

Chief: Fire department was lacking

□ The police chief found Winter Park in need of equipment and policies during his stint as public safety director.

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By Karen Pankowski

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WINTER PARK — The fire department lacked written and enforced policies, didn't keep equipment up-to-date and needed stronger plans for some emergencies, a report by Police Chief Jim Younger says.

Younger oversaw the department as public safety director until Fire Chief Dennis Sargent was hired in June.

In a report covering his three months with the fire department, Younger listed 34 areas of concern — some of which have already been corrected.

Sargent said he agreed with Younger's assessment and said he had used many of the chief's observations to help draft his short-range goals.

"There were a lot of problems and a tremendous amount of rough edges," Sargent said, adding that Younger had "paved the road for me and made it a lot smoother."

Sargent said he also has appointed a new deputy chief. James White, 29, a training manager for the Myrtle Beach, S.C., Fire Department, will start Monday. He will be paid \$46,972 annually.

Younger said the major problems before Sargent arrived had started with the top and filtered down to the firefighters, who had been without a fire chief since November.

"I didn't see a chain of command or discipline. I didn't see records being kept or administration or direction," he said, "and that leads to tremendous frustration for a firefighter. I can understand why they were frustrated and angry."

In his report, Younger wrote that he was "astonished to learn that it had been seven years since any member of the department had actually been in a fire for training purposes." He said the department had been a member of the Central Florida Fire Academy for two years but had not trained there.

At Younger's behest, the department has been training at the academy's center for the past few months.

Younger also set up policies in the department, such as a uniform dress code and a policy outlining mandatory training, physical fitness tests and medical fitness standards.

After investigating a complaint that firefighters had watched X-rated movies on the job, Younger set up a sexual harassment policy and training for the firefighters.

Recently, Lt. Fire Inspector Lyn Wright, the person he appointed to handle sexual harassment problems in the department, accused Younger of making unwanted sexual advances toward her while Younger was her supervisor.

Younger denies the allegations. The city's Civil Service Board and an outside investigator have both started investigations into the matter.

In June, the department purchased \$5,000 worth of new gear to

replace unsafe equipment. In addition, 16 sections of hose were ordered to replace hose that had rotted. Younger had reported that there was no program for a routine inspection and replacement of gear or hose.

The department's hazardous materials team needed to gather information on hazardous materials stored in businesses in case a

fire strikes, Younger said. Fire inspectors needed to place more emphasis on large buildings, such as hotels, to make sure they are inspected annually, he said.

Sargent said he still is evaluating the department, but he continues to update and write new policy and boost communication and accountability within the department. He is placing added emphasis on training and planning, such as for a rail disaster or major

storm.

In addition, Sargent said he is considering getting rid of a \$200,000 platform truck the city bought in 1980 because it is too heavy, too big and too difficult to drive in most residential areas. Instead, Sargent said he will look for a smaller, lighter truck.

Sargent said he intends to update the department and "ensure that the community gets its money's worth," he said.

*City of Winter Park
Govt
Fire Department*