

**Philadelphia Fire Department – Emergency Response Time**  
Preliminary Audit Findings  
December 2015

**Background:**

In an effort to analyze Philadelphia Fire Department's (PFD) policies on public safety, the Controller's Office reviewed data for emergency response rates and assessed the impact of the rolling Brownout and Rotation procedures. More specifically, these policies were studied to determine what effect they had on the PFD to meet the national standard for response as set forth by the National Fire Protection Association.

**Findings:**

National Response Standard Not Being Met

The Fire Response Time includes the moment an emergency dispatch is received at the fire house to when the first-due engine has arrived at the emergency scene. According to the National Fire Protection Association's standard, the first-due engine on the scene of a fire must arrive within 5:20 and should be met at a rate of 90 percent for all fire and special operations.

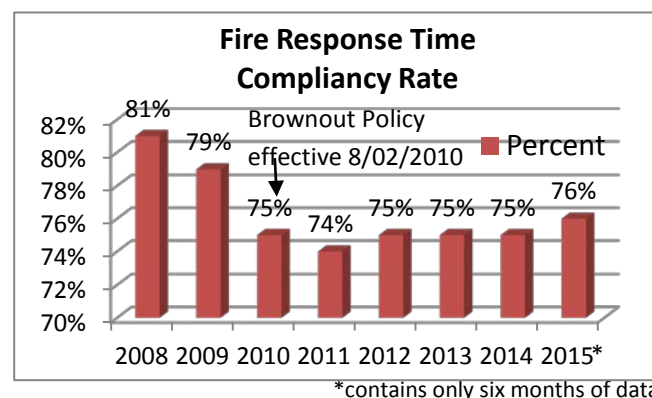
During calendar year 2014, the City Controller's review disclosed the PFD's first-due engine managed to meet the 5:20 benchmark only 75 percent of the time. The following breakdown includes the total response time statistics for 2014:

Total Emergencies	# that Met Standard	% Compliant	# that <b>DID NOT</b> Meet Standard	% Non-Compliant	> than 6 minutes	> than 8 minutes
37,053	27,698	75%	9,355	25%	5,370	361

Decline in Response Rate

A review of PFD's records indicated a significant decline in the overall timeliness of engine response to fire emergencies from 2008 through 2014. In 2008, the PFD engines reached their destination within 5:20 standard 81 percent of the time, which was still below the 90 percent compliance reliability rate. Six years later, the PFD engines were meeting the 5:20 benchmark only 75 percent of the time.

The significant decline appears to be affected by Administrative policy changes that have occurred since 2008. For instance, in 2010 the Mayor's Administration implemented the Brownout Policy, which includes three engine companies to close during the day shift and for two engine companies and one ladder to close during the night shift every week.



In the year the Brownout Policy was implemented, Philadelphia's compliancy rate dropped from 79 percent to 75 percent, recording the largest one-year decrease since 2008.

In addition, in 2013, the Administration implemented a mandatory Rotation Policy in an effort “to ensure that all firefighters have equal opportunity to work in various assignments and acquire diverse skills.” However, the data revealed that when the Rotation Policy went into effect, it actually increased the time it took a fire engine to leave the station, navigate through the busy narrow streets and then finally arrive at the scene of the fire.

Of the total 5:20 Fire Response Time standard, four minutes of this total is considered the travel time for an engine to be in route to an emergency. The remaining 1:20 is the standard time it is supposed to take a firefighter to receive notification of an alarm, get to the vehicle, suit up, board the vehicle and safely secure themselves for travel.

When reviewing the travel time compliancy rate of four minutes, Philadelphia’s emergency response units were meeting this standard 81 percent of the time in 2013, when the Rotation Policy went into effect. By 2014, the travel time rate dropped to 79 percent. This could be a result of fire responders not being familiar with traveling through unfamiliar neighborhoods rather than being stationed with the same company where they have more experience.

#### Impact of Lower Response Rate

From 2008 to 2014, there were almost 250,000 emergencies where a fire engine was called to respond to an emergency. During this time almost 60,000, or 24 percent, were incidents where the first responding engine did not meet the national standard by making it to the scene within 5 minutes and 20 seconds.

Based on the yearly average number of incidents during this time, every one percent drop in compliancy rate means that about 350 fire emergencies do not have engines at the scene on time.

<b>Total Response Time – Annual Breakdown</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Emergencies</b>	<b># that Did Not Meet Standard</b>
2008	35,080	6,759
2009	34,482	7,302
2010	34,877	8,717
2011	35,435	9,178
2012	35,363	8,928
2013	33,969	8,344
2014	37,053	9,355
Total	246,259	58,583

#### **Conclusion:**

The findings presented in this preliminary report are part of a full-scale audit of the Philadelphia Fire Department’s Emergency Response Rate. All findings are considered ongoing and part of the City Controller’s investigation until the completion of the report.



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ALAN BUTKOVITZ  
City Controller  
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December 16, 2015

Hon. Michael A. Nutter  
Mayor  
City of Philadelphia  
City Hall Room 215  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Dear Mayor Nutter:

As part of my Office's ongoing audit of the Philadelphia Fire Department's (PFD) emergency response, we discovered a significant decrease in the rate of engines arriving on scene in the standard time.

In fact, Philadelphia's Fire Response Time Compliancy Rate has dropped from 81 percent in 2008 to 75 percent at the end of 2014. According to the National Fire Protection Association's standard, the first-due engine on the scene of a fire must arrive within 5:20 and should be met at a rate of 90 percent for all fire and special operations.

From 2008 to 2014, there were almost 240,000 emergencies where a fire engine was called to respond to an emergency. During this time almost 60,000, or 24 percent, were incidents where the first responding engine did not make it to the scene of an emergency on time according to the national standard.

Furthermore, the significant decline appears to be a result of your Administration's policies known as "Brownouts" and "Rotations". In 2010 when the Brownout Policy was implemented, the fire response rate sank to 75 percent and has not been able to recover. In 2013 when the mandatory Rotation Policy went into effect, it increased the travel time the engine was on the road because fire responders were not familiar with the neighborhoods.

Please review these findings along with other statistics included in our preliminary review [enclosed]. **More importantly, it is strongly recommended that these policies are eliminated immediately in an effort to restore our Fire Department's ability to increase its emergency response rate.**

It's not fair to the men and women who put their lives on the line every day to be subject to policies that statistically show do not improve public safety. Rather, these have been policies that have put public safety in jeopardy for all residents, just for the sake of trying to save a few bucks – which also failed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Butkovitz".

ALAN BUTKOVITZ  
City Controller

[enclosure]



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December 16, 2015

Jim Kenney  
Mayor-Elect  
City of Philadelphia  
PO Box 60065  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Mayor-Elect Kenney:

As part of my Office's current performance audit of the Philadelphia Fire Department's Fire Emergency Response Time, a preliminary review of data found that only 76 percent of the City's fire engines are arriving on time to the scene of an emergency. This is down from 81 percent in 2008 [enclosed preliminary report].

According to the National Fire Protection Association, first responding fire engines should arrive on the scene of a fire within five minutes and 20 seconds for 90 percent of the time. In 2015, a quarter of the fires reported in Philadelphia did not have an engine on site in the standard response time.

While having such a low compliancy rate is alarming enough, we found the significant decrease occurred in 2010, which is when the Mayor's Administration implemented the Brownout Policy. The policy of closing a few fire stations once a week in an effort to cut overall costs resulted in the compliancy rate to drop from 79 to 75 percent.

In addition, auditors determined that when the Administration's mandatory rotation policy went into effect in 2014, it increased the time it took a fire engine to leave the station, navigate through the busy, narrow streets and to finally arrive at the scene of a fire. This could be a result of fire fighters not being familiar with traveling through unfamiliar neighborhoods rather than being stationed with the same company where they have more experience.

These findings are not only startling but are issues that need to be addressed immediately. As you continue to work with your transition team and assemble members of your administration, policies and procedures that can mean the difference between life and death should be a top priority.

Undoubtedly, you are a proponent of improving public safety measures, especially with the Philadelphia Fire Department. I look forward to working with your new administration to discuss the in-depth findings and recommendations, as the full audit is expected to be released in the coming weeks.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss our preliminary findings, please contact First Deputy Controller Bill Rubin at 215-686-6696.

Sincerely,

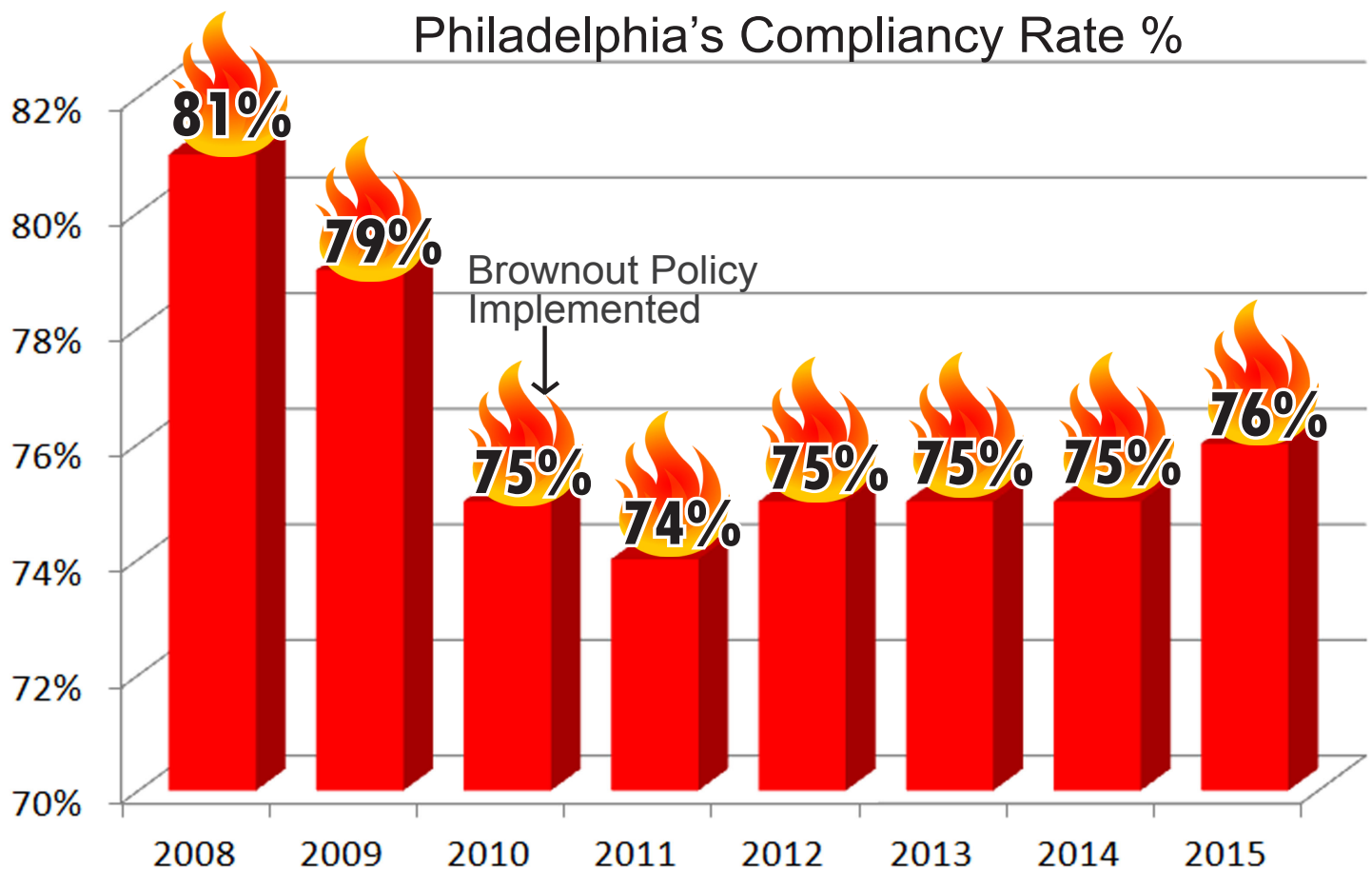
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ALAN BUTKOVITZ  
City Controller

[enclosure]

# FIRE EMERGENCY RESPONSE DECLINE

National Standard: 90% Arrive on Time



= 350 fire emergencies without engine arriving on time (2008-14)