

FIGHTING THE FIRE

Film Review

TIM WHITHAM, *Fire Chief*
Edwardsville, KA

First and foremost... finally a movie that shows the effects of the trauma in our field that first responders see daily that is not thought of by others! While some of the movie can be classified as Hollywood make-up, the thought of showing the aftermath of running complicated calls, the stresses of the trauma, and then the resilience of not wanting to admit there is a problem. Let alone the resistance to identify the need to seek out help is not only highlighted in this movie; it is the story line.

“Fighting the Fire” shows the struggles and the means to having a path forward towards recovery. I hope this movie and the message it expresses reaches every first responder, as the mental health struggle for first responders only gets worse. After 35 plus years in fire and emergency services, and numerous years in the military, the meaningful message was accurate, well thought out, and stayed the course to highlight the mental health struggles that first responders face.

The number of responders who self-medicate and avoid calling for help is alarming; the rate of suicide should make every first responder know what to look for. Not only for themselves, but we protect community members better than looking out for each other. We all carry bad calls; some responders have underlying issues coupled with previous military service, which can make the trauma and stresses more relevant and detrimental to some.

“Fighting the Fire” should, and does, serve as a wakeup call for all of us to keep the mental health and well being of our fellow co-workers or employees first and foremost! I have an ambulance crew who were one of the first three units on scene at a mass shooting on what should have been another Super Bowl parade. One employee has been on the job for a year and a half and the other, just a few months.

While watching this movie, it helps to keep what others of different experiences may feel, or not feel, and that helps me as a supervisor keep their mental health needs paramount in my service delivery and program development for the department and my employees. I thought the movie was moving, well thought out, well done, relevant, has meaning, and serves a purpose greater than entertainment!