



EXECUTIVE
DEPARTMENT

CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND

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PRESS RELEASE

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South Portland Ladder Truck Deemed “No Longer Reliable in the Field”; Insurance to Cover New Replacement Vehicle

SOUTH PORTLAND, ME – The ladder truck that accidentally struck an electrical power line during a testing operation last October is “no longer reliable in the field,” according to the company that manufactured it. Based on this assessment, the City’s insurance company has agreed to fund nearly all of the cost for a replacement truck. The only cost that the City will incur is a \$1,000 deductible and approximately \$6,604 in additional vehicle expenses due to a rise in the cost of manufacturing the truck.

In a December letter, David Archer, Vice President of Engineering for Pierce Manufacturing, recommends the vehicle be deemed totaled and not put back into service. He cites the “amount of damage sustained and more importantly, length of time the apparatus was exposed to electrical current” as the reasons for his determination. Archer further notes that while the physical damage could perhaps be repaired, there is unknown damage to internal electrical components or damage that may only present itself at a later date. He asserts that such unknown damage could result in “a catastrophic issue if the apparatus was fighting a fire at the time the issue manifested.”

After reviewing various pieces of information and conducting their own appraisals, the City’s insurer – Maine Municipal Association Risk Management Services (MMA-RMS) – agreed to cover the replacement value of the vehicle, which the City had insured at \$1,062,882. Due to inflation and other factors, the cost to replace the ladder truck with a new one would be \$1,100,595, according to a proposal from Minuteman Fire and Rescue Apparatus, an authorized dealer for Pierce. However, should the City choose to prepay for the vehicle – which it did in 2018 for the now-totaled one – the price would be reduced to \$1,069,486, which is \$6,604 more than what the City paid previously. Combined with the City’s \$1,000 deductible to MMA-RMS, the total out-of-pocket cost to the City for the replacement truck will be \$7,604.

“The fact that MMA-RMS stepped up and covered this loss speaks volumes about their service,” said City Manager Scott Morelli. “This could have been a drawn out fight for coverage but instead MMA-RMS honored the policy and I’d like to thank them for their cooperation and reasonableness during this process.”

Fire Chief James Wilson also praised Pierce for reducing the price of the ladder truck to keep it close to the 2018 price.

“Pierce was under no obligation to provide us with a price similar to what we paid last year,” said Wilson. “We greatly appreciate their willingness to work with us during this difficult period.”

The City will enter into another lease purchase for the replacement ladder truck, which is expected to arrive by the fall. In the meantime, firefighters will continue to use the 1996 Pierce ladder truck that was brought back into service last October after this incident occurred.

The City has also implemented four recommendations made by City Safety Coordinator Louis Cavallaro, who in December issued his investigative report on the incident. According Chief Wilson, these recommendations were immediately designated to appropriate staff and are now part of the department’s protocols. These recommendations included:

1. Establish as Standard Operating Guideline (SOG) a step for environmental assessment when conducting equipment evaluation and/or training on Ladder 45 and other similar equipment to note any obstructions that may cause injury to any employee and/or damage to the equipment;
2. Establish as SOG during the operations of Ladder 45 and other similar equipment the use of a designated spotter to assist the primary operator during trainings and equipment evaluations;
3. Review the internal process of when and how concerns with equipment are undertaken to ensure appropriate and accurate information is captured and documented in a formal process; and
4. Establish as SOG for all equipment that operational guidelines from the manufacturer are incorporated into department procedures.

“These new protocols will make for a safer department,” said Wilson. “We are looking forward to the arrival of the new ladder truck and putting it in service for the public.”

The City has no plans for future updates/press releases on this issue.

For more information, please contact City Manager Scott Morelli at smorelli@southportland.org or (207) 767-7606.