Dear Sir:

Thank you for your phone call this morning asking about the age requirements for volunteer firefighters. There is no Federal or State law that sets the maximum age for a firefighter. There is however, a minimum age of 18 set by the Federal Child Labor Law that classifies firefighting as a “hazardous occupation” therefore not allowing anyone under the age of 18 to take part in firefighting operations.

My personal recommendation is that no one should be allowed to continue as an active firefighter, either volunteer or career, after the age of 65. However, special provisions can be made for an individual that wishes to continue service beyond age 65 as a volunteer by establishing a Non-firefighting Reserve Unit within your fire department. Individuals, regardless of age, who are part of this unit can participate in fund raising, support operations and administrative functions that will be very useful to the fire department. Because these individuals are not on the “Active Roster” of the fire department, it is not necessary for them to continue with the in-service training that should be mandatory for all volunteer firefighters. To get the maximum points in an ISO grading, every volunteer firefighter should have no less than 20 hours of training per month. The minimum number of hours of training required for a volunteer to stay on the active list is four (4) hours. Any volunteer firefighter that does not get 4 hours of training per month should be suspended from responding to fire calls until training is current.

Volunteer firefighters with limited abilities, such as not able to climb a ladder, wear SCBA, or have other such limitations could still be allowed on the active list so long as these limitations are known to all members of the department and the limited firefighter is not asked to perform functions that they are incapable of doing. Volunteer firefighters are a very valuable commodity and every effort should be made to use anyone who volunteers in whatever capacity they are able to contribute.

If a physical ability standard is to be set for the volunteer firefighters, it should apply equally to all volunteers on the active list for the fire department. Any physical ability standard should be directly related to job performance. For instance, if you had a firefighter carry a section of hose for 100 feet, then hook that hose to a hydrant, open and close the hydrant, then take a ladder off the side of the pumper, put on SCBA and then drag a 100 pound weight for 20 feet while wearing the SCBA – this could be your active list physical ability test. This is only an example; you could make up your own physical ability test using actual functions performed by the volunteer firefighters in your fire department. All
active volunteers should take this test on an annual basis. Set a minimum time limit for completion of all tasks.

I hope this will answer your questions on age and physical requirements for volunteer firefighters. Remember, this is the volunteer state – take pride in being a volunteer firefighter.

Sincerely yours,

Ray Crouch, Sr.
Fire Department Management Consultant