

Charles Alexander Ellison
1st West Virginia Fire Marshal
July 15th 1909 -April 30th 1914

Charles A. Ellison has the distinction of being the very first fire marshal to serve the state of West Virginia.

Ellison was born on November 27, 1883 in Monroe County. After attending local schools during his childhood, he chose West Virginia University as his place of higher learning.

After graduating from WVU, he came to Charleston, marrying Frances Waters. Together, they had one son, Charles Jr, and one daughter, Harriett.

Ellison was working for the West Virginia Inspection Bureau at the time the Fire marshal's Office was being opened and the state's Insurance commissioner, Darst, appointed Ellison as the inaugural head of the new fire marshal's office.

After serving in the position for nearly 5 years, Ellison decided to enter the then-rapidly expanding automobile business. He opened the Triple-State Electric Company, with an office and showroom at 16 McFarland Street in Charleston. The dealership sold the Studebaker brand of autos.

Ellison always kept an eye out for fire safety and the fire service long after his stint as marshal, as shown in 1917 when he was a contributing donor along with other local businessmen in helping to purchase fire equipment and apparatus for the Charleston Fire Department. Conditions of both equipment and apparatus at the time were outdated and dilapidated, according to newspaper accounts, and the work of Ellison and his colleagues ensured that Charleston firefighters could be safer and more efficient than before.

In 1918 at the height of the influenza pandemic, Ellison was also chairman of the home service section of the Charleston chapter of the American Red Cross. He appeared before Charleston City Council to appeal to them for funds in helping to get medical and nursing assistance to the influenza sufferers in poor homes.

Charles Ellison died on May 30th, 1919, after what accounts described as a "short illness". His funeral was at First Presbyterian Church in Charleston on June 2nd, 1919. Ellison had been a very active member of this church and part of the service was conducted by the children of the Sunday school classes, of which he had been superintendent.

Ellison was laid to rest in the Spring Hill Cemetery in Charleston.



John Spaulding Horan
2nd State Fire Marshal
May 1st, 1914 – April 30th, 1921

John Horan was born in Webster County on November 26th, 1884. He attended schools in the Summersville area and after graduating high school, attended the Capital City Commercial College in Charleston.

Horan went on to study at Georgetown University in Washington DC, graduating there in 1911 with a degree in law.

He also found time to marry Winnie Sullivan during his Georgetown days, the ceremony taking place in November of 1910. He was also interning for WV congressman Joseph Holt Gaines during this period.

After graduating, the couple stayed in DC for a while, with Horan working as private secretary for a Nebraska senator.

The Mountain State called him back once more, and Horan joined the firm of Brown, Jackson, Knight as lawyer, based in Montgomery and, after a stint there, started the firm of Osenton & Horan in Fayetteville, their office housed in the Fayette County National Bank.

Horan and wife Winnie had started a family by this point, eventually having children John Sullivan, Robert Dana, Bernard W., and Winifred Ann.

In 1912 he was nominated, and ran for, the WV House of Delegates from Fayette County on the Republican ticket. He lost that race, but not long after was chosen to replace Charles Ellison as Fire Marshal, starting his service in May of 1914.

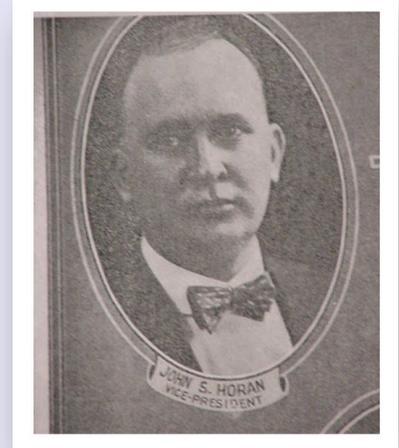
One of his first notable investigations as fire marshal was in November 1914, when a 32 year old mother was charged with setting her infant on fire in her home, allegedly because the baby was not the child of her present husband.

After leaving the fire marshal's office, he resumed his law career, practicing out of the Charleston National Bank building, along with Henry Cato and AJ Barnhart

Horan died at the unfortunately young age of 44, on July, 9th, 1929, at Mountain State Hospital in Charleston. The cause of death was listed as myocarditis hypertrophy and congestive failure.

His funeral was held at Sacred Heart Church, where he and his family were members, and he was buried at Sunset Memorial Park in South Charleston.

In 1936 another tragedy struck the Horan family when John Horan Jr. died after a gun he was handling in his Charleston apartment went off, accidentally killing him. The younger Horan was 25 years old.



Clarence Lamont Topping
3rd State Fire Marshal
May 1st, 1921 – June 30th, 1927

Clarence Topping was born in Cheshire, Ohio, on July 15th, 1867. His family moved to West Virginia when Clarence was a child, and he attended local schools, eventually getting his higher learning at Shelton College in St. Albans, WV.

Topping learned several trades during these years, as well, becoming known as a stone-cutter and a stone-mason.

Marrying Mary Wyatt in 1887, the Toppings went on to have four children: Tracy, Audrey, Kathleen and Wilma.

Topping took an interest in politics and began his public service as city clerk for the city of Charleston. He spent 2 years doing his duties in the capital city, before heading to Weston, WV, to serve at the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum as its clerk.

Coming back to Charleston after 4 years in Weston, Topping began stints as chief clerk for the state treasurer, clerk of the compensation common, and finally becoming the clerk for the house of delegates. He also ran unsuccessfully for secretary of state, in 1908.

In 1921 he was chosen as the new state fire marshal, emphasizing fire safety and education. He partnered with the state's Boy Scouts to help spread his message, as well as personally visiting schools and getting children involved in the safety campaign.

One of his biggest investigations as marshal was the 1923 arson fire at WV State Collegiate Institute, in Institute, WV, which caused over \$325,000 in damages to the school.

In 1927 Topping resigned from the office of fire marshal to take a job with the National Board of Fire Underwriters.

Topping was injured in an auto accident in 1930, which weakened his health, and he suffered a heart attack in 1931 while on duty as chief fire warden at Point Mountain, WV. On June 22nd, 1931 he died of myocarditis hypertrophy at the home of one of his daughters.

A full Masonic burial was accorded to Clarence Topping and he was buried at Spring Hill Cemetery in Charleston.



C. L. TOPPING, State Fire Marshal



Charles William Nolte
4th State Fire Marshal
July 1st, 1927 – March 31st, 1929

Charles William Nolte was born in Wheeling on May 4th, 1873. He was a first generation German-American, and attended public schools in the Wheeling area.

In February of 1895 he married Dorothy Becker and started a family, eventually having 2 daughters and 3 sons.

Nolte owned and operated a large goods transfer business in Wheeling and ran for, and was elected to, Wheeling City Council, serving on it from 1923 to 1927. He was also a right of way agent for the Ohio County Circuit Court and heavily involved in Republican politics in the county.

He was appointed state fire marshal in 1927 by state auditor Sam Mallison, after the resignation of Clarence Topping from the post.

The state's high arson rates were the focus of Nolte's time in office and in 1929 he was instrumental in getting legislation passed that made WV's arson laws some of the toughest in United States.

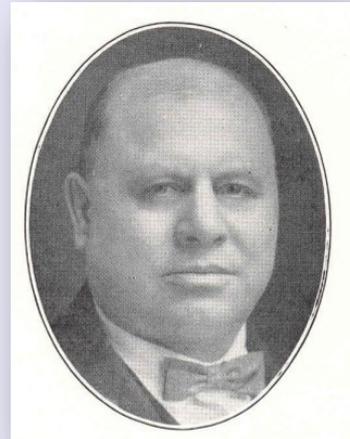
He also organized an arson squad with the Morgantown Fire Department, consisting of MFD firefighters trained to investigate and determine causes of fires in the Morgantown area.

Nolte resigned as state fire marshal on March 31st, 1929, giving his notice to state auditor Edgar Lawson.

He re-entered private business after his service, concentrating on the ice and coal industries.

Charles Nolte died in Wheeling at the age of 65 on September 28th, 1938, after what newspapers said was a "five months' long illness".

Nolte was buried at Mount Zion Cemetery in Wheeling.



Carl Otley Stahlman
5th State Fire Marshal
April 1st, 1929 – March 15th, 1933

Carl Stahlman was born in Parkersburg, WV, on August 30th, 1881, but made his mark in the southern area of West Virginia, in Bluefield.

After graduating from the Mountain State Business College of Parkersburg, Stahlman moved to Bluefield in 1904, where his father was publisher of the Bluefield Telegraph newspaper.

In 1905 he married Ethel Reese, and the couple had one daughter, Catherine.

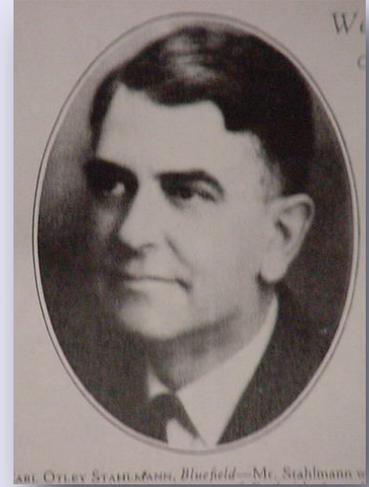
He succeeded his father as publisher of the Bluefield Telegraph, but also served Bluefield in a myriad of ways: as a 2-term mayor, city treasurer, Welch Chamber of Commerce chairman, insurance agent, vice president of Bluefield National Bank and a partner in an insurance agency with R.E. Parrish.

In 1929 he was appointed as state fire marshal and served 4 years in that position.

After his fire marshal service, he returned to Bluefield for a while, but went back to Parkersburg in the mid-50s to join his brother in a hardware business.

In 1964 Stahlman suffered a stroke and was in a coma. After a week in the coma, he died on May 13th, 1964, in a Parkersburg hospital.

Carl Stahlman was buried in Woodmere Memorial Park, Huntington, WV.



Fred Brooks Watkins
6th State Fire Marshal
March 16th, 1933 – March 14th, 1943

Fred Watkins was born on August 6th, 1888 in Boothsville, located in Marion County.

He attended and graduated from Fairmont State College (then called the Fairmont State Normal School) and took up residence in Grafton. It was there that he started his first career as a pharmacist, owning and operating the Grafton Drug and Chemical Company.

Marriage soon followed, with Watkins wedding Minnie Shorden and fathering a boy named Hale.

Watkins took a turn at politics and was a member of the WV House of Delegates from Taylor County in the years 1923-24 and 1931-32. He also ran unsuccessfully for secretary of state in 1932. During his off time from the legislature he also served as president of the WV Pharmaceutical Association.

Charleston buried Highlawn Memorial Park, Oak Hill

In March of 1933 he was appointed by state auditor Edgar Sims to serve as the State Fire Marshal.

Watkins intent as marshal was to pursue, and bring to justice, the so-called "firebugs", the arsonists that were operating in the state at the time. In this endeavor he started a program which would educate WV State police troopers on spotting arsons, so that they could recognize arsons and assist in helping the fire marshal's office in capturing arsonists.

After Watkin's time as fire marshal, he returned to the state capitol to become Clerk of the Senate. He was later to become the state's first beer commissioner. His last job was at Samuels Products Inc, a druggists supplies firm.

Watkins had an extreme passion for sports, especially boxing, and served as judge for many amateur boxing events in the area, even naming the award for outstanding boxer in the annual Golden Gloves tournaments after him.

On April 10th, 1963, Fred Watkins died in Charleston's Kanawha Valley Hospital after a long illness. He was 74 years old.

Watkins was buried at Highlawn Memorial Park, Oak Hill, WV.



Robert Henry Kidd
7th State Fire Marshal
March 14th, 1943 – September 30th, 1948

Robert Kidd was born on April 30th, 1888 in Burnsville, Braxton County. He attended both the Burnsville Academy and Broaddus Institute (now Alderson Broaddus University).

He went to work at the local Grafton newspaper after graduation, eventually becoming the editor there.

Henrietta Horner became his wife during this time and they went on to have 2 children, Robert Jr. and William.

Kidd's family had always been heavily involved in West Virginia politics and, following in their footsteps, served as the House of Delegates clerk from 1931 till 1933 and ran successfully for House delegate from Braxton County in 1940.

During his tenure as marshal, Kidd and his office investigated a series of huge fires in Montgomery, which caused over \$348,000 dollars in losses to the town (several million dollars in today's money).

School fire safety was also a concern of Kidd's and he campaigned for having mandatory fire drills in public schools. He also successfully lobbied state lawmakers to pass legislation concerning fire escapes in any building over 2 stories tall.

The Kidd's family service in public office continued when Kidd's son, Robert Jr., was also elected to the legislature in the 1970s, continuing the line back to when West Virginia had first become a state.

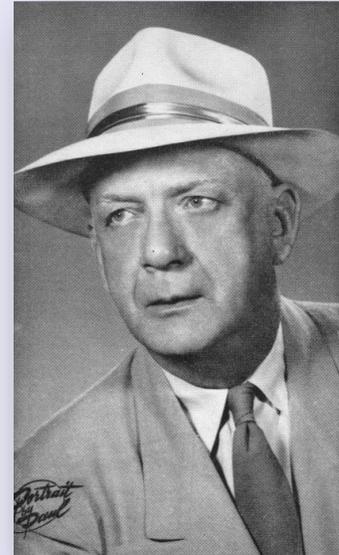
Robert Kidd died on December 7th, 1961 at the age of 73. He was buried in Sutton Cemetery in Sutton.



Carlisle Alonzo "Carl" Raper
8th State Fire Marshal
October 1st, 1948 – June 30th, 1957

Carl Raper was born on August 1st, 1896 in Wheeling and grew up in the area, attending Wheeling High School. He went on to graduate from Marshall College (now Marshall University). Raper served his country in World War I and became a lifelong American Legion member thereafter.

He married Elizabeth Dial and began working at the State Fire Marshal's Office, joining in 1930. Raper spent 19 years as an assistant fire marshal and as chief deputy. During World War II he served as the state's chief of war inspection service.



He was appointed by WV Insurance Commissioner David Butler to succeed Robert Kidd as State Fire Marshal, and was considered by many to be the state's foremost authority in arson investigation. Raper's long time in office included a number of high-profile cases, as in a 1949 Summers Co fire which claimed the lives of 7 people, including 3 children. An arson fire at Huntington State Hospital on Thanksgiving Eve, 1952 made national news when 17 patients lost their lives in the fire.

At the height of the Cold War during the 1950s, Raper coordinated all of the then- 225 fire departments in the state to be part of the WV Civilian Defense Program.

He was also honored by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in 1952 when they elected him as chairman of the fire marshals section of the NFPA.

In 1957, under new governor Cecil Underwood, Raper was replaced as marshal by Carl Weimer. Raper was given his notice on the day of his 27th anniversary with the office.

Upon leaving as marshal Raper went to work for CW Hutchinson Co., a sprinkler company based in Huntington.



Carl Edward Weimer
9th State Fire Marshal
July 1st, 1957-January 15th, 1961

Carl Weimer was born on December 17th, 1915 in Streby, Grant County, WV. b. 12/17/1915 Streby, Grant County d. 08/13/1986 (age 70) Petersburg, Grant Co, buried Maysville Cemetery, Maysville

Weimer was educated at Petersburg High School, Bridgewater College, Fairmont University and Shepard College. A marriage to Janet Cosner produced three children, Elizabeth, Margaret and Carl Jr.

Carl Weimer was a man of many talents, pursuing a wide variety of jobs in his life: a schoolteacher for 6 years in Grant County, and principal at Maysville Elementary for 4 years; owned and operated a mercantile and farm machinery business; member of the Maysville Fire Department; Grant County Republican executive committee chairman; and elected Grant County Sheriff from 1933 to 1937.

In 1957, WV State Insurance Commissioner Harold Neely appointed Weimer to become State Fire marshal upon Cecil Underwood's election to governor. Weimer chose Frank Clark, Charleston Fire Department assistant chief, as his deputy chief marshal.

School fire safety became an urgent priority during his service, after a deadly fire at a Chicago elementary school killed 90 students and teachers. Soon after this tragedy Weimer ordered the closure of many school buildings in Upshur County because of fire code violations, having open stairwells as one of the main reasons for closure.

Weimer ran for secretary of state on the Republican ticket in 1960, but lost to incumbent Joe Burdett.

Later in his life, in 1976, Weimer was appointed as superintendent of Denmar State Hospital, located in Pocahontas County, WV.

Carl Weimer died at the age of 70 on August 13th, 1986 in Petersburg and was buried at Maysville Cemetery in Maysville, WV.



Basil Edward Wright
10th State Fire Marshal
January 16th, 1961-August 10th 1963

Basil Wright was born on February 2nd, 1908 in Rock, Mercer County.

Wright attended school in Mercer County before pursuing degrees at the Institute of Applied Science in Chicago and at Harvard Legal Medicine in Boston. Helen Gordon became his wife and together they had had 2 daughters, Lynda and Bette Sue.

A career in law enforcement followed his graduation, and Wright served as a police officer in Welch and as a McDowell County deputy sheriff before joining the WV State Police in 1936.

Wright rose steadily in the ranks of the WVSP, becoming chief of the criminal identification bureau and second-in-command of the State Police, with the rank of Major.

Controversy and politics entered Major Wright's career when, in 1958, he was fired for unspecified reasons. This was during Governor Cecil Underwood's time in office and Underwood had become embroiled in a probe into Underwood's alleged involvement in political payoffs to protect gamblers in the Northern Panhandle.

Major Wright testified in a state crime commission hearing that Governor Underwood had told him of a \$1500 payoff that the governor had received, an accusation that Underwood denied. Underwood was never found guilty of any crime associated with the probe.

Wright was a certified commercial pilot and became the official pilot for Democratic gubernatorial nominee Wallace Barron, as Barron crossed the state during the campaign of 1960.

Upon Barron's election as governor, insurance commissioner Hugh Mills appointed Wright as the new state fire marshal.

On August 10th, 1963, Marshal Wright was flying passenger Eugene Frederick, the state's racing commissioner, to a hearing in Charles Town on horse racing violations. Wright's plane was making a landing approach to Martinsburg Airport when witnesses said it went into a spin and crashed near the airport, killing Wright and Frederick. Basil Wright was 55 years old. He was buried at Monte Vista Park Cemetery in Bluefield.



Richard William Kyle
11th State Fire Marshal
August 14th, 1963 – October 26th, 1964

Richard Kyle was born on August 27th, 1926 in Seattle, Washington. At a young age, Kyle's family moved to WV and he grew up attending local schools, such as Barboursville High School and Marshall University.

Kyle became an ordained Congregational minister after graduating from Pioneer Theological Seminary in Rockford, Illinois.

During World War II, he spent 4 years in Army intelligence as an investigator. After the war, he married Virginia Mills in 1946, although the marriage wouldn't last. His second, and last, marriage was to Birdie Dressler in 1964, while he was fire marshal.

Kyle was working as a technical assistant to Governor Wallace Barron in 1963 when State Fire Marshal Basil Wright was tragically killed in a plane crash. Barron then appointed Kyle to the position of fire marshal.

Soon after taking office, Kyle and his inspectors refused licenses to 8 hospitals and 6 nursing homes because of fire safety considerations.

In 1964, Kyle became heavily involved in Democrat Hullett Smith's campaign for governor. Smith's opponent, and former governor, Cecil Underwood accused Kyle of receiving more than \$3000 dollars in payoffs to steer work to a private contractor hired by the state to do flood repair work. The accusations were alleged to have taken place while Kyle was Governor Barron's assistant.

Kyle denied all the allegations against him, but Governor Barron and candidate Smith both believed that the best thing for Kyle to do would be to resign from his position as state fire marshal. Kyle acquiesced to their urgings and resigned on October 26th, 1964.

He later sued Cecil Underwood for libel and slander, but the case never went to trial.

In 1965 Kyle accepted a job at the Interstate Commerce Commission and moved to Washington DC with his wife to work there.

Richard Kyle died in DC at the age of 57 on May 29th, 1984. He was buried at Ivy Hill Cemetery in Alexandria, VA.



Lewis E. Myles
12th State Fire Marshal
October 27th, 1964 – June 16th, 1969

Lewis Myles was born in Bluefield on March 18th, 1927. Education was gained in the area, as he attended Bluefield High School, Bluefield College and Concord College.

He married his wife Janet and served in the US Army before becoming a constable in the Beaver Pond district for 4 years. He also worked as a bridge foreman for the State Road Commission before joining the State Fire Marshal's office, where he was an assistant fire marshal.



Upon the resignation of Marshal Richard Kyle, Governor Wallace Barron appointed Myles to take the position.

He served as fire marshal for almost 5 years until being accused of taking his state-issued marshal's car on a trip to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Myles denied the accusations, stating that the trip was partially for business, as he had stopped at a couple of southern WV nursing homes to inspect them on the way to the Carolinas, but then-Governor Arch Moore did not accept the excuse and fired Myles on June 16th, 1969.

More controversy arose when State Auditor Denzil Gainer hired Myles just days after the firing, to work in the auditor's office securities division as a security analyst.

In 1972, Myles' wife Janet died tragically at the age of 48 after a long illness.

Myles went on to work at the Charleston Gazette as a branch manager for the circulation department and in 1974 became a life insurance agent for Jefferson Standard, located in Charleston.

Later in life he moved to Murrells Inlet, South Carolina and died there on April 17th, 2005 at the age of 78.



John Wilson Landfried
13th State Fire Marshal
November 1st, 1969 – January 20th, 1974

John Landfried was born in Charleston on December 4th, 1926. Landfried served in the US Navy during World War II and married Joanne Kerns. They had 2 children, David and Nancy.

Settling in Ripley, Landfried became chief of the Ripley Volunteer Fire Department, a position he held for 35 years. He also made his mark in the insurance business, becoming owner and agent of the Landfried Insurance Agency.

When Governor Arch Moore fired State Fire Marshal Lewis Myles, Landfried was the choice to replace him.

After serving several years as fire marshal, Landfried was eager to return to his insurance business, and offered his resignation in 1973, staying on until early 1974.

Landfried lived the rest of his days in Ripley, succumbing to a long illness there on December 18th, 2002.

He was 76 years old and was buried at Pine Hill Cemetery in Ripley.



Donald Wilson Brown
14th State Fire Marshal (Acting)
April 5th, 1973 – January 21st, 1974

Donald Brown was born on May 9th, 1937 in Renick, Greenbrier County. He grew up and was educated in the Greenbrier school system and then was graduated from WV University in 1959 with a bachelor of science degree.

He married Dee McKnight and together they had 3 children.

Brown began working as a claims representative for insurance agencies and in 1969 he was appointed director of the property casualty division of the state Insurance Commission. By 1972 he had become the administrative assistant to the insurance commissioner and it was in this position that Brown became sought to fill in for departing fire marshal John Landfried.

Brown became acting state fire marshal in mid-1973 and served until the hiring of Walter Smittle in early 1974.

At this point Brown returned to the insurance commission, becoming the state insurance commissioner in 1975.

In his later years, he became the state director for the USDA's WV branch and when he retired from public service, spent his retirement tending his farm in Greenbrier County.

Brown died at the age of 80 on March 23rd, 2018 in Fairlea, Greenbrier County. He was buried at Morningside Cemetery in Renicks Valley.



Walter Smittle III
15th State Fire Marshal
January 21st, 1974 – December 31st, 1999

Walter Smittle was born in New Martinsville on February 27th, 1943. He grew up and was educated in Paden City, attending the high school there and going on to graduate from Marshall University, where he was a standout basketball player.

He married Barbara Mikes and they had 2 children, Jonathan and Matthew.

After graduating from Marshall, he became a teacher and coach at schools in Wetzel and Jackson Counties, eventually becoming head basketball coach at Magnolia High School in New Martinsville.

Smittle served as a volunteer firefighter at Paden City, eventually becoming a captain on the fire department.

Smittle continued his education by receiving his Master's Degree in safety education from West Virginia University and became Wetzel County school system's director of safety and transportation from 1971 to 1974.

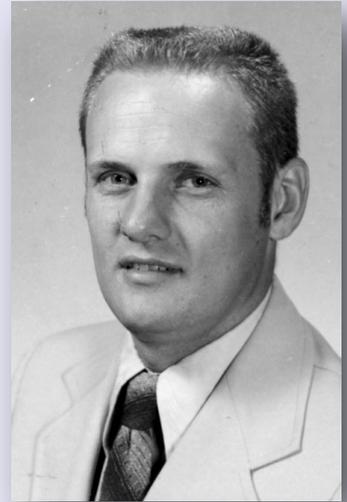
It was in his position at Wetzel County schools that he was appointed to be state fire marshal by Insurance Commissioner Samuel Weese.

Smittle served the longest tenure of any West Virginia state fire marshal to date and brought many improvements and changes to the office,

He also wrote a long-running fire safety column for local WV newspapers.

In 1999 the National association of State Fire Marshals honored Smittle as their "State Fire Marshal of the Year". Other awards included "Firefighter of the Year", given by the National Volunteer Fire Council and a Distinguished West Virginian award. He also served as chairman on many National Fire Protection Association committees, overseeing national codes and practices.

Smittle retired as state fire marshal in December of 1999, but continued to serve the state and his community, becoming the emergency management and 911 director for Jackson County.



Clarence Joe Leake
16th State Fire Marshal (Acting)
January 1st, 2000 – May 1st, 2000

Joe Leake was born in Oak Hill on December 13th, 1946. He received his education in the area, attending the West Virginia Institute of Student Technology and graduating from there in 1979 with a degree in general education. He had earlier graduated from the Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science, becoming a certified funeral director and embalmer.



Leake married Linda Matheny of Hico and together they had 2 daughters, Christy and Leslie.

He became fire chief of both the Gauley Bridge and Ansted Volunteer fire departments and in 1976 joined the WV State Health Department as a fire inspector.

In 1978 Leake joined the State Fire Marshal's Office and eventually became Field Deputy Fire Marshal for the inspections division. Upon SFM Walter Smittle's retirement in 1999, Leake became the acting state fire marshal until the hiring of Sterling Lewis in mid-2000.

Leake continued thereafter as deputy fire marshal of the inspections division.



Sterling Thomas Lewis
17th State Fire Marshal
May 1st, 2000 – April 30th, 2013

Sterling Lewis was born in Shady Spring, Raleigh County, on January 19th, 1951. He attended Shady Spring High School and graduated from WV Technical Institute with a bachelor of education degree in 1972.

He became a teacher at Shady Spring High for the next 26 years, as well as being head coach for the football program, and assistant coach in many other sports.

He married Kimberly Lewis and they had 2 children, Courtney and Sterling.

Lewis was also on the Beaver Volunteer Fire Department for 21 years, eventually becoming the chief.

In 1982 Lewis was elected to the WV House of Delegates, serving one term then and another term in 1986.

After serving a long stint as fire marshal, Lewis retired in 2013.

On December 14th, 2016 Lewis died after a short fight with cancer.

He was buried at Blue Ridge Memorial Gardens in Prosperity, Raleigh County.



Anthony Wayne Carrico
18th State Fire Marshal
November 1st, 2014 – December 13th, 2014

Anthony Carrico was born in Boone County in 1968 and graduated from West Virginia University.

Upon his graduation in 1992, he joined the SFMO as an assistant state fire marshal.

When Marshal Sterling Lewis retired in 2013, Carrico was appointed as acting state fire marshal, until the WV Fire Commission approved him to be the permanent fire marshal in September of 2014.

Carrico resigned in December of 2014 to take a job in the Division of Corrections, a job he still holds.



Kenneth E. Tyree
19th State Fire Marshal
January 1st, 2015 —

Kenneth E. Tyree was born ,graduated from South Charleston High School in 1981 and served 9 years in the U.S. Air Force. While serving, he married wife Leona, and went on to have 14 children and 13 grandchildren.

He also received his associate and bachelor's degree from West Virginia State University.

Upon leaving the Air Force Tyree joined the Charleston Fire Department, serving there for 21 years before retiring in 2014. He rose to the rank of Captain and was also the municipal Fire Marshal for Charleston. In 2013 he was selected by his peers as Firefighter of the Year.

Tyree has been a Cub Scout leader and had an active role in the Church of Latter-Day Saints in Teays Valley. In 2018 Governor Jim Justice bestowed on Tyree the "Most Distinguished West Virginian " award, created to honor those who have contributed significantly to West Virginia or West Virginians and have brought positive attention to the state. It honors those who excel in their field and have achieved state recognition and is one of the highest honors that can be awarded by the Governor.

Tyree was appointed State Fire Marshal on January 1st, 2015 and is an active member of the Fire Marshals Association of West Virginia, WV Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators, International Fire Marshals Association, National Association of State Fire Marshals, International Association of Fire Fighters, and National Fire Protection Association.

