



City of Philadelphia – Fire Department Brown-Out Frequently Asked Questions

What is a brown-out?

A brown-out is a common used phrase in fire departments. It is when you take an engine or ladder company out of service temporarily and re-distribute the staff for either training or to fill in personnel gaps in other companies.

Are brown-outs new?

The Philadelphia Fire Department has been using brown-outs for years to pull on-duty personnel out of service to receive training – typically about 5 companies for training. Rather than assigning companies to training, they will brown-out 3 companies and assign personnel to other stations that require staff and brown-out only 2 companies for training. The Department will also do this on a rolling basis, which means they will rotate which companies will be on a brown-out for personnel replacement, so that no one company is constantly out of service.

Many other departments around the country use this as a tool as well, for training and filling in positions at other company locations and have used it during these hard economic times to preserve jobs by significantly reducing overtime costs (i.e. Los Angeles, Boston).

How much will the City save and how are savings achieved?

The City will save an estimated \$3.8 million from the General Fund budget by reducing overtime costs. The way it works is when a company goes out of service or is “brownd out” the piece of equipment is no longer used, but the personnel (5 on a ladder company, 4 on an engine company) are redistributed to other in-service companies that require staff because someone is out on leave time.

Normally when there is needed personnel in other companies the Department would call someone in for work and pay them overtime. Using brown-outs will allow the Department to redistribute its personnel and pay everyone with “straight time” (normal shift pay). This effort will reduce the need for overtime costs significantly and help to achieve the \$3.8 million in savings.

Who will respond when a company is brownd-out and what will happen to response times?

A surrounding engine or ladder company that is fully staffed will respond to the emergency. The Department will continuously be reviewing any fluctuations in response times based on personnel and equipment deployment to insure that we are responding to the needs of our citizens 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

How were companies chosen for brown-outs and what is the plan?

Companies were chosen based on large amounts of information and data related to:

- Size of the service area and capability of perimeter companies to respond
- Response times
- Workload based on number of “runs” for fire and EMS incidents
- Unit Hour Utilization (UHU) - how often a company is responding to incidents
- Facility security

The schedule is for 3 engine companies to brown-out during the day shift and for 3 engine companies to brown-out during the night shift. The Department is increasing hours of service for 2 medic units for a total of 40 additional hours per week to ensure EMS capacity.

