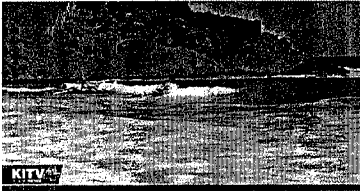


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## Hawaii Fire Fighters Association claims 'inadequate training' is putting lives on the line



In June 2016 a routine exercise off Diamond Head goes terribly wrong. Veteran firefighter Clifford Rigsbee sustains blunt force injuries while being towed at the back of a watercraft.

The incident kills Rigsbee, a seasoned triathlete.

Union president Bobby Lee says Rigsbee's death shook up fellow firefighters. A number expressing fear because they felt they weren't getting enough training in the water.

"We found out that there was actually more incidents, more accidents prior to Cliff's death that were similar in nature," Bobby Lee, President of the Hawaii Fire Fighters Association said.

According to the Department, firefighters are required to undergo ten hours of training every three months. However, Lee says most of it isn't spent in the water.

"It can be jet ski maintenance it can be classroom time just reviewing policy procedures," Lee said. "You could have individuals that don't even hit the water within that quarter or only a couple of hours."

Fire Captain Aaron Lenchanko says the Department needs to beef up the required hours.

"If I devoted only ten hours a quarter to firefighting training, I don't think that would be adequate to even call myself a professional firefighter," Captain Lenchanko said.

The Department says it believes ten hours is a minimum and if operators feel like they need more training they can ask for it. However, the union is proposing the Department turn over all watercraft rescues to Ocean Safety because lifeguards are more sufficient in the water.

"We have been in conversations with ocean safety to see if we can reduce the duplication of services but we are going to look at Public Safety as our number one priority," Captain Scot Seguirant said.

According to Ocean Safety, lifeguards must complete 40 hours of training for five weeks before becoming certified. They also must undergo annual training.

No word yet on when talks between Ocean Safety and the Department are expected to wrap up.

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