



FIRE DEPARTMENT • CITY OF NEW YORK
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2012 – OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL YEAR EVER

NEW YEAR BEGINS WITH 1ST PROBIE CLASS IN 4 YEARS

Congratulations on your outstanding performance in 2012. By any standard, last year was one of the most successful in the 147-year history of the FDNY. We recorded the fewest civilian fire fatalities (58) in any year since accurate record-keeping began in 1916. EMS averaged the fastest response time to life-threatening medical calls – despite the highest call volume ever (1.3 million). Fire units also achieved near-record response times, despite handling the second highest number of incidents ever (494,354, second only to 2010 when fire units responded to 507,430 incidents).

While the year will be remembered for the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy, equally memorable in my view was the tremendous courage, skill and dedication of our fire and EMS personnel – not only saving hundreds of lives during the storm, but also for your selfless work in the days and weeks that followed. The fact that so many of you were personally impacted and nonetheless worked tirelessly to help friends, neighbors and total strangers to recover, is extraordinary. In the face of disaster, you went above and beyond; your professionalism and dedication to the City and the communities where you live and work was exemplary.

WELCOMING PROBATIONARY FIREFIGHTERS

Also, last year, we concluded the most successful recruitment campaign in FDNY history, which attracted the most diverse group of people ever to take the open competitive and promotional firefighter exams. More than 40,000 people took the test, and this month I swore in the first group of Probationary Firefighters in four years. I am very pleased that we have Probies in training, not only because we are now building back up to our budgeted headcount (we were down 750 firefighters), but also because of the fresh enthusiasm and energy they bring to the Training Academy and the Department.

The current class of Probies, promoted from their positions as EMT's and Paramedics in EMS, are the first of several thousand firefighters we plan to hire in the next few years. This class is the most diverse in FDNY history, with 42 percent people of color. On January 8, Mayor Bloomberg and I welcomed them into the fire service at their swearing-in ceremony. There, I told them that the next 18 weeks of their lives were likely to be some the toughest they have ever experienced. I said to them:

"Understand something very important: Just as on the exam you took to get here, you will be judged solely on how you perform. From this moment forward, nothing else matters: not who you know and not what you've done before - but what you do from this moment on."

That is how it will be for every Probationary Firefighter who comes through the Academy in 2013 and in the years to come. In order to graduate, they must learn the job and be able to do it well. When the Probies are assigned to firehouses all over the City, I expect each of you to do everything you can to welcome them into the Department and encourage them to do their best to become top-performing firefighters. We need you to support and guide them, to share your experience and knowledge about how to work effectively and safely, and to include them in all aspects of firehouse life.

FUTURE HIRES

We expect to hire another class of 320 Probationary Firefighters in late July. This class will be comprised of the remaining EMS promotional candidates, "Priority Hire" candidates (as determined and ordered by the Federal Court), and possibly some candidates from the Open Competitive list. Whether we hire off the Open Competitive list for the July class will depend on how many Priority Hires are eligible and can be hired.

Up to 293 individuals may be eligible for appointment as Priority Hires who took the 1999 and 2002 tests but were not hired. While we do not know at this time how many Priority Hires there will be, a list for Priority Hires will be established in the coming months under the direction of the Federal Court. In order to be considered for the 293 positions, these candidates must meet all current qualifications for the position of firefighter (except age limit), including passing the computer-based exam, which was administered earlier this month; passing the physical (CPAT); and successfully meeting all other requirements including medical, psychological and background checks.

As I've previously communicated, retaliating against any Priority Hire or any member who receives or attempts to receive compensation as part of the litigation is strictly prohibited. Disciplinary action will be taken against anyone who is found to retaliate in any manner.

INCREASING DIVERSITY IN OUR RANKS

I am very proud of our unprecedented success in recruitment -- and specifically in attracting so many applicants from underrepresented groups. For nearly a decade it has been a key initiative for the Department to strengthen the force by increasing diversity in the firefighting ranks. This has been a "Top 5" goal in every Strategic Plan since 2004. In 2002, 22 percent of the test takers were people of color. In 2007, that figure jumped to 38 percent and in 2012 it was 46 percent. This is real progress that demonstrates the Department's ongoing commitment to improving the diversity of our workforce.

The improvements we have made over the last decade in recruiting a more diverse pool of applicants has coincided with continuing changes in the type of work we do. More and more of our work involves closer interactions with the City's many multi-cultural communities, including medical responses (which constituted 44 percent of our workload last year) and an increasing amount of inspectional and educational work. Greater diversity in our ranks will allow us to benefit from different perspectives, talents and language skills, which will help us better serve all communities.

We are increasing diversity without changing our high standards. There is no doubt in my mind that the recent firefighter test was fair and job-related. The 2012 exam was developed by PSI, an external professional test-making firm. The Court had found prior exams to be discriminatory in part because they were not validated as required by law. Unlike those tests, the 2012 exam was carefully and properly validated. More than 1,400 current firefighters and fire officers participated in the development of the exam and the validation studies. And for the first time, the test developer performed a "Criterion Study", which sought to confirm that the test was a valid predictor of future job performance. They did this by seeing if scores on a developmental exam (which was just like the real one) correlated with: (1) FDNY officers' anonymous evaluations of 742 actual firefighters; and (2) those actual firefighters' test scores during Probie School. Through this process, it was demonstrated that firefighters who performed better on the developmental exam generally received better evaluations from their officers and scored better in Probie School. Based in large part on this Criterion Study, the Court approved the exam.

Our leadership now -- in this area of diversity and inclusion -- is critical. Using rank-order hiring we will be swearing-in thousands of men and women in the next few years. These future classes of firefighters will continue to be among the most diverse we have ever seen, with more people of color and women entering the Fire Academy than ever before. Our instructors will teach those Probies to become effective firefighters, as they did for all of us. It is our opportunity, and our challenge, to ensure that the FDNY becomes the national leader in recruitment, diversity and inclusion, just as it is in operations, training and prevention.

Again, congratulations on your spectacular performance in 2012. I am enormously proud of our accomplishments - including operating more safely despite a record number of responses - and I know that we will continue to achieve great things in 2013 and beyond.

I thank you for your extraordinary service to this Department and this City, and I wish you and your families a happy and safe New Year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Salvatore J. Cassano". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Salvatore J. Cassano, *Fire Commissioner*