

Why We Did This Audit

Fire and emergency medical responses are some of the most important services the City of Chicago provides, and it is imperative that City leaders and community members have reliable measures of performance. This audit sought to determine if CFD has response time goals consistent with state and national standards, and if CFD meets those goals.

In 2013, OIG published a similar audit, which found that CFD was not meeting its response time goals and its internal reports were unable to measure response times. OIG's 2015 follow-up found that CFD had not corrected these issues.

Background

CFD members are the first responders to fire and medical emergencies in Chicago. Their prompt responses are critical to the protection of public health and safety. The City uses a 911 computer system and buttons in CFD's vehicles to track how quickly they respond.

We thank staff and management from CFD, OEMC, and OPSA for their cooperation during the audit.



City of Chicago
Office of Inspector General
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SECOND OIG AUDIT OF CFD'S FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESPONSE TIMES

OIG concluded that the Chicago Fire Department (CFD) has not implemented performance management strategies that would allow it to evaluate its fire and emergency medical services (EMS) response times in alignment with best practices. CFD has not remedied data issues first identified in 2013.

Findings

1. CFD has not implemented performance management practices that would allow the department to evaluate its fire and EMS response times.
2. CFD has not documented response time performance goals outside of its state-required EMS plan. Contrary to best practices, CFD has not set goals for turnout or travel time at the industry-standard 90th percentile.
3. CFD's data is not adequate to reliably measure key components of response time. OIG found that between January 1, 2018 and November 30, 2020, only 705,061 of 937,446 emergency events (75.2%) had all the necessary fields to calculate turnout and travel times for the first arriving unit.

Recommendations

OIG recommends that CFD management acknowledge the importance of department-wide quantitative performance measures and begin public annual reporting on response time performance. CFD management should establish and document department-wide turnout, travel, and total response time goals for both fire and EMS at the 90th percentile. If CFD management believe the National Fire Protection Association's recommended turnout and travel times are unachievable in Chicago, they should conduct a systematic evaluation of factors affecting response times and set reasonable goals for turnout, travel, and total response times based on the results. CFD should identify, monitor, and remedy the cause of data gaps, and should consider hiring an internal data specialist who would be able to combine operational expertise with technical skills to improve data quality. Finally, CFD should ensure that any external partners who analyze departmental data conduct a full assessment of that data's completeness and reliability.

Department Response

In response, CFD stated that it "acknowledges the importance of department-wide quantitative performance measures" and will implement OIG's recommendations. CFD stated that it would analyze its data to identify "causative factors and or trends," "perform a complete and reliable measure of response time by each component piece and in total," and determine a reasonable percentile goal "as the completeness of data elements improves." CFD agreed to work with OEMC to improve and monitor data quality, and stated it would work with OBM and DHR to hire additional data analytics staff.