

Who and what is the I.A.F.F.?

The International Association of Firefighters, or IAFF, is the 16th largest labor union in the United States representing over 260,000 firefighting and EMS professionals in two countries. The professionals represented by the IAFF protect over 80% of the US Population.

One of the frequent questions we get is, "What is the union and what do they do for you?" To answer that, "they" don't do. WE do for us. A union is a group of workers who form an organization to gain respect on the job, better wages and benefits, more flexibility for work and family needs, a counterbalance to the unchecked power of employers, and a voice in improving the quality of their services. Simply put, a union is only as strong as its membership.

Union members work under a contract, which was achieved through collective bargaining. In that process, members of the union and members of management meet to discuss where each party stands on the issues at hand. Normally those issues cover a broad range. In the event an agreement cannot be reached using negotiations, the parties will then proceed to arbitration. In some cases, the next step would be a strike by the work force. Firefighters are prohibited from striking in the interest of public safety.

Arbitration is binding and the decision of the neutral arbitrator is final. In Act 111 Arbitration, the union has an arbitrator, the management has an arbitrator, and a neutral arbitrator is appointed. Very much like you see on "Law & Order", testimony is presented regarding each issue and the panel of arbitrators then meet to decide the status of the issue. Once all of the issues have been hashed out, an award, or final decision is handed down. That decision becomes part of the contract.

Arbitration is not only used for contract negotiations but for other issues that may arise during the course of the day. Union members are afforded a grievance procedure when issues are addressed that may be in a gray area or outright wrong. The grievance may be handled internally or may have to proceed to arbitration depending on where the parties can meet on the issue.

The IAFF is a strong labor union that is always attempting to protect the safety and health of its members and in the words of General President Schaitberger, "want more," for its members. The IAFF has been instrumental in several firefighter safety standards, the Heart and Lung Act, Cancer presumption, and other safeguards in the interest of firefighters. The IAFF has been instrumental in staffing standards and safety standards as well. In addition, the IAFF has been a strong supporter of "Jerry's Kids" and the Muscular Dystrophy Association for many years. As you can see, the IAFF is more than just a union!