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Commissioner rips idea of fewer firefighters per truck

By Hal Dardick

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Chicago Fire Commissioner Robert Hoff today said fire deaths would increase if the city ^{advertisement} lowers the number of firefighters on a truck to save money, an idea mentioned as one potential cost-saving option in a recent report by the city's inspector general.

Hoff said he is "adamant" in his opposition to the idea of lowering the minimum staffing on all trucks to four, instead of the five-person minimum now in place on most trucks and engines.

"Number one, it affects our performance," Hoff said, explaining his opposition to the change. "And number two, it (affects) the lives of firefighters and paramedics and the people that we serve. Our fire deaths will go up."

Inspector General Joseph Ferguson said lowering the standard would save about \$57 million a year — while also noting such a reduction could pose a safety hazard in an urban area like Chicago.

Nevertheless, the idea has been thrown around with about eight months left on the contract for rank-and-file city firefighters. The current contract spells out the current staffing levels.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel kept Hoff on as fire commissioner. Former Mayor Richard Daley appointed Hoff, a decorated Fire Department veteran, in June 2010.