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Ministry of Public Security | National Fire
and Rescue Authority

The National Fire and Rescue Authority – Training and Exercises for Potential Threat Scenarios



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Background

The National Fire and Rescue Authority ("The Authority") operates by virtue of the National Fire and Rescue Authority Law of 2012 for the purpose of saving lives and property, increasing fire safety and extinguishing and preventing fires. The Authority began operating in February 2013 as a national State Organization sponsored by the Ministry of Public Security. The Authority has been delegated the authority and the obligation to ensure firefighters' levels of qualification for these tasks through the provision of training, exercises and equipment according to its units' tasks. By virtue of their roles, firefighters are required to be prepared and ready at all times to respond immediately to firefighting, extrication and rescue missions.



Key figures

**More than
40,000**

Fires occur annually in Israel at an average of more than 100 fires per day.

126

The number of fire stations in Israel, which covers only approximately 50% of the urban region and at a response time of 11 minutes.

1,641

Firefighters and commanders in the Authority, man approximately 72% of the operational positions.

**NIS 1.59
billion**

The Authority's basic budget according to the multiyear plan proposed for the years 2019–2023, which has not yet been approved.

607

Firefighters were injured on the job in 2019, compared to 432 in 2017.

70%

Of the training courses scheduled for completion by November 2020 were completed on schedule.

1,695

The number of firefighter positions still unmanned compared to the target set in the Authority's potential threat scenarios.

1,302

Hazardous materials incidents occurred in 2019, accounting for approximately 9.5% of all incidents handled by firefighters.

Audit actions



From March to August 2020, the Office of the State Comptroller intermittently audited the Authority's array of training courses and exercises. The audit examined the certification of firefighters' operational qualifications, the array of training courses and exercises in response to the Authority's potential threat scenarios and labor relations in the Authority. Data from the Authority's computerized training management system were used during the audit in order to examine the performance of the training and exercise programs. The audit was performed in the Authority, and supplementary examinations were performed in the Ministry of Public Security.



Key findings



Staffing of firefighter and commander positions – Out of 2,289 positions designated for operational roles, 1,641 firefighter and commander positions were actually filled in July 2020 (72% of the positions). Even if the multiyear plan for 2019–2023 is approved and implemented, the Authority will be short of 554 firefighters (approximately 17%) in order to meet the required staffing needs for the potential threat scenarios defined in 2018.



Indicators of firefighters' operational qualification – As of the audit completion date, obligatory indicators of firefighters' operational qualification had not yet come into effect and therefore, have not been implemented. As a result, the Authority has been operating for years without any situation reports on firefighters' operational qualifications, or on their level of professional qualifications, and readiness for all types of threat scenarios, on their level of physical fitness or whether their medical status is compatible with the proper performance of their missions.



Disparity between the planned training courses and the courses actually provided – As of November 2020, 70% of the scheduled firefighter training courses were provided according to schedule. In recent years, the Authority has not succeeded in implementing the training program that it had defined as essential in order to ensure adequate operational qualifications. Disparities were also found between the planned training courses and the courses actually provided from 2017 to 2019. The continuity of the training courses and exercises is frequently disrupted for various reasons, largely due to organizational measures.



Investigations – The Authority's own investigations have found operational inadequacies that require resolution through the provision of training courses and exercises. Conclusions that were repeatedly drawn from previous investigations have not been implemented in the units.



Inadequacies in the level of professional qualification – Inadequacies in firefighters' levels of professional qualification were found in several competencies. These inadequacies illustrate the need to provide training and exercises in an ongoing orderly manner for certifications in the following competencies: underground fire extinguishing and rescues; fire extinguishing and rescues from high-rise buildings; fire extinguishing at photovoltaic power plants; handling hazardous materials; and rescues from elevators.



Underground fire extinguishing and rescues – The audit found that staff work was not performed and no program was designed for providing an operational response to



emergency incidents involving an underground fire, including in railway tunnels. The Authority does not provide adequate training for responses to underground emergencies including railway tunnels. Despite the critical need for training exercises in a simulation center in order to practice firefighting in tunnels, the Commissioner decided to cancel such exercises. Previously, the exercises were carried out abroad. The commissioner canceled the exercises due to organizational pressures. Alternatively, the construction of a training center including simulations of firefighting in tunnels in Israel available to all rescue forces has neither been planned nor promoted.



Firefighting at photovoltaic power plants – Firefighters' knowledge and operational experience relating to firefighting at photovoltaic power plants is inadequate. Therefore, supplementary training and exercises should be provided.



Elevators – Elevator training courses for mentors have not been provided for firefighters since December 2015.



Training doctrines – The operating doctrines of the Doctrine and Training Division, the Fire and Rescue Academy and the Simulation Center, which specify the roles, spheres of responsibility and relevant work procedures, have not yet been approved.



The Office of the State Comptroller commends the commencement of operations of the Simulation Center, which is used as a professional training facility designated for training exercises to increase the skills needed by firefighters and related agencies.

The Office of the State Comptroller commends the Fire and Rescue Academy's concerted efforts to develop and advance training programs for firefighters and to supplement training courses according to the emerging needs over the years.

Key recommendations



It is appropriate that the Minister of Public Security and the Authority analyze the disparity between the Authority's proposed multiyear plan for the years 2019–2023 and the Authority's requisite staffing needs in accordance with the potential threat scenarios defined in 2018. He should consider the impact of this disparity on the Authority's ability to provide life-saving services to the residents of Israel and to perform adequately its mandated roles during routine times and during emergencies.



The Authority should analyze and develop tools to ensure firefighters' high level of operational qualifications, including professional, physical and medical fitness. The Authority, the Ministry of Public Security, the Civil Service Commission and the Salary and Employment Agreements Department of the Ministry of Finance should jointly decide



on the retirement age for operational firefighting positions and should complete formulating their joint response for situations when firefighters are unfit to carry out their roles.



It is recommended that the Minister of Public Security consider regulating the matter of ensuring firefighters' operational qualifications while exercising its statutory authority to enact regulations. The Authority should rectify the deficiencies found during the previous audit, to analyze and develop tools to ensure firefighters' high level of operational qualifications and to utilize fully all of its operational work force's potential. Concurrently, the Authority should take action to minimize, to the extent possible, the adverse impact on firefighters who are incapable of continuing to perform their operational roles due to their failure to attain the requisite level of qualification. Effective dialogue between the relevant parties is necessary to rectify the findings reported in the previous audit in 2017.



The Authority should analyze the audit findings and data and the controls over the planning and execution processes of the training courses and exercises and should eliminate all of the deficiencies that have accumulated over recent years due to insufficient training and exercises.



The Emergency Department of the Ministry of Public Security should complete the formulation of a national master plan that will engage in responses to scenarios of railway incidents in tunnels and should operate multi rescue exercises to help assimilate the plan and improve the qualification and readiness of all emergency response rescue agencies to react to this scenario.



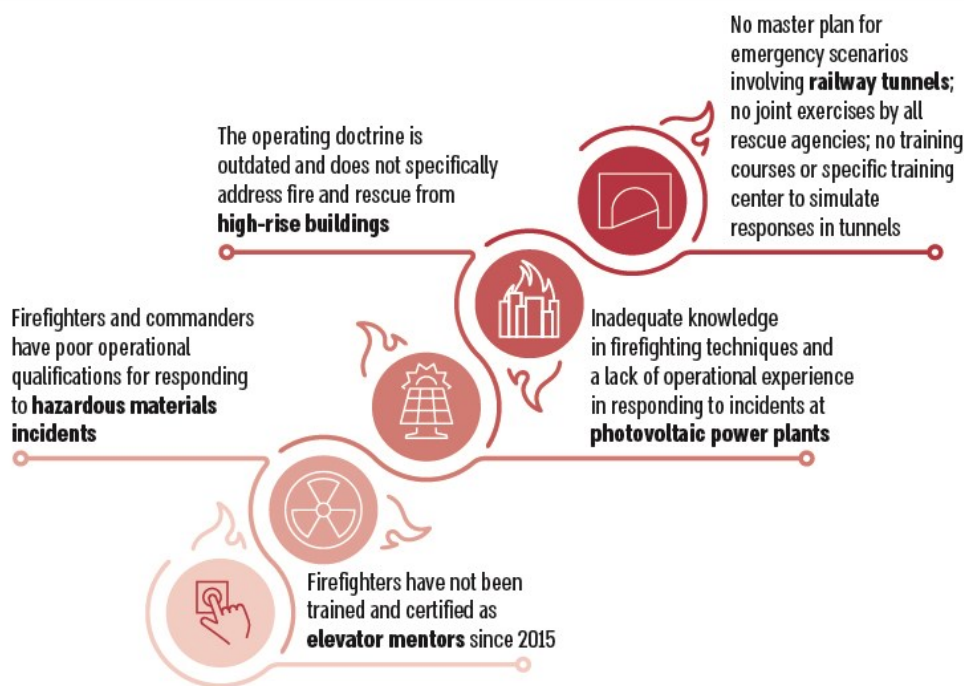
The Authority should take action to validate an updated detailed operating doctrine for responding to fires in high-rise buildings by utilizing all data in its possession. Concurrently, the Authority should appropriately prioritize and make progress in developing the training courses needed in the Fire and Rescue Academy on the subject of high-rise buildings. It is recommended that the courses include training videos and virtual-reality training kits.



The shortage of hazardous materials responders in the southern district may detract from the district's level of competency and readiness to carry out its missions. Therefore, it is recommended that the Authority fill the vacancies, inter alia, considering the government's declared intention in recent years to promote the relocation of industrial plants from Haifa Port to unpopulated regions in the southern district



Main inadequacies in firefighters' operational qualifications by threat scenarios



Summary

The National Fire and Rescue Authority is responsible for saving lives and minimizing property damage resulting from fire and hazardous materials incidents, and for extrication and rescue missions during routine times and during emergencies. The Authority has the responsibility and obligation to ensure its level of qualification and the qualifications of its employees through the provision of training, exercises and equipment for its units' tasks.

This report notes various deficiencies in the Authority's array of training courses and exercises, including: improving firefighters' operational qualifications, the actual implementation of training and exercise programs and disruptions in the continuity of training courses and exercises, as well as deficiencies in filling vacant operational positions. This report describes a situation in which regularly scheduled training courses and exercises as defined in the



Authority's work plan have not been performed for quite some time. These circumstances give rise to concerns that the quality of the operational responses to events has diminished because of organizational measures that included the discontinuance of training, exercises and certifications, which necessarily results in firefighters steadily diminishing response preparedness.

Considering that the Authority is the emergency response agency responsible for saving lives, the Authority should collaborate with the Ministry of Public Security, the Civil Service Commission and the Ministry of Finance, to rectify the deficiencies reported in the previous audit and in this audit – each agency in its field. This will help ensure firefighters high standards of operational qualifications, and abet the Fire and Rescue Authority's professional activities protecting the residents of Israel, and providing the requisite staffing for potential threat scenarios. It is recommended that the Minister of Public Security analyze courses of action that will facilitate these corrective actions and ensure that they are implemented.

