



Writing Effective Incident Reports

tips for writing reports that are accurate and professional

a special publication from Firebelle Productions

Introduction

Reports serve as a permanent record of incidents, events, problems, and so forth. There are many types of reports, each of which serves different functions. Some are used to keep people informed of activities within the department. Some are used to compile statistical information, identify problems in the community, or identify department training needs. Some reports are needed to facilitate investigations, prepare court cases, or defend cases in court.

It is beyond the scope of this publication to elaborate on the different types of reports used in the emergency response field or on the report-writing process itself. That information needs to come from your particular agency. However, this publication will briefly touch on the importance of well-written reports and the characteristics of a good report.

The Importance of Well-Written Reports

Poorly written reports hurt your credibility by making you appear less competent and professional. They can also undermine your goals in a number of ways. A poorly written report can cause you to lose a case in court, perhaps resulting in a criminal being set free to kill, rape, steal, or commit arson again. Poorly written reports can make it difficult to accurately identify training and equipment needs. They can result in failure to take appropriate follow-up action on a problem. And those are just a few examples.

Just as important as content are grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word choice. Something as simple as improperly using or omitting a comma can change the meaning of a sentence. So can using a wrong word. It's not uncommon in a court of law for attorneys to attack the credibility of a witness by displaying a report on screen for all to see and pointing out all the errors in grammar, spelling, and so forth. The strategy is to cast doubt on the witness's competency and professionalism. "If the witness is this careless in writing his report, how can we trust that he was accurate, thorough, and attentive to detail when conducting his investigation?"

Reports must be well-written.

Poorly written reports can hurt your credibility.



A poorly written report can cause you to lose a case in court.

Poorly written reports can undermine your goals in numerous other ways as well

Incident Report Writing Guidelines

Paul MacRae



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