

**NOTES FROM THE FIRE BARN**  
**Fire Service Expectations (part 1)**  
**Lt Rob Dixon**

Welcome back. Last week it was proposed that we consider five levels of service. Respected members of the fire service feel it is a bad idea to try and define a level of service. That due to the multitude of unforeseeable events that may occur, doing so sets the fire service up for failure in the eyes of the public. I see their point. However, in my first column I stated that one of my goals was to break down communication barriers. To discuss what we do in the fire service and why, a common base of understanding must first be established. Let's define the expectations associated with these levels of service:

**Minimum Exposure Protection** accepts that lives and property of the fire building may be lost, with a **high** probability of significant damage to nearby structures. (Non-burning nearby structures are called *exposures* in the fire service) The expected level of service is to prevent a fire from continuing to burn freely and out of control.

**Maximum Exposure Protection** accepts that lives and property of the fire building may be lost, with a **low** probability of damage to exposures. The expected level of service is to prevent a fire from damaging structures not already involved in fire.

**III. Industrial Protection** strives to minimize the loss of life, property, and production. The expected level of service is quick detection and suppression of fire without interrupting production.

**Residential / Life Safety Protection** strives to minimize the loss of life, and property. The expected level of service is timely rescue of victims and minimizing damage to property not already lost.

**Progressive & Proactive** strives to prevent loss of life and property. The expected level of service is strategic and involves intervention, education, and code enforcement.

The service levels just defined are not in any dictionary or textbook. They are based on theoretical capabilities. One of a hundred variables could have a catastrophic effect on the expectation. Every fire is unique and presents its own set of problems that need to be overcome. To increase the readers understanding of these expectations I want to closeout this weeks column by providing two examples of minimum exposure protection, and continue with examples of the remaining four next week. We can discuss the variables in the future.

Areas that currently have minimum exposure protection include Hanover, Milton Plantation, and South Arm. All depend on an outside agency for fire service. If there is a structure fire up at Richardson Lake (South Arm), from the time Andover is alerted, four to six minutes pass before volunteers arriving at the station go en-route (En-route is a term that signifies apparatus (fire trucks) are responding to the call.) A twelve-mile uphill run takes twenty, to twenty-five minutes. Thirty minutes will have passed before any water is put on the fire. Most likely exposures are burning, and the original fire building is fully involved and destroyed. Hanover contracts to Rumford for fire protection. Rumford, with four career firefighters on duty, will be en-route within two minutes. Drive time to Howard Pond (Hanover) is approximately fifteen minutes. Responding with three firefighters and two apparatus Rumford will have water on the fire in less than twenty minutes from the time they were alerted. The original fire building is likely heavily involved in fire, and exposures are probably beginning to catch fire. With two of the three initial firefighters operating apparatus, one is left to actually fight the fire. It is unreasonable to expect one firefighter to contain a large fire. Until more help arrives it is probable that significant damage will occur to the exposures and the fire will continue to grow.

**Rob Dixon is a 20-year veteran of the fire service. He is a Certified Municipal Instructor with Maine Fire Training & Education, and a career Lieutenant with the Rumford Fire Department. Rob is also a Volunteer Captain with Andover Fire Department, and a 2005 graduate of the State of Maine Fire Officer I Academy.**