

West Virginia Fire Prevention and Control Plan



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Status: Approved by State Fire Commission

Legal Authority: W. Va. Code § 15A-11-8(e)

Effective Date: September 9, 2026

I. Executive Commitment & Purpose

The West Virginia State Fire Commission, a 13-member policy-making body, establishes this comprehensive plan to identify strategies, goals, and objectives to reduce fires, casualties, and property loss. While recognizing that West Virginia has historically maintained a fire death rate more than double the national average, this plan marks a proactive shift toward data-driven Community Risk Reduction (CRR). We are committed to safeguarding those who reside, work, and visit West Virginia by evaluating and modernizing our approach to fire prevention and emergency resource management.

II. Strategic Objectives (The 16 Statutory Focus Areas)

In accordance with **W. Va. Code §15A-11-8(e)**, this plan addresses the following 16 mandated areas:

- **Manpower Needs:** We recognize the critical need to increase staffing across the 438 fire departments. We adhere to NFPA 1710/1720 standards and OSHA's "two-in, two-out" safety rule. We will actively research a Retirement Incentive Program and a progressive Length of Service Awards Program (LOSAP) to stabilize the volunteer and part-paid force providing support for local activation of recruitment efforts. .
- **Location of Training Centers:** Coordination with WVU Fire Extension Service and WV Public Service Training to optimize regional infrastructure.
- **Location of Fire Prevention and Control Units:** Facilitating County Fire Prevention Units/Departments as authorized under W. Va. Code § 7-1-3d.
- **Communications:** Enhancing first responder radio systems through the State Interoperability Radio Network (SIRN) to overcome unique topographical obstacles.
- **Fire-Fighting Facilities:** Collaborating with municipalities to assess the effectiveness of current departments and establishment of future departments in underserved areas.
- **Water Sources:** Planning for adequate supplies in partnership with the Public Service Commission and the Hydrant Task Force, including dry hydrants and water tanker shuttles.
- **Vehicular Needs:** Assessing appropriate apparatus needs and standardized record

adherence to NFPA 1900/1901 for standardized and mandatory testing.

- **Public Education and Information:** Prioritizing fire prevention education strategies before emergency incidents occur.
- **Public Participation:** Aggressive promotion of the FEMA SAFER grant and the "Make Me A Firefighter" program.
- **Standardization in Recordkeeping:** Providing best practices to autonomous departments to move toward uniform reporting.
- **Evaluation of Personnel:** Establishing formal criteria for periodic performance reviews for all fire service personnel.
- **Reporting of Fire Hazards:** New National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) reporting for near real-time analytics.
- **Programs on Mutual Aid:** Aiming for 100% participation in automatic and mutual aid agreements to ensure adequate staffing during high-hazard responses.
- **Location of Public Safety Agencies:** Optimizing geographical "First Due" and "Dual Response" areas.
- **Outline of Fire Prevention Programs:** Delivering state-level resources for use by local departments to enhance risk reduction.
- **Accessibility of Fire Prevention Information:** Fostering community partnerships, such as with the American Red Cross, to improve public access to safety resources.

III. Strategic Outreach & Budget (FY 2026–2027)

The following table outlines the \$95,000 tactical outreach budget designed to address findings from the 2025 Performance Review:

Category	Tactical Focus & Channels	Budget Allocation
Residential Safety Survey	Geotargeted Social and Search ads directing residents in high-risk counties (Calhoun, Tyler, Summers) to the official digital survey.	\$20,000
Community Partnership	Collaborative outreach with the American Red Cross for targeted smoke/CO detector installation events in residential "hot zones."	\$25,000

Category	Tactical Focus & Channels	Budget Allocation
Recruitment Support	Professional recruitment campaign for paid and volunteer roles, promoting the Junior Fire Fighters Camp and LOSAP benefits.	\$50,000

IV. Operational Calendar & Milestones

- **July 2026:** Fire Safety Poster Contest Showcase (Organic promotion).
- **August 2026:** Home Safety Survey Promotional Launch.
- **September 2026:** National Preparedness Month Activation
- **September 2026:** Partnership with Dept of Education of Fire Safety Poster Contest
- **October 2026:** National Fire Prevention Week Advocacy
- **October 2026:** Fire Safety Poster Contest Judging and Awards Recognition
- **Nov '26 - Mar '27:** Winter Safety Installation Rallies in high-fatality counties.
- **August 2027:** State Fair Recruitment Drive and Fairground presence.

V. Fire Death Statistics and Risk Profile

State Fire Profile & Key Statistics West Virginia historically ranks among the top 10 states nationally for fire-related fatalities, averaging approximately 25 deaths per million residents—more than double the national average.

- **Residential Risk:** Over 87% of all fire fatalities in the state occur in residential structures.
- **Fatality Rate:** In recent USFA reporting, West Virginia recorded 15.8 residential fire deaths per 1,000 fires, compared to the national average of 5.8 deaths per 1,000 fires.
- **Primary Contributing Factors:** Older housing stock, rural response lag times, supplemental heating hazards (wood stoves, space heaters), lower rates of working smoke alarms, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

Risk Mitigation & Reduction Action Plan

A. Target High-Risk Residential Areas (Community Risk Reduction)

- **Targeted Smoke Alarm Installations:** Partner with local Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs) to execute door-to-door installations of 10-year sealed battery smoke alarms in rural and high-risk census tracts.
- **Home Fire Safety Audits:** Provide free voluntary digital home safety surveys focusing on having working smoke alarms, closing the door campaign, fire extinguishers in the home, safe attended cooking usage, home medical oxygen safety, and smoking safety.

B. Enhance Data Collection & Statistical Analysis

1. **NFIRS Modernization:** Standardize and incentivize 100% participation of state fire departments in the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS).

2. **Predictive Mapping:** Utilize incident data to map fire mortality hotspots, allowing the State Fire Marshal's Office to allocate educational and physical resources dynamically.

C. Public Education & Outreach Expansion

- **School & Youth Programs:** Implement standardized life safety and fire escape planning curricula across all West Virginia K-12 public schools.
- **Senior & Vulnerable Adult Outreach:** Distribute specialized fire prevention materials targeting elderly populations, focusing on safe cooking practices and heating safety during winter months.

D. Strengthen Enforcement & Code Compliance

- **Rental Housing Safety Standards:** Mandate functional smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in non-owner-occupied residential rentals as a requirement for municipal utility hookups or licensing.
- **Plan Review & Code Integration:** Maintain digital streamlined plan reviews for commercial and multi-family residential structures to ensure modern suppression and alarm systems are installed during construction.

VI: CONTINUOUS EVALUATION & PROGRESS TRACKING

A. Quarterly Commission Review (or appropriate to schedule)

In accordance with its mission to coordinate state fire service objectives, the State Fire Commission shall include a "Fire Prevention and Control Plan Progress Report" as a standing agenda item for every regularly scheduled bi-monthly or quarterly meeting.

- **Review Cycle:** During these sessions, the Commission will evaluate at least four of the 16 focus areas per meeting to ensure a full comprehensive review is completed annually.
- **Action Plans:** If a focus area is found to be lagging—such as a dip in NERIS reporting rates or a lack of participation in mutual aid agreements—the Commission will develop a targeted Action Plan with specific deadlines for correction.

B. Measurable Goals & Deadlines

The Commission will set S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals for the 16 focus areas, including:

- **Reporting Efficiency:** Reducing the 90-day grace period for incident reporting to improve the "timely and efficient reporting of all fire department responses".
- **Safety Metrics:** Tracking the installation of smoke and CO alarms through the American Red Cross partnership to hit specific "hot zone" targets identified in the 2024 State Community Risk Assessment.
- **Recruitment Benchmarks:** Measuring the "Application Starts" from the \$50,000 Career Promotion campaign to address the decline in volunteer numbers.
- **Quarterly Reporting and Action Planning of Safety Survey**

C. Official Record Keeping & Transparency

- To comply with W. Va. Code §5F-1-7 and ensure legislative transparency, the Commission will maintain an official record of all plan-related activity:
 - Meeting Minutes: All discussions, votes on Action Plans, and progress updates related to this Master Plan will be documented in the official meeting minutes.
 - Public Access: These records, along with the required Annual Reports, will be made available on the Commission's website to enhance user-friendliness and public trust.
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VI. Executive Summary: DRAFT Strategic Recruitment Campaigns (messaging)

To address the findings regarding West Virginia's fire service manpower needs, we propose the integration of two high-impact recruitment strategies tailored for rural environments. These campaigns move beyond traditional job postings to build a sustainable "pipeline" of professionalized responders. Here are two examples we found and can emulate.

1. The "Fire Within You" Awareness Campaign

Objective: To reposition the fire service as a vital, prestigious, and accessible profession for West Virginia citizens.

- **The Narrative:** This campaign shifts the focus from the department's "need" to the individual's "purpose." It utilizes the "Is There a Fire in You?" model to challenge residents to serve their neighbors directly.
- **Rural-First Tactics:** Deployment of 365-day localized marketing including "Volunteers Needed" station signage and annual community mailers.
- **Incentive Transparency:** Explicit promotion of the Length of Service Award Program (LOSAP) and potential retirement incentives to demonstrate long-term value to the recruit.
- **Digital Pulse:** High-quality "Day in the Life" video content featuring actual West Virginia responders to humanize the profession and break down "barrier to entry" myths.

2. The "School-to-Station" Mentorship Pipeline

Objective: To capture the next generation of responders by bridging the gap between high school graduation and fire academy enrollment.

- **The Narrative:** Building on the success of the Junior Fire Fighters Camp, this program establishes a formal mentorship "hand-off" from youth programs to active service.
- **Tactical Partnerships:** Collaboration with the Department of Education and local high schools to recruit students into EMT and Firefighter-I tracks before they enter the general workforce.
- **Safety Through Mentorship:** Pairing new recruits with senior mentors immediately upon application to build "social capital" and reduce high turnover rates.
- **Application Support:** Hosting "Practice Days" at Regional Fire Schools for physical ability tests to ensure rural youth feel capable and prepared for professional standards.

3. The new “Volunteer Community Risk Reduction Corps”

Objective: To capture a new pool of differently skilled professionals (non-fire related) to help promote and focus on proactive community safety and risk mitigation or prevention.

- **Key Activities:** Volunteers perform non-emergency, high-impact tasks such as installing and testing smoke alarms, conducting home safety checks, teaching fire safety to children and seniors, and handling administrative or logistical duties.
- **Who it is for:** This model allows citizens who want to support their local fire departments—but do not wish to or cannot fight active fires—to volunteer in a meaningful, non-hazardous way.
- **Goal:** Create a warm inviting environment with the doors open, showing community members they are welcomed to be engaged in another important way!
 - We are not changing the mission; we are changing how we resource it and model it for people that may be ready to join.

References

1. PERFORMANCE REVIEW: THE STATE FIRE COMMISSION
2. WEST VIRGINIA FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL PLAN