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# 2021 FIRE SERVICE PREDICTIONS

What does 2021 have in store for the fire service? We know COVID-19 will continue to cast a long shadow over the fire service as we navigate budgets, public healthcare support, and responder well-being. We've compiled the trends we believe are the most important to pay attention to this year. Accompanying each trend is a recommended action you can take to help you be successful in 2021.

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## PREDICTION 1

# Provider safety will continue to be a core issue

Responder and provider safety – especially around mental health and well-being – has been a key topic for the last few years. However, 2021 will see the safety and wellness of responders being stretched to the limits as we continue to experience a massive surge in COVID-19 encounters. There is significant risk of exposure to disease, physical exhaustion, and mental/emotional burnout across the board.



## TAKE ACTION

- ✔ **Provide Support & Resources for Crews.** In pre-pandemic times, a firefighter's daily experience was already stressful, with burnout being a leading contributor to leaving the fire service. Now more than ever, it is essential to check in with your crews to get a sense of their well-being. Create an avenue for receiving education around mental health, physical health, and other resources to support employees who may feel taxed by the pandemic's longevity.
- ✔ **Track PPE & Safety Equipment Usage.** Protecting ourselves is one of the most critical actions we can take at this time. However, as we saw in 2020, accessing and maintaining adequate PPE levels can be a challenge. Ensure you track PPE usage on all calls so you know what supply levels are needed for response. To reduce exposure risk, look to software that can document PPE usage for operational reporting and any exposures at the personnel level. **ESO Incidents** and **ESO Electronic Health Record (EHR)**, both allow users to track PPE. Additionally, integration with **ESO Personnel Management (PM)** captures an individual's exposures on their personnel record automatically, so all pertinent exposure information is in one place.

## PREDICTION 2

# Budgets will be severely affected by COVID-19

While we've seen some fiscal impact of COVID-19 on fire service budgets, the worse is yet to come. We will see the true effect of COVID-19 over the next 6-18 months as organizations enter new budgetary cycles and experience constraints. Resources will be trimmed to minimal needs, fewer heads will be added, there will be small capital adjustments, and departments will be pushed hard to use data to show justification for allocated dollars.



## TAKE ACTION

- ✔ **Unlock Your Data.** Data is the key to unlocking and justifying your budgetary needs. However, you'll need to first make certain all data entered into your reports is accurate and robust. Work with your crews to emphasize the importance of the information they enter into reports and take advantage of software with built-in progressive validation tools, such as **ESO Fire RMS**, to keep records pristine and complete. In doing so, you'll have a more powerful tool for understanding your departmental needs and the ability to pull rich reports for budgeting, resources, and more.
- ✔ **Take Advantage of Grant and Other Assistance Programs.** From FEMA grants to privately funded opportunities through foundations, several grant and assistance resources are available to fire departments. Use sites such as **Fire Grants Help** and **Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG)**, as well as other **FEMA grants**, to find financial relief, assistance with PPE purchases, and even mental health care for providers.
- ✔ **Educate Elected Officials.** The elected officials in your community often have competing and worthy financial priorities. To highlight your needs, look to be an educational resource for your representatives. Share what essential services you provide, get specific on funding needs and what ROI they will deliver back to the community, and make your data easily accessible and understandable.

## PREDICTION 3

# Recruitment will be a key area of focus

Two significant events in 2020 will have an impact on recruiting in 2021. The stress and strain of COVID-19 is increasing retirement and decreasing the desire to enter the fire service (which is very different from the effects of September 11); and even though fewer heads will be added due to budget constraints, there is an increased focus and emphasis on inclusion when it comes to recruiting, meaning the fire service needs to be more reflective of the community it serves in terms of demographic composition.



## TAKE ACTION

- ✔ **Shape Community Image.** From drama television shows to the news, it is easy to form an unrealistic opinion of firefighters' daily lives. You should look to educate your community on what services your department provides beyond what is often displayed in popular TV shows. Consider creating a weekly post on social media or your website that highlights specific metrics, programs, and other initiatives your organization is taking to truly offer a community safety net.
- ✔ **Invest in Smart Technology.** As workforce demographics shift, paper and outdated processes that lack technology may hinder your applicant pool. Instead, show applicants you're invested in them by providing connected tools and practices to help them succeed in their job. Today's technology should match the younger audiences you want to attract, so choose a Fire Records Management System, such as **ESO Fire RMS**, that has a modern user interface, feels natural to use, and sets your crews up for success.
- ✔ **Interact, Include, and Influence.** Interact and communicate with all cultures in your response area to help them feel included. Additionally, this will help you attract the best people from all different backgrounds and lifestyles in the community. Use sites like IAFC's **Guide for Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department** for tips and guidance to help you accomplish this goal.

## PREDICTION 4

# Fire Service will grow in public health responsibility

Fire departments will be expected to take on increased responsibility in their communities around major events and public health emergencies. For example, in many places, fire departments are being identified as key sites for clinical care when it comes to the treatment of patients, supporting emergency management, and filling gaps in community safety – especially in light of COVID-19. Departments will be stretched to do more with fewer resources.



## TAKE ACTION

- ✔ **Prepare and Educate.** From new protocols and expectations to global pandemics and everything in between, the fire service is never the same from year to year. Help current and new responders understand, train, and prepare for their role in the fire service, including ever-changing environments in which they will be called on to help mitigate, prevent, or recover.
- ✔ **Leverage Your Crew's Skills.** Lead your organization into serving the needs of the community over the traditional services of a fire department. Take advantage of your staff's skills, knowledge, and experiences from EMS and rescue events and apply those to new tasks and services related to community health and safety.

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### **About ESO**

ESO is dedicated to improving community health and safety through the power of data. Since its founding in 2004, the company continues to pioneer innovative, user-friendly software to meet the changing needs of today's fire departments. ESO currently serves thousands of customers throughout North America with a broad software portfolio, including its modern, cloud-based **ESO Fire RMS**. For more information, visit [www.eso.com](http://www.eso.com).