were given the option to staff a table to showcase their products or services to attendees. The reception was a relaxed and productive way to kick off the week's activities.



The next morning, we commenced the training at the University of Alaska Fairbanks K.M. Rae Building in downtown Seward. That day was dedicated to classroom training, including the presentation of the new Marine Dockside Awareness classroom hours, led by instructor Gaylen Brevik. We also presented an informational panel dedicated to the theme of "Public/Private Partnerships," intended to highlight the benefits of public organizations working with private businesses to train and respond to incidents in Alaska's seas.





The second day was dedicated to functional exercises designed to build skills and abilities. We arranged a network of skill-building stations for participants, including a search-and-rescue drill using a darkened, smoke-filled maze to teach students how to rescue downed people aboard ships; a raise/lower station for participants to practice litter evacuation techniques; a burn building featuring live fire, allowing firefighters to approach, enter, and maneuver inside a simulated burning ship; and several burn pads on which firefighters practiced utilizing a variety of fire extinguishers to attack fires of varying types. It was a full day of practical drills, on which we built the final day's full

scale exercises. Not a minute was wasted, as even lunchtime was dedicated to education via a presentation on air monitoring systems.

The third day tied all the classroom and skill building exercises together with live drills on real ships. Attendees performed search and rescue drills in smoky atmospheres on moored vessels, going on board via ladders from the dock and from the fire boat. Attendees learned how to maneuver inside the tight spaces aboard ships, including techniques for tying off air packs and other equipment to fit below decks. After the practical session, the students came together for lunch and wrapped up the Symposium by taking their Marine Dockside Awareness Exam under the supervision of a State of Alaska examiner. It was a fantastic three days, and with such an incredible reception from the people and organizations of Seward, it's apparent that the Symposium was a great success in the new location.



2.0 SPONSORS

Obtaining sponsors during a time of particular scrutiny of the oil and gas industry that coincided with financial and organizational difficulties for the Federal government, including the shutdown that affected all Federal operations, was quite challenging. I was fortunate to have gained the support of many local organizations and industry sponsors:

- Sponsorship, assistance, and certification support from the **Seward Fire Department**, which also provided fire trucks and personnel, the Department's Fire Boat for use in practical exercises, and loaned out air packs and gear to participants. The SFD was of critical importance to the Symposium, as without the above-and-beyond support of this State of Alaska-accredited organization, we would have been unable to offer the Certification piece at the event.
- Financial sponsorship and organizational assistance from the **Seward Chamber of Commerce**, which was also of great help in identifying venues and other potential participants and sponsors.
- For the first time in Symposium history, sponsorship and attendance from **IFSTA/Fire Protection Publications** and **Oklahoma State University**. Dr. Anthony Brown of OSU's Fire and Emergency Management Program attended the Symposium to provide attendees with information on OSU's career-advancing degree programs designed for fire service professionals.
- Staff support and facility coordination from **AVTEC**.
- Financial contribution and attendance at the reception from **Crowley**.
- Financial contribution from **Scott Safety/Eagle Enterprises**, which also provided a booth at the Reception to show attendees their products. Representatives from the company attended most of the events and were very pleased with the Symposium, assuring us that they would very much like to be included again in the next Symposium.
- Travel assistance from **Alaska Travel Source**.
- Travel assistance to attendees from the **State of Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management**.
- Cooperation and assistance from the **Seward Harbormaster**.
- Vessels from **Kenai Fjords Tours**.
- Vessel from **Foss/Anderson**.
- Vessel **Bering Explorer**.

3.0 TRAINEES

Over sixty people registered to attend the conference. Unfortunately, the Federal government shutdown occurred in the days just prior to the Symposium, and quite a few participants were forced to back out - notably the USCG, which had intended to send five trainees but ultimately could only send one. Still, we ended up with forty-one attendees, a number on par with past Symposiums. Participating organizations included:

- Seward Fire Department
- Gustavus Fire Department
- T&T Salvage
- Anchorage Fire Department
- Whittier Fire Department
- Kachemak Bay Emergency Services
- Homer Fire Department
- Capital City Fire Department (Juneau)
- Nome Fire Department
- Valdez Fire Department
- Kenai Fire Department
- Bear Creek Fire Department
- World Safety International
- American Marine
- United States Coast Guard



4.0 VESSELS

My site visit to Seward in the summer of 2013 produced ample options for utilizing vessels for the training. While the glamour of a “big ship” or tanker was appealing in some ways, we soon realized the utility value posed by smaller, working vessels such as the ones we ultimately utilized. Utilizing a working tanker or barge for training is difficult because of tidal and business schedules, as well as the potential for unintentional damage to such a vessel and the inability to utilize smoke machines inside a working vessel. We found that the smaller vessels available in Seward were easily accessible, readily adaptable to training scenarios, and not otherwise at the mercy of commerce-oriented scheduling. Their owners were able to commit to the Symposium

well ahead of time. Ultimately we settled on using the following vessels with the much-appreciated involvement of their owners and crew:

- **Kenai Fjords Tours *Chugach* and *Kenai Explorer*** – these tour boats offered convenient moorage – they were already in slips just adjacent to the harbor parking lot – as well as stout construction designed for heavy tourism use and ready availability, as most tours had closed for the season and the vessels were not otherwise engaged.
- **Tug *Junior*** – Foss/Anderson loaned us their tugboat and ensured that it was moored in proximity to the Kenai Fjords boats during the Symposium.
- ***Bering Explorer*** – a working vessel in well-used condition, this large vessel was the perfect example of conditions that firefighters might encounter in the real world. The Bering Explorer posed unique challenges not otherwise found on vessels in newer condition. We thought its labyrinthine layout was perfect for challenging symposium participants.

The vessels were ideal for the training, and participants enjoyed a day of exercising their skills in real-life situations.



5.0 CERTIFICATION CLASS

The new State of Alaska Marine Dockside Awareness standard was still in the development phase when this project started, and we had to proceed with the utmost flexibility as we developed the schedule of training for the Symposium to allow for the potential inclusion of this certification class.

Holding a State of Alaska firefighting certification class requires that the course be preapproved by the Alaska Fire Standards Council via sponsorship from an accredited body, as well as the presence of a State of Alaska Certifying Officer. We originally planned for AVTEC to provide this piece as per its stated intentions; however AVTEC was not able to obtain accreditation in time for the Symposium. In the month before the Symposium, it became apparent that we would have to find another way to offer the certification class. The Seward Fire Department, already an accredited department, graciously agreed to help us with this piece, sponsoring the class and providing their training officer, Dale Butts, to ensure that the class was held according to Alaska Fire Standards Council procedures.

Alaska Fire Standards Council Executive Director Gordon Descutner traveled to Seward to administer the exam on the final day of the Symposium. The certification hit a snag when post-exam discussions revealed that the test had inadvertently included questions directed to participants in the much more in-depth Marine Firefighting 1005 Standard. Because we had only covered Marine Dockside Awareness topics, many participants were not able to accurately answer the more advanced questions. Mr. Descutner took decisive action and revised the exam immediately afterwards, removing the incorrect questions and rescoring the exams. After the exams were rescored, we were pleased to see that all but one participant had passed the exam, and a large portion of the attendees obtained a perfect score, reflecting the accuracy of the team's instruction according to the Marine Dockside Awareness standard.

6.0 REVIEWS AND RATINGS

Attendees were asked to rate each module (day) individually, and were asked about the quality of instruction, the venues, the topics, and course content. Attendees consistently rated the Symposium highly. The practical exercises by far were the most well-received, and attendees loved anything physical they were able to practice. Utilizing the Bering Explorer for drills was

another highlight, as attendees placed high value on real-world scenarios. Attendees also appreciated the live fire exercises, and the inclusion of fire extinguisher training was valued as well.

We gathered input from students for each individual class. The actual scores reported by attendees are as follows:

Day One: Discussion Panel and Certification Class

Average Scores (1 to 5):

Quality of Instruction: 4.37

Venue: 4.2

Topics: 3.96

Course Content: 3.74

Sample Comments:

“The real experience of the instructors is great.”

“John [Lewis] and Gaylen [Brevik] are very good!”

“Group exercises with fire plans were fantastic – studying the plan and learning where to start in a situation that turns into an emergency was really helpful.”

“John [Lewis] had great experience and knowledge to relate to all topics.”



Day Two: Skill Building Stations and Burn Building

Average Scores (1 to 5):

Quality of Instruction: 3.9

Venue: 4.1

Topics: 3.96

Course Content: 4.1

Sample Comments:

“Direct experience of instructors was great.”

“Ship attack/rescue set up was the best part of the day’s training.”

“Amazing props, really creates a good environment for learning.”

“Good refresher of skills.”

“The fire extinguisher part helped understand how much fire can be put out with a fire extinguisher.”



Day Three: Full Scale Drills on Vessels

Average Scores (1 to 5):

Quality of Instruction: 4.2

Venue: 4.7

Topics: 4.4

Course Content: 4.2

Sample Comments:

"All of the hands-on training was great. Going into the Bering Explorer in smoke brought the whole thing together."

"Great training and instructors, everything came together in the end."

"Actual travel through smoky compartments was great training."

"Being on the vessels, going through what we have learned was the perfect conclusion."

7.0 CHALLENGES

There is no shortage of challenges presented by a project like this. I'm very pleased to report that my team was prepared to remain flexible and respond to any given issue at any time. From the difficulties of traveling to a relatively remote location in Alaska, to setting up a day's exercises only to find early the next morning that facility janitorial staff had dutifully cleaned up and put away all of the equipment that had been so carefully arranged for the next day's activities; we tackled every aspect of the Symposium with enthusiasm and dedication.

7.1 Organization

Challenge: The Symposium has been organized by the same team the same way for many years. This was adequate in years before, but improving and expanding the Symposium to a new location required a more systematic organizational process. Putting the Symposium out to bid, as the RCAC did, is the proper way to increase the effectiveness of a project and for that decision the RCAC should be lauded for recognizing this important step. As with any endeavor, there were some "growing pains" as we addressed the substantial challenges of moving the

Symposium to not only a new location with a new type of management and many additional players. Predictably, duplication of effort was a problem, as there were a few “too many cooks in the kitchen” working on some of the logistics at the same time given all the entities involved outside of the consultant team. Some members of the consultant team were used to executing the Symposium the same way it was done in years past, and needed to adjust to the new requirements of the endeavor. Coordination ended up working out just fine but with the PWSRCAC directing some inquiries to me and some inquiries to other entities, things got a little confusing at times. I have no doubt that in future Symposiums, the organization will become more seamless. Though everything of course came together in the end and we had a great event, we will nevertheless continue to strive for improvement for the benefit of the PWSRCAC and the attending firefighters.

Recommendation 1: Establish one point of contact on the project team and direct all inquiries and organizational issues to that point of contact. This can ensure that efforts are not duplicated, and that the consultant team can be responsive to the issues and requests that come up.

Recommendation 2: While the established method of running the Symposium in Valdez was effective for a while, in order for the event to grow and improve it should take a step forward in organizational style. The planning process should take place earlier on, with a class agenda firmly in place before registrations are open. The six months preceding the Symposium could then be dedicated exclusively to registrations, promotions, and logistics. 18 to 24 months is a more realistic time frame when planning to move the event to a new location in the future.

Recommendation 3: During our after-action review process, we concluded that in some ways we tried to meet too many objectives and could have simplified our list of goals to make the organization of the Symposium more streamlined. Trying to meet all the same objectives while adding new levels of complexity made the endeavor more challenging than in years past; adjusting expectations to align more accurately with stated goals and objectives is always reasonable. In the end we achieved all objectives, though, and are even more prepared for the next time, should the PWSRCAC wish to hold the Symposium in another new location.

7.2 Federal Budget Issues

Challenge: We were unable to secure significant Federal involvement this year despite indications on the positive side at the beginning of the project. The Federal government shut down the week before the Symposium, preventing most Federal agencies from participating despite their previous commitments to do so. For example, the Coast Guard initially signed up five attendees, but regretfully had to withdraw from participation, citing the government

shutdown and budgetary issues. However, the USCG did participate in the panel discussion and was able to allow one person to participate in the courses. It was fantastic to have their participation and maintaining this positive relationship would be advantageous to future Symposiums.

Recommendation: Develop positive relationships and maintain current relationships with Federal agencies. There may not be much RCAC can do to affect government crises like the shutdown, but any and all connections are beneficial for participation in a big event.

7.3 Venues

Challenge: At the start of the project, the assumption was that we would be utilizing AVTEC facilities to hold the classes because of verbal commitments from the school and its stated interest in supporting the Symposium. However, AVTEC is inactive during the summertime, and we were unable to secure AVTEC venues in the time we had to plan the event.

For some aspects of the Symposium we opted to hire other Seward venues, which at the time had staff on site and could commit to the event and allow us to continue the planning process in a timely manner. Once the venues were secured, the organization of the event was more seamless, but significant time was devoted to attempting to obtain commitments from AVTEC before turning to other options. Fortunately that gap was readily filled by willing participants from other Seward organizations who stepped up to provide support during the summer and make the necessary commitments in time for the planning process to continue. The PWSRCAC was ultimately able to reach an agreement with AVTEC to use some of its facilities; however this issue wasn't resolved until uncomfortably close to the dates of the Symposium. Having this piece in place well ahead of time would have been advantageous, though the PWSRCAC and the consultant team did the best they could to resolve it in a more timely manner throughout the planning process.

Recommendation: When the PWSRCAC identifies a preferred venue, the PWSRCAC should be sure the vendor is fully committed to the task and able to participate in the planning process. A written agreement regarding what the vendor is prepared to offer can be valuable. This keeps expectations clear and spells out the relationships between entities. This also prevents back-room maneuvering and protects the prime contractor and the PWSRCAC from being manipulated by timelines; contracts hold the contracted entity firmly responsible for delivering promised services.

Challenge: The instructors indicated that they felt “pigeonholed” into making the AVTEC facility work and coming up with ways to use it rather than deciding what skill building topics they wanted to cover and identifying the most appropriate venue for the chosen activities. The facility presented some restrictions regarding what type of exercises we could offer, and would not have been suitable for a bigger group of attendees. Using the AVTEC facility also presented transportation and meal challenges that took considerable resources to address. We had to shape the Symposium to fit the venue rather than the other way around.

Recommendation 1: Ensure that contractor has appropriate leeway to design course content and choose venues that are most applicable. The burn building was a great addition to the Symposium, but not strictly necessary for the event to be successful. In future Symposiums, weigh options and benefits carefully to ensure maximum productivity. The focus of the Symposium should be on quality training, not on showcasing a particular venue.

7.4 Travel

Challenge: Seward is on the road system just two hours from Anchorage, which we at first thought would be an asset in attracting industry partners and attendees. However, Seward lacks one important amenity: commercial flights. This wasn’t too much of an issue and Seward’s proximity to the road system made the Symposium accessible to many departments who otherwise wouldn’t have been able to participate, but recognizing the limitations imposed by the difficulties of travel in Alaska is important to the future success of the Symposium.

Recommendation: Travel in Alaska is never without its challenges. Having the Symposium in a variety of locations over the years can ensure maximum participation from Alaska’s firefighters. Some of Seward’s firefighters didn’t participate in this year’s event because they’d been to the Valdez event already; had they known it was coming to Seward they could have planned accordingly.

Recommendation 2: Establish a long-term schedule for future Symposiums in different locations.

7.5 Registration

Challenge: Registration of attendees was problematic in some ways. Departments were quick to verbally request spots in the class, but most times weren’t able to identify the specific personnel they wanted to send to the Symposium. Convincing them to fill out the very simple paper registration form was difficult, prompting the necessity of direct phone calls to every

potential department to try to secure registration information. It was challenging to firm up a class schedule, obtain training materials, and plan transportation for the Symposium, not knowing exactly how many people to expect.

Recommendation 1: Web-based registration would be infinitely beneficial. Filling out a web form seems to be less onerous for people than a paper form, as moving to electronic mediums becomes more prevalent throughout business and government organizations. Web forms can also collect more accurate information and eliminate the problems created by handwritten forms (undecipherable handwriting, blank form fields, etc.).

Recommendation 2: Charge a nominal fee for registration. Free registration seems that it would benefit attendees, but becomes problematic for organizers who can never quite pin down how many attendees might show up. Charging a nominal fee to register for the Symposium will increase commitment; once a person or organization has committed funding to an activity, they are more likely to follow up and attend. While it may not seem intuitive, charging a fee for a service increases the perceived value of that service. Fees collected could be utilized to assist with funding for travel or for disadvantaged departments, covering costs of food for attendees, or for improving the Symposium in other ways.

Recommendation 3: Consider limiting the number of participants. The purpose of this would not be to reduce the numbers of participants, but to make planning and logistics more accurate and productive. With the current model, much time is devoted to planning for contingencies should more participants show up than expected. Knowing that there will be a cap on participants, and improving the registration process to give organizers a better idea of how many participants to expect will exponentially improve the Symposium. A cap on participants may also inspire attendees to register earlier (though I concede that this is hard to control and that, historically, the members of the Alaska fire service, and Alaskans in general, are slow to commit to an event and usually don't register or plan to attend until just before the event itself. Being cognizant of this tendency is also important for planning the Symposium).

7.6 Web-Based Information

Challenge: It was difficult to keep the web site updated with current information, and confusing to potential participants to have so many points of contact.

Recommendation: Facilitate contractor management of web-based registration and information.

7.7 Certification

Challenge: For the first time, this Symposium offered a State of Alaska certification: Marine Dockside Awareness. This certification utilized a brand new standard and was the first time the exam was administered within the state. The inclusion of a certification class is a positive development, as documented training hours and certifications are important to firefighters and departments. The required classroom time dictated how the Symposium would have to be organized, which imposed a few more restraints than the instructor team was used to dealing with. The instructors are resourceful and experienced, though, and were readily able to restructure the Symposium to accommodate the certification.

Our most substantial challenge was finding an accredited sponsor for the class. AVTEC had originally agreed to provide this piece, but was unable to secure their accreditation in time. We were fortunate to secure the participation of the Seward Fire Department, already an accredited training agency in Alaska, to assist in offering the Certification course. I greatly appreciate the Seward Fire Department's willingness to step in to help us with this piece on short notice, and extend my appreciation to Chief Eddie Athey and Assistant Chief Rob Mathis for assisting me with this task.

Thanks is also due to the Alaska Fire Training Council's Executive Director, Gordon Descutner, who graciously traveled to Seward to administer the exam. He provided essential assistance when feedback from attendees revealed that the exam presented had included a significant number of test questions from a higher-standard, much more advanced course, and students were concerned that they were not able to pass the test. Mr. Descutner took swift action to correct the situation, and corrected the test questions and test results so that scores were taken only from test questions appropriate for the Marine Dockside Awareness standard. After this correction, we could see that the vast majority of participants (all but one) had passed the test and obtained certification, most with a score of 100%. My appreciation is extended to both Mr. Descutner and to the participants for their patience and willingness to work through the "bugs" of this brand new certification program.

Recommendation: Including unknown quantities in a three day training class can lead to challenges beyond what such an endeavor already presents. Offering certification classes in

future Symposiums should be restricted to certifications already readily available and in place in the early stages of planning. We were fortunate to have the Seward Fire Department to turn to in order to complete this piece.

7.8 Travel Funding

Challenge: State of Alaska DHS&EM assisted with a travel grant for attendees from outside the PWSRCAC service area. While a valuable addition to the assistance available to firefighters, the grant came through very late in the planning process and we likely lost attendees due to inability to commit to the travel. The travel grant also included prerequisites of which the project team were not aware during initial planning. The travel grant required recipients to have current HAZMAT Operations level, which can be problematic for small, volunteer, and/or remote communities and departments.

Recommendation 1: Time the Symposium to allow more space between fiscal year grants and the Symposium itself to ensure maximum financial support from the State. Take care to not overlap with other State of Alaska events to ensure that State staff aren't overloaded with the administrative burden resulting from planning travel for so many attendees.

Recommendation 2: DHS&EM personnel report that this piece created a high administrative burden on its staff. They acknowledged that there is little way to prevent this, as the work to plan attendees' travel is by nature time consuming. The suggestion of DHS&EM was simply to be cognizant of this issue in future Symposiums and, like my team did this year, stay in close contact with State personnel to facilitate the process as much as possible. The Recommendations relating to registration may also be of benefit when addressing travel funding challenges.

7.9 Timing

Challenge: Scheduling an event of this magnitude can be difficult in Alaska's short summer and fall season. This year there were a number of challenges to pull off the event on the dates chosen. A number of overlapping events ended up being scheduled on top of the event, leaving us unsure of how much participation we would obtain and whether attendees would be able to get their travel arranged in time..

Recommendation 1: There is little way to prevent any and all scheduling conflicts, but providing as much advance planning as possible is a good way to ensure maximum involvement. Creating a long-term schedule of Symposiums will increase the effectiveness of planning as well as providing ample notification to other entities of the Symposium's schedule.

Recommendation 2: Consider offering the Symposium in the winter months. This will be less ideal in regards to weather, but will present an even more realistic scenario for which Alaska's firefighters should be equipped and may not have as many scheduling conflicts.

7.10 Attendance

Challenge: Having the Symposium in a new area of the state was generally positive, as it enabled participation from departments who may not otherwise have had the opportunity. Some local firefighters had already attended Valdez events, though, so for those people the relocation didn't have a benefit. Many attendees wanted to know where the next event would be held, and it would be advantageous to be able to give them this information.

Recommendation 1: Develop a schedule of Symposiums indicating where and when they will occur, so departments can undertake long-term planning. Additional locations should be identified, including but not limited to:

- Kodiak
- Cordova
- Whittier
- Kenai

Recommendation 2: Begin the planning process at least 18 months ahead of time, preferably two years. There are incredible facilities and locations throughout the region that could be leveraged to provide an amazing variety of Symposium activities and keep the event fresh and exciting. It was clear during this planning process that nine months was not the optimum amount of time to organize the event in an entirely new location.

7.11 Attendee Qualifications

Challenge: There was a substantial disparity in the experience level of attendees. The student background was too varied to meet all of the tasks efficiently. Experience of attendees varied from senior captains from full-time departments to people who had never before worn bunker gear or utilized an SCBA. We had expected this and were able to address it, in part by pairing less experienced students with more experienced firefighters, and by utilizing the Seward Fire Department's Training Officer to perform an SCBA familiarization class before going "on air" for the practical drills.

Recommendation: Add a field to the registration form so that attendees can indicate their level of experience before arriving at the Symposium. Knowing this information ahead of time will

help organize the classes to provide the maximum benefit. Two tracks might be possible; one for experienced firefighters and another for beginners.

Recommendation 2: Consider prerequisites for the Symposium, depending on the topics to be presented and the skill level required to perform the practical exercises. All skill levels can be taught at the Symposium, but a specialized “advanced” Symposium may be worth considering every other event. Since there is proven, consistent interest in the Symposium, alternating an introductory level track with an advanced skills track at each Symposium may be a worthy option to consider.

8.0 SUMMARY

Despite all the challenges of moving the Symposium to the new location, it was obvious from the level of welcome and support we received in Seward that it was a resounding success. The community, and in particular the Chamber of Commerce, was enthusiastic about holding the event in Seward and demonstrated the ways in which the event can benefit the community in which it is held. The Symposium allowed many firefighters to learn new skills, network with other responders, and increase their preparedness for marine emergencies. We were able to produce a well-received Symposium despite a time of financial unrest for the country and with no lack of challenges, which in itself is an achievement for which all involved should be proud.

The Symposium is an important service performed by the PWSRCAC and I have no doubt that in future years it can be even better. It is my belief that the Symposium can grow to become a key event for the fire service and the oil and gas industry in the state of Alaska. The Symposium could be designed on a cycle to build on each event while maintaining accessibility for less-experienced firefighters. Should you wish to utilize any my above recommendations, I stand ready to assist you to make each Symposium better than the last.