

A Fire Museum -the need

THE DICTIONARY describes the word "museum as; "A building used for the storing and exhibition of objects illustrating antiquities, natural history, arts, etc." Antiquities as; "customs, events, etc., of ancient times; ancient relics." Let's face it, there are a few walking relics left who add to the general knowledge of the history of fire fire-fighting and fire safety because of first hand experience of where the fire industry has come from and why? However, will they be around when it counts? We think not. So how do we secure this type of information for the future? Through the means of a museum, of course. That knowledge promotes an understanding of the evolution of standards, legislation and equipment, that cannot be gainsaid. Simply put, it is often necessary to revisit the past to interpret the correct way forward.

All too often, the difficulties of an uninformed group of people trying hard to update standards are experienced. Protracted debates, even arguments, develop during meetings intended to deal with regulation revisions or subjects as basic as fire extinguishers. The reason? Committee members do not have the experience of previous decision processes, or have lost contact with the issues at hand. References to the rationale behind a requirement or recommendation are not usually accessible at the time, so unless someone recalls the process that went before, time is wasted and the debate starts again. So history plays an

important part in promoting understanding, particularly in the outcomes-based education process that we aspire to today.

So too, is the learning process propelled forward when aspirant fire prevention practitioners begin to know what the intention of a regulation clause is rather than learning the clause parrot fashion. A scary example is the fire officer who after a site inspection of a flammable liquid store, wrote, "The floor is to be intrinsically safe." Clearly, he had no clue as to what he had learned, or how it was supposed to be applied.

The need for a fire museum in this country goes beyond its role as a source of education and learning. The ever-changing emergency service personnel profile shows that the only way to replace lost experience is through effective training. The word that best describes this process is "experiential learning", which can only come from a base of historical understanding of our evolution as preventors, suppressors and protectors from fire.

Access to this store of knowledge and the sad fact that so much of our history is being lost or decimated through the loss of fire equipment and vehicles, has prompted the Board of the FPASA to begin the process of establishing a fire museum at the Fire College premises. It will be used to house the current collection of memorabilia and historic artefacts and the Association will actively seek donations and acquisitions, which will



be available for posterity. When such articles are taken into the FPA Museum, they form part of an inventory and become a permanent asset, which in terms of the company's Articles of Association, cannot be dispersed. To quote from this legally binding document; "If, upon the winding up or dissolution of the Association, there remains, any property whatsoever, the same shall not be paid to or distributed among the members of the Association but shall be given or transferred to some other institution or institutions having objects similar to the objects of the Association at or before the time of dissolution and in default thereof, by the Minister."

It is clear that the permanency of the contents of the museum is assured and will remain beneficial to the country as a whole.

It follows that donations, or loans to the museum will be welcomed. Now is the time to secure a piece of history for the benefit of all.

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Editor