

The following is what the speaker, PA State Rep Ronald Buckston, delivered to the members attending the bi-monthly meeting on Sept 20, 2009 in Highspire PA, Dauphin County. The speech was well received, and with Rep Buckston's permission, it was decided to be printed in the newspaper for all to read.

PA Fire Police Association

Good afternoon.

Thank you for inviting me to be with you today.

Since their birth nearly seventy years ago, fire police in Pennsylvania have maintained a very specialized niche in the increasingly sophisticated emergency field.

Most people only see fire police in their call of duty. They are the first, first responders we see regulating traffic at the scene of a fire or accident. You are the living warning signs of 'Danger Ahead', assisting the general public.

However, what most people don't realize is a fair number of you are also fully qualified firefighters and are members of a local fire company who know how to expertly coordinate safety procedures during emergencies.

When the siren calls, as a first responder you have the large responsibility of answering. It is the merging of all of the trainings, the necessary certification, and requirements that come together in a matter of minutes. And while these too may go unrealized, it is within that commitment in demonstrating the protection of your fellow citizens that sets you apart.

Take all of us here today – we come from all over central Pennsylvania and from different walks of life. As a first responder, none of that matters. When the siren sounds, there is no separating man from woman, rich or poor, black, Asian, Hispanic or white. The only thing that matters is that help is on the way.

The reverse is also true. Not many among the general public stop and distinguish between EMS personnel, firefighters, local law enforcement and fire police. The untold story of what it takes to achieve your familiar blue light is the real story. The fact that state law makes it a felony to assault a fire police officer the same as assaulting a state trooper speaks to the importance we assign the job of fire police.

I mentioned a moment ago that we're all different, yet where we come from is probably very similar. Given the frequently overlapping jurisdictions of municipal police departments, fire companies and other emergency services, the seemingly routine professionalism shown by fire police under potentially dangerous circumstances is a testament to your special qualifications and collective work ethic.

So many people across the state owe their property and their lives to first responders – to perfect strangers. That cannot be matched. But as a lawmaker I can do my best to say thank you.

We are indebted to you. We owe it to you to acknowledge that debt, and work to get fire companies and rescue organizations the help they need.

Nearly every citizen of Pennsylvania is dependent on volunteer firefighters and rescue squad members for their safety – whether they realize it or not.

Even those living in communities served by paid services will certainly travel through areas of the commonwealth that are protected by volunteers.

Therefore, it is absolutely essential that the state continues to work as closely as possible with our dedicated volunteers to continue their tradition of providing the best possible fire and rescue services.

I cannot think of a more valuable contribution to the people of Pennsylvania than the one that you have given them. Your dedication, your bravery, your heroism is truly an inspiration to us all.

To you the few, on behalf of the many, I'm grateful for the work you do for all of us, and we thank you.

PA Rep Ronald Buckston