



The Vermont Legislative Research Shop

User Fees for Firefighting

User fees allow for those citizens who utilize specific services to pay for them as opposed to a tax burden that disperses the fees for services amongst all citizens. Since the mid 1970's three-quarters of local governments in the United States and Canada have adopted user fees in one form or another (Berman 1997).

Types of User Fees at Fire Departments

The Fire Service Financial Management textbook written by the Federal Emergency Management Agency indicates that the additional revenue generated through user fees assists in the maintenance of fire departments (FEMA 1997). The United States Fire Administration in its book lists the following as the more common fees charged by fire and emergency medical service agencies (FEMA 1993):

fire prevention fees i.e. permit fees, insp

on a departments fire prevention program (Godwin 1995). As a result many departments have opted to charge for re-inspection fees as opposed to charging for the initial inspection.

False Alarms

There are various fees associated with false fire alarms. These are similar to fees assessed by the police department for responding to false burglar alarms. It is noted that in fire response to a false alarm, an element of danger was created for the general public and the fire department. This is due to the fact that in the false alarm, valuable resources were utilized unnecessarily and firefighters were unavailable for actual fires or other calls. Charging a fee for these particular types of responses not only assists in fire department costs but also helps to address concerns related to fire alarm system maintenance. It is

The Fire Service Institute of Iowa State University Extension suggests the following schedule of fees (Callahan and Oster 1999):

Grass fires \$100 - \$300

Car fires \$150 - \$500

Commercial fires \$300 - \$1,000

Residential fires \$300 - \$500

Hazardous material fires \$100 per truck + \$30/hour/firefighter.

State Data

Iowa

In 1996, 3% of fire department in the state of Iowa accessed fees for fire fighting, 35% for water rescue, and 65% charged fees for hazardous materials spill response. Many departments also charge for EMS services as well (Callahan and Oster 1999).

Arizona

Rural/Metro Corporation provides private sector fire protection in parts of Arizona. In some communities they serve, where the local government does not offer fire protection services and/or there is no tax base to support fire protection, Rural/Metro contracts directly with individual homeowners and business owners who pay annual subscription fees for fire protection (Rural/Metro Corporation)

Insurance Companies

Iowa, Institute of Public Affairs.

<http://www.state.ia.us/government/dps/fm/fstb/assessingfees.PDF> March 11, 2002

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This report was completed by Erik Weibust, Lauren Haymond and Charles Megivern under the supervision of Professor Anthony Gierzynski on March 13, 2002 in response to a request from Senator Vince Illuzzi.