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Study Evaluates Effectiveness of Fire Crew Sizes

Mayor's office criticizes study, says it only covers small portion of the type of fires crews face

By [Kim Vatis](#) | Wednesday, Apr 10, 2013 | Updated 8:40 PM CDT



The city's Inspector General had estimated a cost savings of \$54 million if staffing was reduced from five to four for every fire department apparatus. Kim Vatis reports.

It was staffing issues that led to the last firefighters strike in 1980, and with potential cutbacks for firehouses looming, Chicago firefighters on Wednesday were pointing to a new national study that shows staffing can and does make a difference between life and death.

"Now we have the scientific data to back up what we were saying," Chicago Firefighters Union Local 2 President Tom Ryan said Wednesday.

He said the findings of [the study, conducted by the National Institute of Standards and Technology](#), are compelling. If Chicago cut just one firefighter, going from five to four on an engine, it could cost firefighters nine to 12 minutes to finish life-saving tasks.

"If there's any chance of survival, any chance of extinguishment, you have to have enough people ready to go, on staff, properly equipped," he said.

Looking at rescues alone, having five versus four crews means firefighters could complete high-rise searches 29 percent -- or 13 minutes -- faster. The first victim could be rescued 28 percent, or 11 minutes faster, and a second victim 32 percent, or 17 minutes, faster.

The study notes that simply adding crews later won't help.

"It ignores the fact that larger crews have tactical advantages," said Ryan. "You need bodies, boots on the ground, ready to get upstairs to do whatever they have to do to mitigate the situation to save lives."

Inspector General Joe Ferguson had estimated a cost savings of \$54 million if staffing was reduced from five to four for every fire department apparatus.

Chicago Ald. Bob Fioretti (2nd) called the study an "eye opener."

"I think the people of Chicago ought to be saying, 'Give them a contract. Give them a fair contract,'" he said. "I think before cuts are made we ought to be darn clear how the public is being affected."

Officials in Mayor Rahm Emanuel's office poked at the study, saying it only focused on staffing for high-rise fires, which are just a small portion of what the city handles. Officials said they continually evaluate staffing needs.

Firefighters have been without a contract since June 30 of last year.

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