

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

*GENERAL DIRECTION FOR THE PREVENTION AND ATTENTION OF
DISASTERS*

**PROPOSAL FOR THE IMPROVEMENT AND STRENGTHENING
OF THE NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE OF COLOMBIA**

BOGOTA D.C. February 2001

IMPROVEMENT AND FORTIFICATION OF THE NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE IN COLOMBIA

1. JUSTIFICATION

Fires are disasters that are usually provoked by humans. They have a very high incidence in the accident statistics in some countries, due to the frequency that they occur and the characteristics of the country's social and economic circumstances. Development and growth in communities represent an increase in the number of fire risks.

The introduction of new processes and products, the use of new systems for building, accelerated population growth, the increase in the use of energy, are some of the factors that increase the risk of fire in different colombian communities.

As a fundamental principle, the Prevention and Control of fire is the responsibility of the Fire Service, which is a public service organization. Law 322/96 created the National Fire Service in Colombia as an integral part of the National Organization for the Prevention and Attention of Disasters, that allows the organization, throughout the country, of fire brigades which operated in an efficient way to guarantee safety in all colombian communities.

The Government should create the necessary conditions in all areas of planning, legal and financial organization, to allow the regions, departments, zones, and native territories to have the means to respond successfully in the prevention and protection against fire emergencies.

2. PROBLEM

It is a recognised fact that the level of protection against fires is directly related to the quality of the fire service. The legal and administrative requirements are effective in so far as there exist organizations trained in supervision and control. Therefore, response in the case of a disaster will be more or less efficient, based on the real operational capacity of the fire service.

We should not lose sight of the consequences to property that the lack of or inadequacy of this public fire service represent for the government. This concern deepens as the legal, organizational and financial systems show weakness because of their short period of existence.

The reality of the prevention and protection against fires in Colombia, shows the lack of commitment from departmental, municipal and local governments. Our country needs training to create a culture of prevention as well as sensitising public opinion to the problem.

The lack of control and supervision, that allow the identification of strengths and weaknesses in the organizations responsible for the prevention and protection against fires and other disasters, has impeded the fulfilment of constitutional directives on the evaluation of public services which is a basic right of the community. The Government and the Direction of Prevention and Attention of Disasters and the National Fire Service is fundamentally unaware of the elements required for the successful management of the fire service in Colombia.

The General Command of the National Fire Service does not have an administrative, technical and operative infrastructure. This means that it cannot give opportune, practical and adequate responses to questions related to this essential public service.

The absence of coordination between the General Command of the Fire Service and other agencies has lead to serious deficiencies in policies and their related actions in the area of Human Resources, planning, management development, strengthening of operational capacity, strengthening of the administrative systems, strategic planning to give a culture of prevention, protection and control of fires and other disasters and the forming of strategic alliances with other sectors to obtain the economic and publicity resources as well as the transfer of new technology and knowledge.

4. OBJECTIVES

4.1. GENERAL

To modernize and strengthen the National Fire Service through an organic, administrative, financial, technical, logistical and operative infrastructure which has the foresight and the ability to give practical solutions for a better and more effective operation within the Fire Service of the country.

4.2. DETAIL

- Strengthen the organic, administrative, and financial structure of the General Command of the Fire Service.
- Generate a culture of prevention and a sense of belonging to all of the institutions which form the National Fire Service.
- Increase knowledge and technical training to sufficient levels to fulfill the functions of the Service.
- Coordinate the General Command of the Fire Service and other institutions especially in the areas of command and control.
- Create mechanisms and strategies that allows the Fire Service to obtain, update and handle adequately resources and equipment.
- Establish mechanisms of control and supervision of uniform standards for the fire service throughout the country, using adequate coordination to effectively and efficiently provide public service.

- Action Point No.2 Four workshops on the challenges and perspectives of the National Fire Service in Colombia. The Minister of the Interior, in his capacity as President of the National Board of Directors of the Fire Service will invite the 296 Fire Chiefs of the National Fire Service for these workshops.
- Action Point No. 3. A seminar in each Department for Mayors on the theme of modernising and strengthening the National Fire Service. Departmental Governors, as the Presidents of their departmental Fire Services, will invite the municipal authorities and respective Fire Chiefs.
- Action Point No. 4 The transmission of all these action points from the National Level down to local level using radio, television, national newspapers, magazines. This will also be done using strategic alliances between the General Command of the Fire Service and the Institutions that form the National System for Prevention and Attention of Disasters.
- Action Point No. 5 Training for community leaders will be done through instructors, facilitators and multipliers who will be members of the National Fire Service.

2. STRATEGY NO. 3

The General Command of the Fire Service through the formation of a working group which will present a draft reform to Law 322/96 and its relevant decrees from the Ministry of the Interior which will strengthen, revive, coordinate and optimise the Fire Service in Colombia. This will allow the improvement and development of a more effective, efficient and opportune service to the community.

The Working Group will be made up of professionals from the new structure of the General Command of the Fire Service and the Board of Directors of the Fire Service.

Implementation of this strategy will be through information workshops for checking, analysis, discussion and approval.

5.4. STRATEGY No 4

The General Command of the Fireservice through the Fire Fighting Training Centres located in Colombia, will strengthen and establish levels of knowledge, research and technical training to guarantee that the Fire Service performs for the community in an efficient and opportune way, achieving the objectives set by National Government which are the protection of life and property of the community.

To achieve this, the Devon Fire and Rescue Service will provide to the General Command of the Fire Service a group of people from the United Kingdom with the technical and practical knowledge necessary to create a programme that develops and improves the Fire Service in Colombia.

5.5. STRATEGY No. 5

The General Command of the Fire Service will create and implement a strategic plan as an administrative tool to search for and manage donations and humanitarian aid from different international and national organizations. This will be coordinated with the development plans of each department and municipality allowing the Fire Service to grow in relation to its environment.

To achieve this, the General Command of the Fire Service will support all of the Fire Brigades throughout the country through groups of professionally qualified and experienced people in the field of coordination of the functions with departmental and municipal administrations and other institutions of the National Fire Service and will manage projects on both a National and International level. There will be seminars and workshops in each department and municipality for the Fire Brigades and the respective administration personnel with the participation of the different institutions of the National System of the Prevention and Attention of Disasters and the International Cooperation Agency ACCI.

5.6. STRATEGY NO. 6

The General Command of the Fire Service will create and implement mechanisms for supervision and control in order to detect weaknesses and problems in the fulfillment of Law 322/96 and its respective decrees and norms. This will allow the verification and establishment of the

administrative, technical and operational levels in the provision of services by the Fire Service, guaranteeing stability in the evaluation which will guide the necessary adjustments under the relevant circumstances.

It will be achieved through consultancy from the Devon Fire and Rescue Service of the United Kingdom.