



Facts

Local 1908 of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) has been disseminating incorrect information about the reorganization of the Clark County Fire Department. We believe it is important to set the record straight.

First, the union aired in July 2010 an erroneous and misleading television spot that claimed: “It's a question of judgment. Rory Reid says he's trying to contain costs, yet he's approved promotions and pay raises for County bureaucrats this year. Simultaneously, Reid shut down one of the most important rescue teams in Southern Nevada, its heavy rescue that uses Jaws of Life when horrific car crashes trap victims. The team pulls victims from raging waters during flood season. They're a lifeline for high-rise buildings on the Las Vegas Strip. The savings? A little over 1 cent a day per resident. Go to Rory Reid's threat.com.” Let's review its claims and the reality of what is occurring:

Claim: “It's a question of judgment Rory Reid says he's trying to contain costs, yet he's approved promotions and pay raises for County bureaucrats this year.”

The reality: This is simply false. The only County employees who the County Commission can promote or award a salary increase to are the county manager and certain elected officials. In some cases, the board has delegated the authority for salary increases to the county manager; in other cases, the board has authorized such increases through the approval of collective bargaining agreements such as those with the IAFF. As for the county manager, she has not received a salary increase from the Board since 2007. It is, however, true that several people were promoted into Fire management positions, by the Fire Chief with the approval of the county manager. Five individuals were promoted into budgeted, vacant management positions. However, the five individuals, in the aggregate, took more than a 10-percent salary reduction as a result of having to forfeit a number of union premium and specialty pays.

Claim: “Simultaneously, Reid shut down one of the most important rescue teams in Southern Nevada, its heavy rescue unit....”

The reality: It is a fact that the County recently took its heavy rescue unit out of service to reduce spending in the Fire Department and eliminate redundant services. However, the county manager, rather than Commissioner Reid, made this decision. It was based upon the recommendation of Fire Chief Steve Smith, who consulted with all other valley fire departments and the fire union prior to submitting his recommendations to the county manager. The assertion that Commissioner Reid shut down this unit is simply not true. Please refer to the county manager's report to the entire County Commission.

Claim: “Simultaneously, Reid shut down one of the most important rescue teams in Southern Nevada, its heavy rescue that uses Jaws of Life when horrific car crashes trap victims. The team pulls victims from raging waters during flood season. They're a lifeline for high-rise buildings on the Las Vegas Strip.”

The reality: The spot's assertion that public safety is put at risk through this agreement is simply not true. The spot implies that Clark County's heavy rescue unit is the only emergency response apparatus equipped to handle emergencies such as auto accidents requiring the Jaws of Life, swift water rescues and high-rise building emergencies. These assertions are **false**. The heavy rescue unit is not a first-responding unit, whereas all of our engine, truck and rescue units are. A typical engine company, fully equipped and staffed, will respond to approximately 10 times the number of emergencies to which the heavy rescue unit responds. In most instances, the heavy rescue unit responses do not, in fact, require specialized equipment or skills beyond that available from a regular engine unit responding to an emergency. Both Las Vegas and Henderson fire departments have swift water rescue certification.

Further, the spot is misleading in that it doesn't state that, currently, Clark County, and the fire departments of both the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas effectively serve the public across jurisdictional lines through mutual aid and automatic aid agreements. Under these agreements the City of Las Vegas Fire Department responds to heavy rescue incidents within unincorporated Clark County, thus allowing the County to eliminate this duplicative service. Further, the practice of one jurisdiction providing emergency services for all others is already in place for services such as bomb detection and emergency dispatch.

Finally, since the spots started running, the union is seeking to have its employees, who are no longer performing the aforementioned services, continue to receive "specialty pay" associated with that assignment.

The union has been making other unsubstantiated claims outside of those in the aforementioned television spot. To wit:

Claim: Two heavy rescue units responded to 2,000 calls and is the County's "most important" fire apparatus.

The reality: The County heavy rescue unit was dispatched 996 times. However, it was cancelled while in route 70 percent of the time and arrived on scene 296 times. Arriving on scene is a better measure of whether an emergency actually exists rather than dispatches. The typical County fire engine (E34) arrives on scene far more often at 2,199 times.

The heavy rescue and hazardous material units are dispatched so infrequently that these services could be provided by other departments. The public safety impact of this option is minimal when compared to any other option. Only after analysis of emergency call types, volume, response times, and the impact on other surrounding units workload, did the fire chief decided to take these units out of service.

Claim: Commissioner Reid launched the campaign to take heavy rescue services away.

The reality: Commissioner Reid directed the Fire Chief to examine if specialty emergency services could be regionalized. That is, one department provides the service in return for other services provided. Among the city of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas and County fire departments this model currently exists with the "bomb squad" and Fire Dispatch Office. Both the County and city fire chiefs concluded that the city could respond to both heavy rescue and hazardous materials calls without impacting public safety. Further, responding to these calls would help offset the 4,000 calls the County responds to within the city.

Claim: Fire Chief Steve Smith is not a heavy rescue expert; those who run the calls are.

The reality: Fire Chief Steve Smith has 30-plus years of fire experience, was promoted up through the ranks (Fire Fighter, Paramedic, Engineer, Captain and Battalion Chief) and held numerous emergency operations positions and has responded to and/or commanded some of the valley's largest emergencies (MGM Fire, AERO Tech explosion, and Monte Carlo fire). He has a thorough understanding of department operations, resources and equipment utilization and, for these reasons, is as much of an expert as anyone he supervises.

It also should be noted that the Fire Department's bid system allows employees to bid in and out of stations every two months and as such, the union's assertion of who the "experts" are, are subject to change.

We would also mention the Fire Chief met with both union officials and heavy and hazardous material teams prior to a final decision being made. No arguments significant enough to warrant shutting down other units rather than the specialty units were advanced.

Most recently, the IAFF disseminated a "news release" that contained numerous inaccuracies.

Claim: "According to county officials, the Las Vegas team was only expected to respond to less than 100 emergencies a year."

The reality: In the vast majority of cases (probably 95 percent of them), the units are cancelled in route or not given an assignment when they arrive on scene.

Claim: "Since the heavy rescue and hazardous materials teams have been decommissioned just over 30 days ago, the Las Vegas units have responded to 87 life threatening emergencies within Clark County's jurisdiction."

The reality: In the vast majority of cases (perhaps 95 percent of them), the heavy rescue and haz-mat teams are turned back when it is determined they are not needed at the scene.

Claim: "The heavy rescue team has also responded to several severe car crashes, including a recent incident where a husband and wife were pinned in the car waiting for the Las Vegas Heavy Rescue team to make the much longer trip across the valley, while their son was in the back seat with a severed arm."

The reality: One person was trapped but the engine crew that was dispatched to the scene was able to extricate her without the assistance of a heavy rescue unit. The child was outside of the vehicle when units arrived.