

Equipment Donation

This scenario was adapted from *Ethics and the Fire Service: Curriculum Needs Assessment*, a report to the National Fire Academy, by Ann Murphy Springer and Phillip Stittleburg. (1990)

Position One: Donate the Equipment

You are the chief of a fairly large “combination” fire department—mostly volunteer, but partly paid. You recently acquired new OSHA-approved turnouts for your personnel—“state of the art” for safety and comfort. You also have replaced your older self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBAs) with new ones.

For many reasons, including space limitations, you want to get the older equipment out of the station. A smaller local all-volunteer department has requested your older turnouts and SCBAs. They are desperately in need of both. You know that your old equipment is no longer OSHA-approved or reliable, but you remember what it was like to try to equip a group of volunteers with extremely limited funds.

You decide to throw the equipment out in the “dumpster” but let the other chief know when and where so they can make a “mid-night raid” and recover it.

Is your action ethical?

While it is true that the old equipment does not meet current standards, it is better than having no equipment at all, which is what the other department has now. You are completing your obligation by putting it in the dumpster. If the other department chooses to pick up the equipment they are taking any responsibility for its use.

Position Two: Don't Donate the Equipment

You are the chief of a fairly large “combination” fire department—mostly volunteer, but partly paid. You recently acquired new OSHA-approved turnouts for your personnel—“state of the art” for safety and comfort. You also have replaced your older self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBAs) with new ones.

For many reasons, including space limitations, you want to get the older equipment out of the station. A smaller local all-volunteer department has requested your older turnouts and SCBAs. They are desperately in need of both. You know that your old equipment is no longer OSHA-approved or reliable, but you remember what it was like to try to equip a group of volunteers with extremely limited funds.

You decide to throw the equipment out in the “dumpster” but let the other chief know when and where so they can make a “mid-night raid” and recover it.

Is your action ethical?

If the equipment doesn't meet current standards there is no way we should be allowing another department to use it. It may be more dangerous to use it than to not have any, since it may give false confidence. While the motive to help them is good, donating sub-standard equipment is not the way to do it.

Also, we might be liable for damages or injury if the equipment fails in a critical situation. The responsible thing to do is to make sure the equipment gets thrown away.