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Choosing between Police and Fire Civil Service

Choosing between a civil service career as a police officer or a firefighter can be a tough decision. Both strive to protect the public, but the differences between these jobs can make the choice difficult unless the prospective employee understands how each branch operates. Making this decision requires knowledge of the tools of each respective trade, of the training each service requires, and of the way each department manages itself.

Police officers and firefighters require very different equipment in order to accomplish their responsibilities. A key difference is the use of weapons by police officers. In order to provide law enforcement for the general public, an officer on patrol must carry a weapon of some type, such as a mace, a baton, or a firearm. This is in stark contrast to firefighters; they are unarmed. They carry more search and rescue equipment, such as water hoses, Jaws of Life (for motor vehicle accident rescue), and general medical equipment. Vehicles also differ greatly between the two departments. Police require relatively small patrol cars as opposed to larger fire trucks.

Training is another difference between police officers and firefighters because the training is geared towards the specific tasks each must accomplish. Police require training in marksmanship. This is to ensure that, if one ever discharges a firearm, his or her aim will be accurate and safe to the general public. Firefighters train more in fire protection and safety. These academies give them a scientific background, showing the behavior of fire and methods of

combating blazes. Both departments, however, require their employees to complete courses in medical training.

Management for police and firefighters does have some similarities in structure, but key differences set them greatly apart from each other. Police management uses an internal affairs office to investigate activities by its employees within the department itself. This varies greatly from investigations within fire departments. Fire departments handle investigations at the associated level of government (i.e. city, state, county, or federal). Ranks within each branch also differ. Police use standard enlisted ranks for general employees, such as sergeant or private, and commissioned ranks for detectives and special management positions, such as lieutenant or captain. Firefighters also use a similar rank structure, but at higher levels of administration; they do not retain the commissioned ranks as police officers do.

Overall, while police and fire departments share many key similarities that make their jobs related, there are many differences in their operations which one should understand before making a career choice. By understanding what makes each department different and how these differences affect a career-path choice, it is then possible to select which branch is right for an individual.