



December 3, 2007

Honorable Mayor and  
Common Council

Dear Honorable Mayor and Common Council Members:

The City of Racine Fire Department is widely known for their involvement as a State Regional Hazardous Materials Team covering Racine, Kenosha, Walworth and Jefferson Counties for any emergency involving Extremely Hazardous Substances (EHS). This level of response capabilities is known as Level A, which provides superior training and equipment to allow firefighters to operate independently of the contaminated atmosphere that surrounds a given incident. The Fire Department annually receives \$122,500 in payment from the State of Wisconsin to maintain our Level A Team, provide training, and purchase equipment.

Very recently, Kenosha County Emergency Management was notified that the City of Kenosha Fire Department would not be providing Hazardous Materials Level B responses to county fire departments after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. Apparently, this was a decision by Kenosha's Mayor and Kenosha County's Executive to end this longstanding relationship. Kenosha Emergency Management along with the Kenosha County Fire Departments are not prepared to assume Hazardous Materials Level B responses in the County at this time.

Initially, there was an inquiry by Kenosha County Emergency Government Director, Ben Schilesman, wondering if the Racine Fire Department would be interested in providing this service to Kenosha County. The initial conversation indicated there would be compensation available for this service. A subsequent meeting was held on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007. The Career Fire Chiefs in Kenosha County had interest in utilizing the Racine Fire Department in providing this service and there was overwhelming support for this idea. We also had a conversation with Fire Chief John Thomson from the Kenosha Fire Department about their feelings on the matter. Chief Thomson indicated he had no problem with Racine providing this service as the decision for Kenosha to bow out was made at a higher level in city government.

The Racine Fire Department has a number of specialty teams beyond fire suppression and Emergency Medical Services that require regular training. The department provides confined space rescue capabilities, trench rescue capabilities, and high angle rope rescue capabilities, in addition to Hazardous Materials capabilities.

Virtually all of our training dollars for specialty teams comes from revenue sources outside of the tax levy. The annual State Haz Mat revenue pays for a vast majority of training including supplies, equipment and overtime. This budget is stretched to the limit as the State has not increased its payment to the Regional Teams in almost 10 years. This forces us to find additional revenue sources to compensate for the loss of real training dollars after taking inflation and wage increases into account.



**RACINE FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
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The proposal here is to allow us to move forward in negotiating with Kenosha County Emergency Management to provide Hazardous Materials Level B services to Kenosha County in exchange for training dollars that will be used to keep our specialty teams training at a very high level of competence. This will keep that type of training off the tax levy, and allow for greater regional collaboration among area fire departments. At the appropriate time, we will report back to the Council and this Committee with the results of our discussions along with a possible recommendation.

Respectfully,

Steve Hansen, Fire Chief