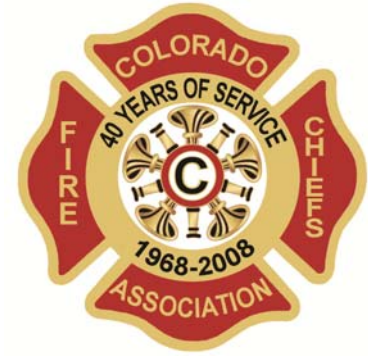




CHRISTOPHER P. RILEY  
CSFCA PRESIDENT



COLORADO STATE FIRE  
CHIEFS' ASSOCIATION

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## CSFCA President's Message New Year's 2010

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I would like to begin by wishing everyone a safe and happy new year 2010. Stating the obvious and not wanting to sound cliché, 2009 was a year of unprecedented challenge for those of us in the Colorado fire service. By choice, my message is not going to focus on last year's challenges or accomplishments. Rather, I want to talk to you about the New Year that lies before us. In doing so, I am going to take somewhat of a different angle in sharing my thoughts with you on the word "aggressive".

In the fire service when the word aggressive is used, what normally comes to our mind is an aggressive firefighting and /or rescue department and work culture. I realize an aggressive firefighting/rescue attitude can have merit, but what I would like to do is use the word aggressive in other areas that impact our departments and communities on a daily basis.

Besides the word aggressive, I would also like us to consider the word "proactive". I could use a long list of fire department responsibilities that we all share, but for the sake of time I will limit the foregoing list of items for us to think about with the following question: As you think of each one of these responsibilities, how we can improve our departments and raise the bar by being aggressive and proactive leaders throughout 2010.

**Firefighter Safety** - It goes without saying that firefighter safety cannot occur by osmosis or happenstance. How aggressive are you being to ensure that "Everyone Goes Home Safe" within your agency? Someone may say "Chief, firefighters have a dangerous job and the reality is that not everyone goes home safe". I am not here to debate the dangers of firefighting. What I am asking is "what are we doing as fire service leaders to ensure our firefighters are properly led, equipped, and trained, so they are given the best opportunity to go home safe"?

**Training** - The preceding leads me to the topic of training. How proactive and aggressive are you being in terms of training your members in areas such as low frequency/high risk incidents, identified areas needing improvement (i.e., risk/benefit firefighting strategies and tactics, firefighter survival, etc.), and other fire service best practices? How about when we conduct PIA's and AAR's; Are they honest, open, and most importantly are we learning and getting better and safer after each incident? We need to "Train as if your life depends upon it, because it does".

Fire Prevention - When are we, as an industry, going to put as much emphasis on preventing fires as we do fighting fires? Look how long it has taken us to put residential sprinklers on the national forefront. In the early 1970's, then San Clemente (CA) Fire Chief Ronny J. Coleman took the community of San Clemente and required new homes to be sprinklered. That's nearly 40 years ago! How aggressive is your department's fire prevention inspection program? Are all business thoroughly inspected at least once a year? Are your members properly trained to do company inspections? Are all your hazardous material businesses identified with NFPA 704 Placards? I have said for years that those placards are not just for the business owners, but for our firefighter's safety. When your firefighters respond to a commercial building fire at 2am, are they aware of the contents of the building and whether they need to go to a defensive strategy?

Wellness/Fitness and Driver Safety - Approximately 100 firefighters die in the United States every year. If you combine the areas cardiovascular and traffic accident incidents, it makes up approximately 70% of firefighter deaths! How aggressive and proactive are you in preventing problems with firefighters in these areas? There is no substitute for putting an emphasis on training and following standards and best practices. Are your fire stations equipped with physical fitness equipment and do you allow your members to have time during the shift to have physical fitness workouts?

Professional Standards - Here is an unsettling thought-In reviewing firehouse.com everyday for a few months; you will find an average of 3 major headlines/per month depicting some type of fire service member misconduct or illegal activity. These cases have no boundaries; geographically, rank, gender, ethnicity, Fire chiefs, officers, or firefighters are listed accordingly. I am not here to talk about the outcomes of misconduct, but rather as a fire service leader, are you being aggressive in preventing your agency from making the news headlines in the area of misconduct? Have you made your expectations clear to your members? Are you ensuring your records and reports are accurate? Ensuring that members are treating each other professionally and respectfully? Do you have Professional Standards policies in place to deal with an incident? Are you implementing progressive discipline when necessary?

Communications - Good, clear, and open communications is mission critical, period! How many of our problems originate because of a breakdown or misinterpretation in communications? Being aggressive with fresh, new, and straight-forward communication up and down the chain of command, across shifts, at the company level at shift exchange, between the suppression and fire prevention divisions, etc. will pay dividends and minimize problems. I said minimize, not eliminate. After 28 years in the fire service, I am still trying to find the communications "silver bullet" or "pixie dust" to ensure perfect communications. If you have found it, please help the rest of us out and pass it our way!

Mentoring - Are you aggressively preparing your members to promote and move up in the organization? Succession Planning? In recent years there has been large loss of senior members due to mass amounts of retirements. The reason for these large retirement numbers may vary, but the bottom line is this-large amounts of institutional knowledge and skills are lost due to retirements. Do you have members properly prepared and trained to take over various leadership positions in your organization? The Center of Public Safety Excellence has a new Chief Officer Mentor Program you may want to consider to assist you in this endeavor.

Strategic Planning - I am going to conclude with the very topic this message is all about, Strategic Planning. We need to be smart and strategic in everything we do. So much of our job requires reacting to problems. However, many of these problems could be reduced with good planning. Does your agency have a Strategic Plan to guide it this year, next year, 5 years from now? The only way we are going to effectively manage the forces of change is through planning. The CFAI Accreditation

process would be a great tool for you to look at in terms of organizational self assessment and planning.

I have spoken to a great deal we can do as leaders to be aggressive within our departments; day in and day out.

In closing, I want to encourage you to get aggressively involved with the CSFCA. We have a newly established legislative committee that is chaired by CSFCA Vice President, Steve Pischke. We have several Sections any of which could use your expertise and help; Training Officers, Fire & Life Safety Educators, and Fire Marshals just to name a few. In short, we need your help, talents and expertise!

At the end of 2010 when we run into each other at the Fire Leadership Conference, I may have a few questions for you (and for myself!) and one may be "What areas have you been aggressive in and how have you improved your department this past year"? Hopefully we can share our ideas and help each other out.

Have a safe and great New Year!

Respectfully submitted,

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Internationally Accredited Agency, CFAI  
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### About the Colorado State Fire Chiefs' Association

The mission of the Colorado State Fire Chiefs' Association is to provide leadership, education, and support to the Chief Officers of Colorado fire departments, in order to reduce the loss of life and property and to protect Colorado's citizens and institutions from all types of emergencies.