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*Fire Department, Water Supply Reviewed*

Leading Insurance Information Provider Renews Village High Rating

The nation's leading provider of information used by insurance companies to set rates has again ranked the Oak Park Fire Department among the nation's best prepared to deal with structure fires.

In addition to the Fire Department's readiness, the New Jersey-based Insurance Services Offices, Inc. (ISO) also gave high marks to the Village's water supply system, which is a key component of an effective fire fighting operation.

"This high ISO rating is a credit to the men and women of the Oak Park Fire Department who have dedicated their lives to protecting the health and property of others," said Fire Chief Gerald Beeson. "But it also demonstrates the importance of having elected officials who are willing to invest in personnel, equipment and capital improvements so necessary to a top performing firefighting organization."

Of the nearly 47,000 communities rated by the ISO, only 45 are rated Class 1 and 370 Class 2. Illinois has only 12 Class 1 and 31 Class 2 communities. The ISO has been the leading supplier of information about property and liability risk since 1971.

"Many in the insurance industry rely on the ISO ratings of a community to set their rates for homeowner and business insurance," said Village Manager Carl Swenson. "In today's volatile property insurance market, this latest review of our community's firefighting capabilities and water supply system is great news."

An ISO evaluator visited the Village in September 2001 to conduct an extensive review of all aspects of firefighting response and capability, and the water supply system. Areas examined included dispatch, equipment, staffing and training, as well fire hydrants and water pressure. The Village retained its overall Class 2 ranking on a 10-point scale, with a Class 1 being the highest.

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“Much of the ISO ranking system is related to staffing levels, and that cost us slightly in the overall score,” Beeson said, noting that the last time the ISO was in the Village was in 1988. “Over the past few years, we have focused much of our efforts on improving the efficiency of our approach.

“For example, when the ISO says you need a specific number of firefighters on a responding fire engine to obtain the highest score, it doesn’t properly account for innovative response plans, such as ‘automatic aid’ with surrounding communities, in its final scoring. Like many operations around the country, we are now able to do more with fewer people thanks to better equipment, technology and more effective response strategies.”

This strong showing for the Fire Department in the ISO rating is just the latest accolade for Village firefighters. The Oak Park Fire Department was one of only 21 departments in the United States and Canada to be accredited by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) in 1999, and was one of only two departments in the state to earn national accreditation last year from the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS) for excellence in emergency medical transportation services.

“Oak Parkers are fortunate to have such a highly regarded firefighting operation,” Swenson said. “Recognition by organizations that know what makes a fire department effective is an honor that means more than words. When the call goes out for emergency response, residents can rest assured that the best are on the way.”

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