

West Virginia Fire Prevention and Control Plan Supplement



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

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Approved: GRANT GUNNOE
Chairman

Date Approved: September 9, 2026

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New Document	Fire Prevention and Control Plan	21 Pages
Superseded Document(s) Effective Date		

WEST VIRGINIA FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL PLAN

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the Fire Prevention and Control Plan, created and approved by the State Fire Commission, is to identify strategies, goals, and objectives to reduce fires, fire casualties, and property loss, and to improve firefighters' and other first responders' safety. This can be achieved by evaluating and changing how people think about fire, the results of fire, emergency response, emergency resources, and fire prevention. Included in this plan is a community risk reduction strategic plan to continue our efforts along with the State Fire Marshal's office and other local stakeholders to reduce the rate of death due to fire and other related incidents.

Fire loss continues to be a problem in the State of West Virginia. As such, there is a need to have a robust plan. The State Fire Commission and the State Fire Marshal's Office will strive to address the issues and help to positively improve and safeguard those who reside, work, and visit this great state.

In accordance with West Virginia Code §15A-11-8(e), The State Fire Commission is tasked with developing a plan for fire prevention and control which shall include, but not be limited to, the following areas: manpower needs, location of training centers, location of fire prevention and control units, communications, fire-fighting facilities, water sources, vehicular needs, public education and information, public participation, standardization in recordkeeping, evaluation of personnel, reporting of fire hazards, programs on mutual aid, location of public safety agencies, outline of fire prevention programs, and accessibility of fire prevention information. This Fire Prevention and Control Plan intends to address each criteria set forth in West Virginia Code §15A-11-8(e).

West Virginia State Fire Commission

In accordance with West Virginia Code §15A-11-1, the State Fire Commission is an established 13 member policy making body of volunteers appointed by the Governor with the sole purpose and mission to coordinate the fire service objectives of the state. Responsibilities include promulgation of the State Fire Code and State Building Code and development of a fire prevention and control plan. The Fire Commission has representation from the West Virginia State Firemen's Association, the West Virginia Fire Chiefs, the West Virginia Professional Fire Chiefs, the Professional Firefighters Association of West Virginia, the West Virginia Architects Institute Association, the West Virginia Independent Insurance Association, and the West Virginia Manufacturers Association. The State Fire Commission does not have any direct funding or staffing, but it gains its support through the partnership and collaboration with the West Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office.

West Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office

In accordance with West Virginia Code §15A-10-2, the State Fire Marshal has statutory responsibility for enforcement of laws covering fire prevention; hazardous substance and explosives; installation and maintenance of fire control equipment; adequacy of fire exits from buildings and all other places where people live, work, and congregate; determine fire causes; arrest arsonists; certification of fire departments for state revenues; and to manage fire incident reporting system. The State Fire Marshal's office is authorized to establish demonstration units within public and private educational institutions for the purposes of public fire safety education, prevention, and protection.

West Virginia Fire Service Partners

West Virginia State Firemen's Association

West Virginia Fire Chiefs

West Virginia Professional Fire Chiefs

Professional Firefighters Association of West Virginia

West Virginia State Agencies

Department of Homeland Security

West Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office

West Virginia Emergency Management Division

WVU Fire Extension Service - State Fire Academy

West Virginia Public Service Training

West Virginia Division of Forestry

Current State of Fire Prevention in West Virginia

West Virginia's fire service stakeholders and other community service organizations have made efforts to make risk reduction efforts. It should not go without notice that fire service stakeholders and other community service organizations have implemented and improved strategies attempting to improve the plight of individuals and families in the state.

The factors that plague this state are affected by variables that have not been able to be solved, including demographics (senior population and children), topography (rural and remote areas), response time obstacles, and sometimes the lack of needed staffing. In West Virginia, in excess of 90% of all communities are served through and with great sacrifice by members of Volunteer and Combination (Part-Paid) Fire Departments who volunteer their time to train and prepare within these communities. Of the 438 fire departments throughout the state, there are only 13 fully paid and staffed fire departments, and 12 part-paid or combination fire departments. These departments are located in more densely populated areas.

The State Fire Commission, the State Fire Marshal's Office and the American Red Cross have partnered to bring greater awareness and education to communities by providing solutions, efforts, and resources to make their best attempts in the needed reductions.

OBJECTIVES

Because of the reality of fire in West Virginia, and especially because of fire related deaths, the need for an established fire prevention and control plan is imperative, as is the State Fire Commission's on-going concern for the heroes of the fire service in this state. These and other issues will be addressed in this plan, which will also include a Community Risk Reduction Strategic Plan.

There are necessary objectives and goals through strategies and desired outcomes that must be considered to protect the life and property of our citizens and those visiting our state. These objectives and goals will be achieved by increased collaboration of the State Fire Commission, the State Fire Marshal and Staff, and with improved collaborations with other stakeholders and organizations that can and will impact the success of this plan. The West Virginia Fire Prevention and Control Plan has been developed to implement the 16 Focus Objectives as included in West Virginia Code §15A-11-8(e).

1. MANPOWER NEEDS

Challenges related to staffing, recruitment, and retention of both career and volunteer firefighters are an ongoing concern that the State Fire Commission will continue to address.

Addressing adequate fire department manpower and staffing involves determining the necessary number of firefighters and their strategic placement to meet response goals with a common recommendation being a minimum of four members per engine and ladder company. Staffing levels are influenced by factors like the type of department (career, volunteer, or combination), budget constraints, and scheduling models. Federal guidelines like National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710, Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments, NFPA 1720, Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments, and OSHA's "two-in, two-out" rule set minimums for safety regarding staffing for fire departments. Both NFPA 1710 and NFPA 1720 not only have the recommendation of a minimum of four members for engine company response, but also for ladder truck companies.

The firefighters' "two-in, two-out" rule is a safety regulation that requires a minimum of four firefighters for interior structural firefighting operations: two inside the structure to perform the work, and at least two outside who remain in voice or visual contact to perform a rescue if needed. This rule, established by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), ensures there is a dedicated standby team ready to assist or rescue the interior crew in an Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH) atmosphere. The industrial stakeholders received clarification from OSHA that eight personnel was the minimum for the dedicated standby team.

The safety of firefighters engaged in interior structural firefighting is the major focus of paragraph (g)(4) of the OSHA Respiratory Protection standard. This provision requires that at least two employees enter the Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH) atmosphere and remain in visual or voice contact with each other at all times. It also requires that at least two employees be located outside the IDLH atmosphere, thus the term, "two in/two out". This assures that the "two in" can monitor each other and assist with equipment failure or entrapment or other hazards, and the "two out" can monitor those in the building, initiate rescue, or call for back-up. One of the "two out" can be assigned another role such as incident commander. The incident commander cannot be a back up and the incident commander; both functions require full attention.

Despite progress in reducing the cost of a resident's fire insurance coverage, some areas still have less than the minimum recognized fire protection (an ISO rating of 10), and some communities lack a fire department entirely. There is a need for a plan to assess these needs and identify solutions.

Strategies to manage staffing include using predictive analytics, grant programs like Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), and inter-departmental partnerships. The manpower needs relative to fire and other related hazard responses are critical to the safety of the citizens of West Virginia and those responding to these emergencies and hazards. There is a significant concern that the need for staffing must increase throughout most fire departments serving their communities.

Key components of fire department staffing:

- (a) Minimum staffing levels: The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends a minimum of four firefighters for each engine and ladder company to effectively and safely perform tasks like initial attack, search, and rescue. OSHA's "two-in, two-out" rule mandates at least two firefighters inside a structure who are in voice or visual contact with two outside firefighters.
- (b) Staffing models: Fire departments can be career (full-time employees), volunteer (minimal or no pay), or a combination of both.
- (c) Strategic placement: Staffing is not just about total numbers, but also where the departments are located. Some departments use predictive analytics to forecast high-demand areas and times to strategically position crews for faster response times.
- (d) Safety and effectiveness: Adequate staffing is crucial for safety and effectiveness. Understaffed departments face higher risks and potential for increased losses. Research shows that four-person crews are significantly more efficient at tasks like initial fire suppression and search and rescue compared to smaller crews.
- (e) Challenges: Modern fire departments face challenges in maintaining staffing levels due to factors like budget constraints, increasing demands for services, and difficulty recruiting younger members.

The State Fire Commission will collaborate with local fire departments to explore the following solutions to staffing shortages:

- (a) Grant programs: Federal grants like FEMA's SAFER program provide funds to help communities increase their number of firefighters.
- (b) Partnerships: Collaborating with neighboring departments can help pool resources and respond to emergencies together.
- (c) Technology: Upgrading equipment with innovative technology can help departments perform more with fewer people. Predictive analytics: Using data to forecast needs allows for more efficient allocation of resources and better-informed staffing decisions.

Desired Strategies and Goals:

- Actively pursue assessing current and future personnel requirements for fire services.
- Work with and form collaborations with other stakeholders to increase volunteer participation.
 - Current bi-monthly meetings conducted by the Fire Commission's Recruitment and Retention Committee provides for this collaborative accomplishment.
- Research and present a more progressive Length of Service Awards Program (LOSAP).
 - Gather data for research for potential consideration of a Retirement Incentive Program for departments of the volunteer and part-paid fire service.
- Consider potential utilization of NFPA 1710 and 1720 as guidelines to establish S.M.A.R.T Goals focused on manpower solutions.
- Improved collaboration and buy-in with other stakeholders to meet desired outcomes.
 - Greater collaboration during fire department evaluations, fire commission meetings, and association meetings with focus on manpower and other elements of concern.

2. LOCATION OF FIRE TRAINING CENTERS

There are at least four permanent fire training centers throughout the state with the possibility of more being established. As such, most training is provided by using mobile training centers where fire tactic related props are used when requests are made to the state's two recognized training providers. The two primary recognized training providers are West Virginia University Fire Extension Service and West Virginia Public Service Training (PST)

Potential locations for training facilities are primarily determined and established by training providers in collaboration with other stakeholders, which may include some involvement of the State Fire Commission and State Fire Marshal's Office. However, neither agency has jurisdictional authority for establishing locations for these centers.

Further research may be needed to determine or explore potential collaborations with Law Enforcement and EMS training providers not embedded within the WVU Fire Extension Service or WV Public Service Training (PST) to provide training.

The State Fire Commission has sought information from fire service training professionals and other resources to develop an infrastructure for a training center with the purpose of providing and establishing an understanding of what it takes for the preparation, development, and implementation of Fire Training Centers locally or on a regional basis. This provides a summary of the Fire Training Center Need, Use, & Resource Availability and Approach to the ultimate goal of training center development.

Most planning for fire training centers focus on the following criteria: a. Site Location; b. Project Ownership/Oversight; c. Structures, Appliances, and Equipment; and, d. Financial Planning/Funding Options for training centers.

Desired Strategies and Goals:

- Assessing current and potential future establishment of training centers for fire services;
- Improved collaboration and buy-in with other stakeholders such as the state's training providers to meet desired outcomes.
- Consider further utilization and buy-in to NFPA 1402, Standard on Fire Training and Associated Props, as a guideline and standard to establish relative goals for greater use and access to training.

3. LOCATION OF FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL UNITS

The fire prevention and control units referenced in West Virginia Code § 15A-11-8(e) are limited to the county level. These fire prevention and control units are called County Fire Prevention Units. There are no current fire prevention units operating, but there are four counties with county fire departments: Berkeley, Gilmer, Jefferson, and Wirt.

A "County Fire Prevention Unit" shall mean an organization created under the provisions of W. Va. Code § 7-1-3d, which shall provide personnel or other resources to a municipal, volunteer, or other local fire department, pursuant to a valid Memorandum of Understanding between the County Fire Prevention Unit and the organization receiving the assistance.

In order for a Memorandum of Understanding to be valid under this section, it shall contain provisions agreed to by all fire departments involved in the agreement and must be properly reviewed and approved by the State Fire Commission.

The State Fire Commission will explore the following desired strategies and goals:

- Actively research, assess, and, where needed, develop current and potential needs for the county's utilization of these types of control units.
- Improved collaboration and buy-in with any and all other stakeholders to meet desired

outcomes and provide better options for such implementation.

- Collaborate with other stakeholders, including county commissions, to determine additional needs.
- Evaluate the current designated response areas.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

First responder radio systems are critical life safety technology that enable fire, EMS, and police to have an effective and reliable means to communicate. In some instances, new or existing structures are altered in a way that affects emergency responder's ability to communicate utilizing the jurisdiction's communication systems. Due to topography and obstacles created by the lay of the land, it has been difficult to navigate. But with partners and strategies of the State Interoperability Radio Network (SIRN), which is managed by the West Virginia Emergency Management Division, West Virginia has and will continue to improve the critical element of regulations and standards mandated throughout the state.

Coordination with local, state, and federal agencies and workgroups to continue the development and enhancement of communications within all public safety organizations will remain critical.

Desired Strategies and Goals:

- Continue to improve efforts in the establishing and maintaining of effective communication systems throughout the state.
- More effective collaboration with other stakeholders such as the West Virginia Emergency Management Division and county and local 911 communication centers to assess all communication issues and needs.

5. LOCATION OF FIRE-FIGHTING FACILITIES

Like training centers, the State Fire Commission and the State Fire Marshal's Office do not have jurisdiction to determine the locations of new fire fighting facilities. However, the State Fire Commission recognizes a need for additional paid and volunteer fire departments. The State Fire Commission plans to collaborate with counties and local municipalities to assist in addressing needs.

Desired Strategies and Goals:

- Research and assess the potential for the establishment of future fire departments.
- Improved collaboration and buy-in with other stakeholders to meet desired outcomes.
- Improved utilization of NFPA 1402 as guidelines and standards to establish relative goals for greater use and access to training.
- Better assessment, evaluation and planning for the provision of equipment and infrastructure standardization.

6. WATER SOURCES

Water Sources are critical to the fire service in relation to the need for mitigation of fire throughout the state. The West Virginia Public Service Commission along with local public service districts and private water purveyors has jurisdiction over water access.

The installation and repair of new and existing water sources can address a critical need for an improved water supply throughout the state with urban, suburban and rural areas. Partnership and participation with agencies like the West Virginia Public Service Commission and the Hydrant Task Force will also assist in the attention, improvement, and implementation of West Virginia's fire service water supply.

Desired Strategies and Goals:

- Greater assessment and planning for adequate water supplies for firefighting.
 - Assessment of the potential for alternative methods of water supplies such as dry hydrants, water haulers and water tanker shuttles.
 - Assessment of the potential for alternative methods of water supplies such as pumping water out of nearby water sources or the ability to bring water to fire sites to mitigate fire suppression.
- Increase collaboration and discussion opportunities with the Public Service Commission (PSC), local Public Service Districts (PSD), Division of Forestry stream statistics information, Emergency Management Division stream gauge information and other critical stakeholders on a reasonable and more regular basis to discuss strategies and plans to improve water systems supplies, hydrant placement and infrastructure to improve water systems statewide.

7. VEHICULAR NEEDS

The State Fire Commission is mandated to develop minimum statewide standards for firefighter training levels, equipment within service areas, response times, and communication systems.

The State Fire Commission has jurisdictional oversight over each fire department's evaluation, which is found, W .Va. Code R. § 87-6-1 et seq., Certification and Evaluation of Local Fire Departments, that is conducted at least one time in a 5-year cycle. Each evaluation addresses the following criteria:

Vehicle Maintenance:

Each department shall maintain documentation of routine inspections and maintenance for all apparatus and equipment, including emergency repairs, to include but not be limited to vehicle inspection stickers and emergency vehicle permits (EVPs). These records shall be maintained by the department and made available, if requested, to an appropriate governmental entity, which includes the Fire Commission, the Fire Marshal's Office or any overseeing governmental agency.

These records shall be retained by the fire department and/or their governing Authority Having Jurisdiction in accordance with Appendix A- Record Retention of the West Virginia State Fire

Commission “Requirements for West Virginia Fire Departments”.

Buildings Housing Apparatus and Equipment:

Buildings that are used for housing apparatus and equipment storage shall be of adequate size, heated, and lighted adequately. Each building shall meet the minimum requirements of the State Fire Code applicable at the time of its construction.

National Apparatus Standards:

Apparatus shall meet the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards applicable at the time of manufacture, as appropriate.

If an apparatus is not capable of transporting the required equipment to an emergency scene, a written plan must be kept on file and be capable of being produced upon demand to the Fire Commission, Fire Marshal, or overseeing governmental agency, setting forth a detailed procedure for transporting all necessary equipment to the emergency scene which shall be strictly adhered to. The plan not being able to be produced, or the plan not being adhered to is a violation of this standard and may result in revocation of the department’s certification.

Apparatus Testing:

All fire pumps and hoses shall be tested annually for compliance with nationally recognized standards. Records shall be maintained of such tests in accordance with the Record Retention policy of each fire department.

Acquisition and Replacement of Apparatus:

Each department should prepare a long-range program for the purchase and replacement of apparatus and equipment.

Minimum Equipment and Performance:

Minimum equipment and performance for Volunteer and Part-Paid fire departments must adhere to the provisions set forth in the “Volunteer Firefighters’ Training, Equipment and Operating Standards” Legislative Rule provided in W .Va. Code R. § 87-8-1 et seq.

Paid fire department minimum equipment and performance shall meet the listed equipment as defined by apparatus set forth in Appendix B – Pumper Fire Apparatus, Appendix C – Aerial Fire Apparatus, Appendix D – Mobile Water Supply Fire Apparatus, and Appendix E – Special Service Fire Apparatus.

These records shall be retained by the fire department and/or their governing Authority Having Jurisdiction.

Desired Strategies and Goals:

- Actively pursue specific time-focused strategies to identify and provide uniform and standardized apparatus and equipment standards for a department's future procurement.
 - Focus on life cycles of apparatus and equipment where updates, changes, and replacement of equipment occur.
 - Conduct assessment surveys and facilitate discussions after the receipt, review and evaluation of all surveys for potential concerns on proposing overall standardization of apparatus and equipment maintenance.
- Increase utilization of the NFPA standards for guides on needs assessment, planning, procurement, and maintenance of apparatus equipment and fleets such as guidelines for First-Line and Reserve Fire Apparatus found in the NFPA 1901 or its new standard NFPA 1900.
- Actively collaborate on a more regular basis with all critical stakeholders with the goal of regular assessment, and improvements to meeting the needs of the statewide fire service.
- Actively participate in any and all grant funding processes for adequate apparatus and equipment needs for the department.

8. PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Many fire departments throughout the state have a fire safety program to educate the public in prevention and reduction of fire risks. All departments should understand the significance of fire prevention through the value of public education programs. These programs should assist the respective community in gaining the knowledge and skills for passive and active fire protection needed to lead safer lives. NFPA 1730, Standard on Organization and Deployment of Fire Prevention Inspection and Code Enforcement, Plan Review, Investigation, and Public Education Operations, provides great guidance on the establishment of a public education program.

Desired Strategies and Goals:

- Developing program strategies to inform and educate the public on fire safety within each statewide fire department.
 - Fire Prevention education should be the first approach prior to emergency incident response.
- Increase collaboration and buy-in with fire departments and other stakeholders to assess current program deliveries, future goals for developing and increasing program involvement utilizing outside organizations such as NFPA, 'Vision 20/20, International Association of Fire Chiefs, and others.
- Provide outreach to fire departments on best practices.

9. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Many local volunteer fire departments are struggling to meet staffing needs.

The number of volunteer firefighters in the U.S. reached a low in 2020. At the same time, call volume has more than tripled in the last 35 years due in large part to the increase in emergency medical calls. Major factors contributing to recruitment challenges include increased time

demands, more rigorous training requirements, and the proliferation of two-income families whose members do not have time to volunteer. Fire departments today are also expected to provide a wide range of services and multi-hazard response, creating further challenges for resource-constrained departments.

Recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters are two of the key issues being addressed by the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC).

In 2014, the NVFC received a SAFER grant from FEMA to implement a nationwide recruitment and retention campaign. Through the “Make Me A Firefighter” program, the NVFC has developed resources, tools, and customizable outreach materials to assist local departments in recruiting and retaining personnel. Departments can access these free resources and post their volunteer opportunities through the department portal at <http://portal.nvfc.org>. The campaign also seeks to raise awareness among the public of the need for fire service volunteers. The public can learn more about the volunteer fire service and find a local opportunity at www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org.

Desired Strategies and Goals:

- Actively encourage more public involvement in fire prevention efforts.
- Explore opportunities for Fire Departments to participate in the SAFER grant program
- Make efforts to publicize the SAFER grant program to all fire departments within counties and local municipalities.
- Encourage continued collaboration amongst the Fire Commission, the State Fire Marshal’s office and the West Virginia University Fire Service Extension regarding the Junior Fire Fighters Camp as this camp has continued to grow in numbers and national reputation and has aided in impacting recruitment and retention locally and nationally.
- Seek improved collaboration with local community service organizations with like-minded goals such as the American Red Cross, other State agencies with focus on children, families, those with disabilities and the senior population.
 - Assessment and increase of potential partnerships with specific desires and needed focus based on assessed risk within each community.

Recruitment and Retention Challenges - Root Causes

SOURCES OF CHALLENGES	CONTRIBUTING FACTORS
Time Demands	• The two-income family and working multiple jobs • Increased training time demands • Higher emergency call volume • Additional demands within department (fundraising, administrative)
Training Requirements	• Higher training standards and new federal requirements • More time demands • Greater public expectation of fire department's response capabilities (broader range of services such as EMS, hazmat, technical rescue, etc.) • Additional training demands to provide broader range of services • Recertification demands
Increasing Call Volume	• Fire department assuming wider response roles (EMS, hazmat, technical rescue) • Increasing emergency medical call volume • Increase in number of automatic fire alarms
Changes in the "Nature of the Business"	• Abuse of emergency services by the public • Less of an emphasis on social aspects of volunteering
Changes in Sociological Conditions (In Urban and Suburban Areas)	• Transience • Loss of community feeling • Less community pride • Less of an interest or time for volunteering • Two-income family and time demands • "Me" generation
Changes in Sociological Conditions (In Rural Areas)	• Employers less willing to let employees off to run calls • Time demand • "Me" generation
Leadership Problems	• Poor leadership and lack of coordination • Authoritative management style • Failure to manage change
Federal Legislation and Regulations	• Fair Labor Standards Act interpretation • "2 in, 2 out" ruling requiring four firefighters on scene before entering hazardous environment • Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) live-fire burn limitations
Increasing Use of Combination Departments	• Disagreements among chiefs or other department leaders • Friction between volunteer and career members
Higher Cost of Housing (In Affluent Communities)	• Volunteers cannot afford to live in the community they serve
Aging Communities	• Greater number of older people today • Lack of economic growth and jobs in some towns
Internal Conflict	• Disagreements among departmental leaders • Friction between volunteer and career members

Retention & Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services: Challenges & Solutions.
National Volunteer Fire Council and United States Fire Administration (FA-310), May 2007

10. STANDARDIZATION OF RECORDKEEPING

Standardization of recordkeeping practices across all departments statewide would be a difficult task due to a variety of issues including each department's autonomy and their choice of software solutions and other third party vendor options. However, the State Fire Commission can provide guidance and best practices on recordkeeping to local fire departments.

Desired Strategies and Goals:

- Assess record keeping strategies at the appropriate level to potentially develop uniform standards and guidelines for record keeping.
- Begin the assessment phase during the agency's Fire Department evaluations for the potential discussion and current record keeping practices that are in place.

11. PERSONNEL EVALUATION

Although there are no specific codes, standards, or directives, having evaluations provide a great measure of performance for all fire service personnel whether paid, career, or volunteer.

Desired Strategies and Goals

- Look to establish a reasonable criteria for evaluating fire personnel with focus on clearly understood job expectations, implementation of periodic reviews for identifying any challenges, and retention of more formal documentation on each member that reflects the value of their contribution.
- Provide reasonable objectives and goals with a focus that may involve recruitment and retention strategies that welcome more of a desire to serve which will increase each community's pool of potential candidates.
- With stakeholder involvement, conduct research, evaluation, and specific focus on other states with successful program development and implementation.

12. REPORTING OF FIRE HAZARDS

The goal of reporting fire hazards should be centered around timely and efficient reporting of all fire department responses to not only fire responses, but also all responses made by each department. The ultimate goal of fire hazard reporting is to develop strategies for emergency response and provide risk reduction measures within the department's area.

The new National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) platform will modernize and transform the legacy data system, known as the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS), to a secure, cloud-hosted system that fulfills the U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA's) National Fire Data Center's (NFDC's) obligation under the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-498) to mitigate the fire problem, reduce loss of life and property, and educate the public on fire safety, prevention and protection.

NERIS will be the premier source of all-hazards information and innovative analytics informing the nation's fire problem and the capabilities of state, local, territorial and tribal fire services' resource capacities and capabilities to handle the fire problem effectively, efficiently and safely. The NERIS platform, using data procured, captured, aggregated and analyzed, will provide near real-time information on the overall scope of fire and emergency incidents across the U.S. and timely insights on significant or remarkable fire, hostile and disaster events.

This project is made possible through a research and development contract awarded through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) Science and Technology Directorate's (S&T's) Long-Range Broad Agency Announcement program awarded to the Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI). FSRI is a part of Underwriters Laboratories Research Institutes, the nonprofit safety science organization within the UL enterprise. In collaboration with USFA, DHS S&T and the American fire service, FSRI will develop and provide the new NERIS platform for use by fire and emergency services departments nationwide.

NERIS will have enhanced data integration capability and substantial computing power to minimize the burden for data contributors while providing incentives through user-defined and actionable analytic tools that support intelligence-led decision-making at the local level.

It will be flexible and adaptable to the changing needs of the local fire service and first responders nationwide to ensure equity of service availability at the most local level, and to enable local fire departments and emergency response agencies to access and use their own data for data-driven informed decisions.

Desired Strategies and Goals

- Assess and evaluate the use of the recently launched National Emergency Reporting Information System (NERIS) platform.
- Work with the statewide fire service to consider increasing the requirement of statewide reporting to all hazard incidents being responded to by all departments and not being limited to a department's fire responses only.
- Work with the statewide fire service for consideration of more timely reporting of all incidents.
 - Currently the code allows for an additional 90 day grace period for reporting which could impact the reporting of all necessary incidents. (See West Virginia Code §8-15-8a(3)(b)).
 - Reduce overall time to incident reporting and document all fire fatality reporting to a more efficient timeline.

13. MUTUAL AID PROGRAMS

The development and implementation of mutual aid and automatic aid programs have been put in place throughout the state to address the concern and need for adequate staffing, readiness, and emergency response relative to all types of hazards. With the limited numbers of personnel in

many of the departments throughout the state, it is of critical importance to ensure the greatest measure of response within every community.

Desired Strategies and Goals

- Assess participation rates, staffing of each department, create objectives and goals for participation of those not engaged.
 - Conduct Fire Department evaluations to assess which departments currently participate in automatic and mutual aid agreements and actively encourage other fire departments within the county and even neighboring counties, where practical, to have established agreements.
- Collaboration with all necessary stakeholders to include 911 communication centers in local and state emergency management to encourage 100% participation.
 - Increased collaboration with other stakeholders (i.e. Division of Forestry and others.)

14. LOCATION OF PUBLIC SAFETY AGENCIES

Each fire department has an assigned response area that shall be approved by the State Fire Commission which include, according to the definitions in W .Va. Code R. § 87-6-1:

- (1) **Fire Protection District** which is defined as a geographical area established by the Commission, within fire protection boundaries approved by the Commission, for the administration of fire protection and emergency response programs.
- (2) **First Due Area** which is defined as a fire protection district for which the Commission has assigned primary responsibility to a local fire department to provide fire protection and rescue services.
- (3) **Dual Response Areas** which refers to an area, defined by a mutual aid agreement or designated by the Commission, in which more than one local fire department may respond or may be called upon for initial response to a fire, threat of fire, or public emergency. The term “dual response area” is not mutually incompatible with the designation of a “first due area” and a dual response area may overlap, or comprise all or a portion of, a designated first due area.

Desired Strategies and Goals

- Assess and evaluate all communities for determining the optimal locations for public safety agencies.
- Seek collaboration at all levels of the fire service, local government, and emergency management to ensure locations of infrastructure are optimized.

15. FIRE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

It should be the goal for every fire department throughout the state to have some level of fire prevention within their community. Much of what each department is able to develop and implement will be based on the people and resources available to them relative to public

education training and awareness. It is important to have like-minded stakeholders within the community to combine time and resources to have a successful fire prevention program. Enhancing existing public education initiatives, such as the poster contest, public service announcements, and greater community involvement should be the focus.

Desired Strategies and Goals

- Provide assessment of current established programs and conduct research, develop, and ensure implementation of fire prevention programs within each fire department with the goal of more effective community risk reduction strategies.
- Provide increased resources and deliverable programs at the state level for use at all levels.
- Encouraging each local department to use fire prevention programs to educate the public, which in turn serves additional purposes of good public relations, interaction with the public and support, as well as possibly getting more interested in joining the fire service.
- Increase collaboration with prevention program educators and educational providers to meet the goals of reducing risk, injuries, and death from all hazards including fire.
 - Assess/survey all critical stakeholders including the public for potential delivery desires, collaborate with stakeholders on current accessibility, all media delivery types, physical material and billboards; to include media releases and the updated Community Risk Reduction Public Education Guide.

16. ACCESSIBILITY OF FIRE PREVENTION INFORMATION

Every fire department's strategic plan should include a goal of fostering community partnerships. These partnerships provide opportunities for department growth by creating allies in problem solving, innovation, expanded resources, funding and non-wage benefit support, increased community trust, brand awareness, and recruitment efforts.

It is important to remember that partnerships should not be one-sided, but rather bring value to all agencies and organizations involved. Developing partnerships and solving a community issue will take multiple organizations partnering together to develop a solution.

For example, from October 2014 through December 2024, the American Red Cross through partnerships with the fire service, the State Fire Marshal's office, and other organizations, have made 15,930 homes safer serving 39,793 people through the installation of 39,556 smoke alarms in the homes noted.

Strategies and Desired Outcomes

- Assess/survey all critical stakeholders including the public for potential delivery desires, collaborate with stakeholders on current accessibility, all media delivery types, physical material and billboards.
- Establish a call for shared resources. Communicate with local groups such as other government entities, civic groups, churches, businesses, and nonprofits regarding your desire to connect to pool resources. Many external organizations are unaware that they

have resources that can be useful to the first responder community.

- Host brainstorming sessions. Meet with community and business leaders to brainstorm department needs and resources available. Invite leaders to attend future department planning meetings to allow them to weigh in with innovative solutions. Each partner can offer a unique set of resources. Identify the strength of each partner and think beyond physical assets. For example, there might be a partner that excels with social media that can assist with developing a fire department plan for spreading fire prevention messages.
- Develop a resource database. Create shared drives listing individual resources, what organization has them, and the affiliated point of contact. Communicate with the partners regularly to update their resources and points of contact as equipment and personnel change.
- Build relationships and an understanding of each contributor's role. Building solid relationships with your partners can add value and satisfaction to both sides. Treat each partner as a valued individual, not just a group asset.
- Continued engagement. Engagement with community partners should not be a one-time event. Agencies and organizations should foster long-lasting partnerships by continued engagement.
- Hold joint events. Identify opportunities to host joint events with a shared mission. Engaging in joint events that help another organization fulfill its mission demonstrates that you care and are listening to the needs of your partners. Partners who feel like they are always giving and not being supported may lose trust. Joint events may also introduce a new audience to your department. Strategic community partnerships can help to build credibility and awareness to their maximum potential.
 - An example is the State Fire Commission along with the State Fire Marshal's office have partnered with the Marshall University Football team to have current players install smoke detectors in homes in Huntington.
 - Another example is in Kanawha and Putnam counties, fire departments, community advisory panels and industry have assisted with alarm installation. There may be other counties and community organizations involved in similar programs
- Promote success stories. Provide partners with updates and look for opportunities to share partnership success stories with the community and memberships. Leverage membership bases and social media followers from all organizations partnering for a greater reach. Be sure to include a call to action at the end of each story to encourage readers to get involved through volunteering with the fire department or as auxiliary support.

OTHER STRATEGIC GOAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PLAN

The following information should be a part of existing and new strategies as an approach to address the concerns that plague our state relative to the state's fire death rate:

Continued Adoption Consideration for Updated Codes and Standards:

Since 1979, West Virginia has adopted codes and standards with the primary purpose and focus on all occupancy types with the exception of one- and two-family dwellings which have traditionally been exempted from the fire code.

This state has never taken for granted that fire prevention, protection, and safety isn't important, but we've not been able to minimize the risk and help prevent loss, injuries, and death from fire and other hazards in a way to prove that we are adequately improving.

The information included in this portion of the plan can help to continue the individual and collective efforts and may even give information to consider now and in the future:

- (a) Investing in safety should be everyone's priority. We all must take a vested interest in the safety of the public and work together to allocate resources to reduce losses from fire and related hazards.
- (b) When first responders put their lives on the line, they should feel they are prepared to protect themselves and others. Prioritizing and investing money in effective preparedness based on capabilities and resources helps them meet the varied response needs of their communities.
- (c) Using the latest codes and standards developed by experts, help to establish minimum levels of safety to protect people and property. As technology advances, safety advocates are constantly assessing risks as well as behaviors and actions that can create new hazards. Codes and standards are updated to reflect our changing world and its environments.
- (d) We all have a responsibility to keep our communities safe from fire, electrical and other hazards. Thus, the importance of the creation of policies within our regulatory environments will sometimes dictate the priorities we have for public safety and it is what the public expects from us.
- (e) When given education and resources to help address hazards, having an informed public can make better, more informed decisions and take action to protect their home and personal safety. When provided with accurate information, people generally do take extra safety precautions when they understand the risks and the consequences associated with fire and related hazards and are given viable solutions.

Fire System Protection in Residential Uses:

One way to reduce the devastation from residential fires is to prevent them from happening in the first place. This all starts with building safe and affordable homes. This means utilizing available technology in new construction and maintaining it throughout the life of the structure including homes. The key is the installation of passive and active fire protection, smoke alarms and automatic sprinkler protection systems.

It has been documented by several fire protection organizations such as the National Fire Protection Association and National Fire Sprinkler Association that when there is a presence and

installation of operating smoke alarms and automatic sprinkler protection in all types of occupancies, including one- and two-family dwellings, there has been an annual average of only one percent death rate, which is a reduction of 85% in all fire occurrences.

Working together, we need to find a more cost effective solution that will eliminate any concern to the installation of this critical solution to protecting those constructing and living in new homes, which is nearly the only occupancy type where automatic sprinkler protection systems are not already mandated by our adopted laws.

Statewide Community Risk Strategies:

The West Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office developed two Community Risk Assessments in 2017 and 2024 with the goal of developing strategies and tactics to reduce risk in the highest priority areas of overall fire fatalities, cooking fires, and ground level falls in the state's senior population. They were also developed in hopes that local fire departments within jurisdictions throughout the state would see the importance of developing their own assessments to identify local fire and other hazard concerns with the goal of attacking within their local community.

Statewide Community Risk Reduction Strategic Plan:

The implementation of a 5-year Statewide Community Risk Reduction Plan is necessary to meet specific outcomes throughout the state by not only our agency, but also other state and local government agencies that should include community based stakeholder organizations focused on like-minded community awareness, education and protection. (See Attached CRR Plan at the end of this document)

Based on West Virginia State Fire Commission reports and related documents, key areas for improvement in the state's fire service and the State Fire Marshal's operations include, but may not be limited to the following goals and objectives: 1) Taking immediate action to increase engagement in local communities by providing additional resources and education to fire departments, schools, and all types of community centers; 2) Improve engagement, partnerships, and involvement to help create community events to encouraged increased opportunities for engagement life school visits for fire safety education and learning opportunities; 3) Equip staff and other stakeholders with tools and educational materials to be used within each department, community and neighboring communities to increase safety awareness including physical and virtual training materials and safety tips; 4) Expanded social media outreach; and 5) Reevaluating and enhancing fire safety and prevention outreach efforts by increasing involvement in local community smoke alarm installation, carbon monoxide alarm installation and fire extinguisher programs.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The West Virginia State Fire Commission and the State Fire Marshal's Office have continued to address the fire needs and concerns of this state. We believe that the creation of the West Virginia Fire Prevention and Control Plan will be key to solving age old problems and history related to a high fire death rate and the need for greater participation within the fire service at all levels. This

will include better data collection through the new NERIS system and increased community risk reduction efforts throughout the state through the implementation of community risk reduction strategic plan. Each of the elements and strategies in the plan will provide for more focused risk reduction and greater awareness to first responders, other citizen stakeholders, and the public.

This plan will be a working document for the State Fire Commission, State Fire Marshal's Office, and our government leaders to hear about and better understand the needs of those who live, work, and visit this state. And also, to contribute to this document, for it to be adequately updated by community involvement. This document will be discussed annually to identify goals successfully met and do address new goals that may arise through discussion. The goal is to improve this document year by year by having topics covered in this document on Fire Commission agendas going forward for frequent discussion.