

Future Challenges Of The Austrian Fire Service

An essay by Paul Haunschmied

The Austrian fire service system is one of the most advanced in the world and is paid lots of respect, even from abroad. We've certainly come a long way since the days when villages first assembled groups of brave men willing to risk their lives in a fight against the *red rooster*.

However, in fast-paced times like these, society changes rapidly and with it the challenges the Austrian fire service is facing. The most pressing one is the recruitment of motivated volunteers that are willing to invest notable portions of their spare time for the good cause. To make such a volunteer engagement more attractive, employers need to appreciate the extraordinary value those people contribute to society - and should, in return, be compensated by a federal fund if

one of their employees is absent due to an emergency call. Additionally, thorough legal protection needs to be established for every volunteer firefighter to ensure that he or she cannot be held accountable beyond limits for their volunteer service.

Another aspect that will gain even more importance in the future is increasing the interest of the youth, i.e. the group of the ten- to sixteen-year-olds, in becoming a firefighter. In recent years, lots of competition—not necessarily by local soccer clubs, but by so-called new media—resulted in fewer kids joining local fire stations. It's about time to build up that interest again by visiting schools and organizing firefighter-related activities during the summer holidays. Furthermore, fire service associations not only should provide common frameworks

for such events but also develop strategies to drive engagement, i.e. introduce an app for young firefighters.

As technology strides, fire services need to learn how to leverage those advancements for their daily operations. For instance, it should be the standard for every fire station in Austria to have some sort of display that visualizes the details of an emergency call automatically for the whole squad. Again, fire service associations could jump in to provide a common solution that can be easily deployed to all fire stations. However, technological advancements always have to be inclusive, i.e. need to be introduced in a way that every member of the organization can use it, without regard to age or technology affinity.