



Office of
Bill de Blasio
PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK



CUTS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

AN ANALYSIS OF MAYOR BLOOMBERG'S FDNY BUDGET

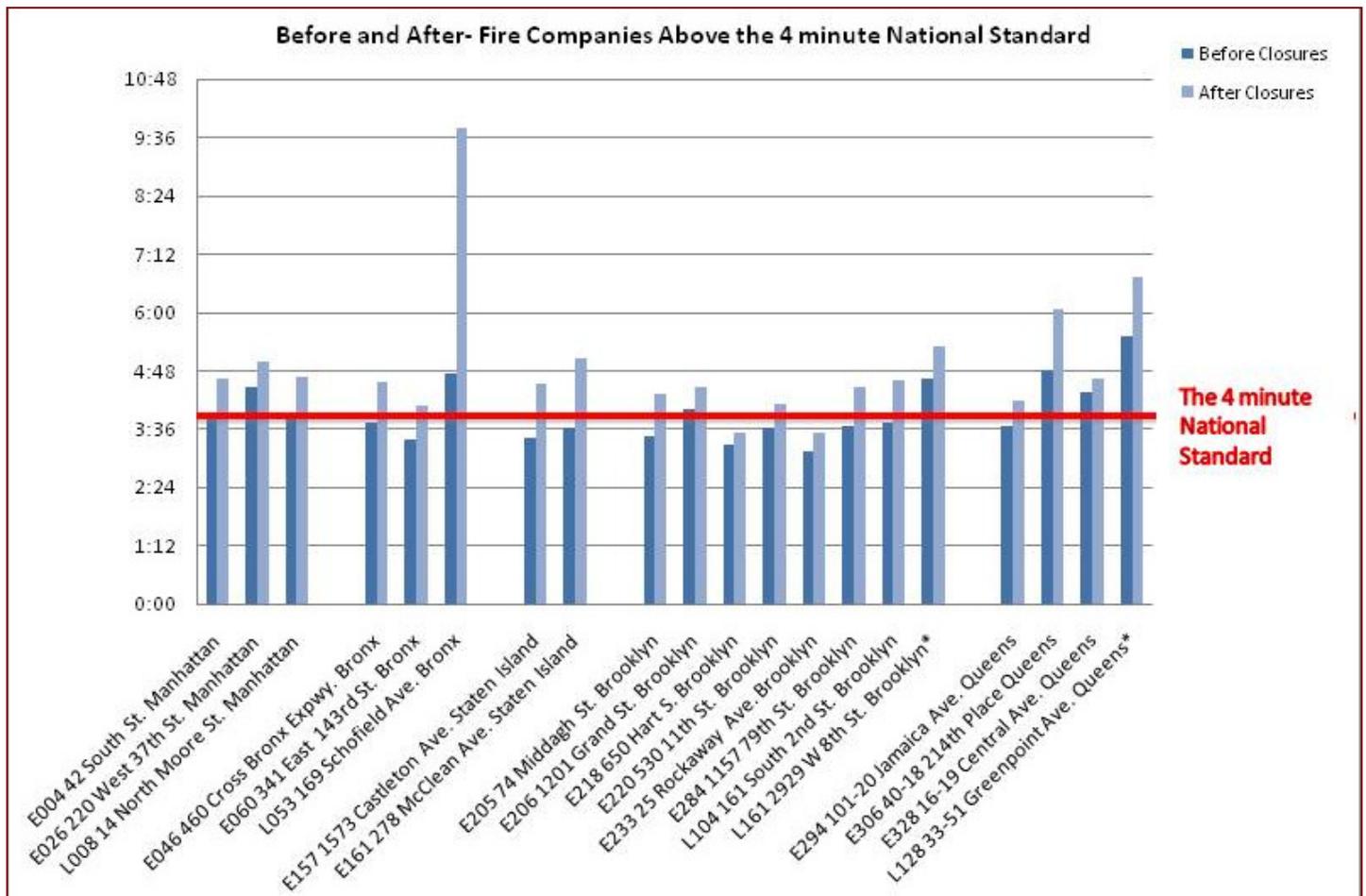
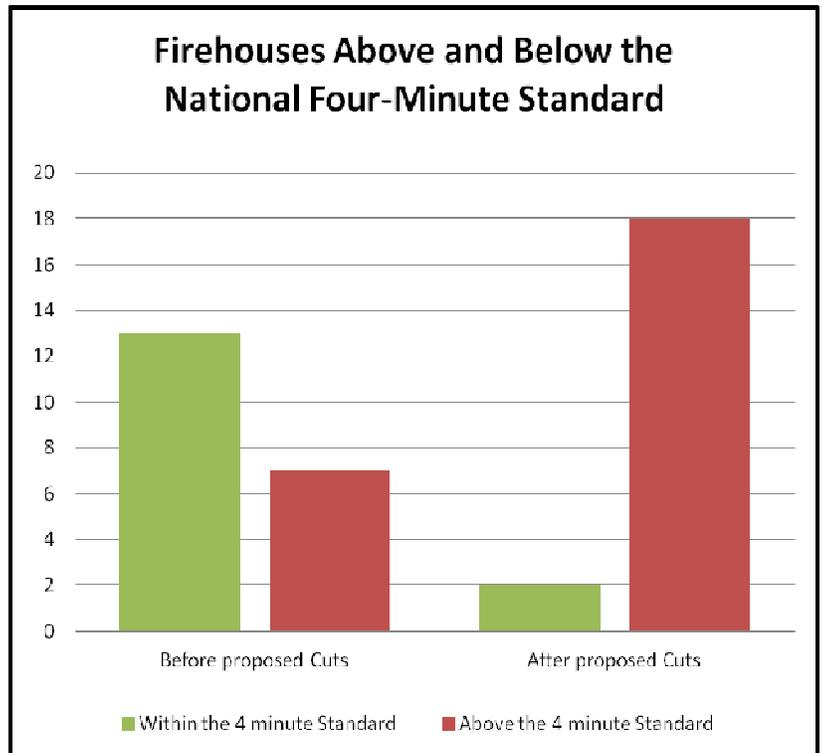
On May 18, 2011 the FDNY released a list of twenty fire companies slated for closure if the Mayor's Executive Budget is adopted by the City Council. These closures are intended to net the City \$55 million in cost saving, but an analysis by Public Advocate Bill de Blasio's office shows they are also a matter of life and death for many New Yorkers who will now have to endure a longer wait for first responders. In the affected neighborhoods, the number of response times exceeding national guidelines are expected to more than double.ⁱ Response times at eight of the closed locations will lengthen by nearly a minute or more – enough time for even a small blaze to begin burning out of control. The National Fire Protection Association, private insurance companies and the FDNY all agree this will mean larger and more widespread fires, higher fatality rates and a devastating destruction of property. Even at a time of fiscal crisis, sacrificing public safety is just not an acceptable budgetary choice.

Public Advocate's Finding: The Mayor's Budget Undermines Compliance with National Standards

According to the national guidelines created by the National Fire Protection Association, it is required that firefighters should arrive at an emergency scene within **four minutes** of a dispatch center receiving the call.ⁱⁱ This NFPA standard is based

upon a combination of accepted practices and more than 30 years of study, research, testing and validation. Moreover, the four-minute standard is modeled on a fire in a two-story, single-family home where firefighting can commence soon after arrival. In a dense city such as New York, firefighters require additional minutes to ascend multi-story buildings, making response times above the national standard even more alarming.

An analysis of data provided by the Fire Department of New York Cityⁱⁱⁱ shows that the proposed budget cuts will drastically delay response times to emergency scenes. As seen in the chart above, prior to the proposed cuts, only 7 of the affected fire companies were above the four minute national standard and after the proposed cuts 18 of the companies will be above the four minute standard, leaving only two out of the twenty meeting national standards.^{iv} The graph below illustrates how each fire company's response time will be affected.



Empirical data assembled by NFPA demonstrates that the four-minute benchmark is critical because most fires spread beyond their room of origin within eight minutes, and firefighters require several minutes of lead time after arrival to survey the location, move equipment and commence fighting the fire. A confined fire has an estimated civilian death rate of 5 per 1000, a civilian injury rate of 47 per 1000 and an average dollar loss of \$3,958. In contrast, once a fire breaks free, these numbers spike to 17.64, 80.45 and \$34,011, respectively. Every second beyond four minutes increases the risk of a larger and much more costly event.^v

Slow Response Times Lead To Fatal Consequences

- **Fire Damage Grows Exponentially:** According to the NFPA's Fire Analysis and Research Division, the acceleration of fire damage increases on a predictable and quickly steepening curve. This exponential growth causes a fire's impact to become substantially more dangerous even over half minute or minute intervals thus posing an ever more serious threat to persons and property.^{vi}
- **Firefighter Staffing is a Proven Key to Increased Survival:** Repeated studies have shown that fatalities and property destruction are also correlated with the number of firefighters who arrive at the scene. Understaffed fire companies not only take longer to reach their destinations, they risk arriving with insufficient personnel and can experience further delays when working with heavy gear.^{vii}
- **Medical Emergencies Rapidly Worsen Minute by Minute:** The American Heart Association's scientific position is that brain death and permanent death start to occur in four to six minutes after someone experiences cardiac arrest. To ensure adequate lead time, AHA recommends that first responders arrive in three to five minutes. Few attempts at resuscitation succeed after ten minutes.^{viii}
- **The FDNY Agrees – Faster Response Times Save Lives:** In 2010, the FDNY directly attributed the City's significant drop in fire fatalities "to an aggressive campaign of fire-safety education and quicker response times," said Fire Commissioner Sal Cassano. Response times for structural fires dropped by more than half a minute from five years ago, when it took an average of 4 minutes and 36 seconds to respond to a blaze. "The firefighters are getting to jobs quicker and providing assistance quicker to those caught in these emergencies," Cassano said. "Firefighters are getting their people out of the buildings, and EMS is providing on-scene lifesaving care."^{ix}
- **Slow Response Times Can Also Cripple the Economy:** A fire that devastates a building will frequently cause affected small businesses to move or shut down operations. A difference of just a few minutes can mean a permanent loss to a community's workforce, tax base and small business economy.^x

The list of fire company cuts illustrates the very real cost in public safety New Yorkers will pay under the Mayor's budget: longer response times, increasing casualties and expanded property damage. The budget trades cost savings for decreased public safety. Defunding essential services like the FDNY will put New Yorkers at unacceptable risk, and must be prevented.

ⁱ Data analyze by the Office of the Public Advocate using New York City Fire Department, Engine and Ladder Company Analysis, 5/18/2011

ⁱⁱ National Fire Protection Association, Standard 1710, accessed 5/19/2011; Fireman's Fund Comprehensive Statistics, accessed 5/19/2011

ⁱⁱⁱ New York City Fire Department, Engine and Ladder Company Analysis, 5/18/2011

^{iv} The data used is based on the first truck's arrival time.

^v National Fire Protection Association, Standard 1710, accessed 5/19/2011

^{vi} U.S. Fire Administration/National Fire Data Center, Report on Structure Fire Response Times, August 2006

^{vii} NFPA Journal, May 2008; U.S. Fire Administration/National Fire Data Center, Report on Structure Fire Response Times, August 2006

^{viii} American Heart Association, accessed 5/19/2011; EMS World, 4/1/2004

^{ix} New York Post, 12/2/2010

^x Fireman's Fund Comprehensive Statistics, accessed 5/19/2011