



## CAPITAL SHORTS:

- A letter of intent for those wishing to run for CAFDA officer or director must be in to the Secretary prior to the start of the October General Membership Meeting.
- Both the fire district election schedule and the budget development schedule are posted to the web site at [www.CAFDA.net](http://www.CAFDA.net)
- Another Alex Dell seminar to discuss VFBL and Cancer Diagnosis, Social Security Disability, Public Safety Officer and Veterans Affairs Benefits, Wednesday September 24<sup>th</sup> at the West Albany Fire Station, 113 Sand Creek Road, Albany at 7PM. No Charge!!
- September is Suicide Prevention Month. This is a a

time to raise awareness and discuss this highly stigmatized topic. In addition to educating and shifting public perception, we need use this month and EVERYDAY to spread hope and vital information to people affected by suicide.

- AFDSNY is pleased to announce that Michael Stevens, from NYS DHSES OFPC, will be presenting on Thursday, October 2nd at the AFDSNY Annual Meeting & Leadership Expo in Saratoga Springs, to review the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS), answer your questions. and help ensure you don't miss the January 1st deadline. Onboarding to NERIS is **mandatory** for all fire departments, with a deadline of **January 1, 2026**. Register for the Annual Meeting/Conference at: [https://mms.afdsny.org/members/evr/reg\\_main.php?orgcode=FDNY&evd=45560727](https://mms.afdsny.org/members/evr/reg_main.php?orgcode=FDNY&evd=45560727)
- If you are wondering about the Volunteer Fire Grants from NYS, they are pending due to other priorities. From those who have used the grants in the past the process is very cumbersome and difficult to get contractors to bid projects due to the stringent requirements created by the State.

## LEARN WITH CAFDA – OUR EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

[WWW.CAFDA.NET](http://WWW.CAFDA.NET)

1. **NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING** **Thursday October 9th**, in person or Zoom in. 7PM. Nominations for 2026 Officers and Directors will occur.

ZOOM LINK FOR THE OCTOBER MEETING:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89890135454?pwd=XvaEknHQzJ8kiTq937xbUQlY12brdV.1>

Meeting ID: 898 9013 5454

Passcode: 248739

One tap mobile 646-558-8656, 89890135454#,,,,\*248739# US (New York)

**NOTE:** According to our By-Laws Article 7 (C) "Letters of intent to be nominated for President, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Preside, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President and Board of Directors must be submitted to the Secretary in writing by the **OCTOBER** meeting."

And it should also be noted that: "Letter of intent to remove a name from nomination for President, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President and Board of Directors must be submitted to the Secretary in writing by the November meeting."

2. **CAFDA FALL EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR**, **Saturday November 1<sup>st</sup> at Verdoy Fire Department; Continental Breakfast at 7am, Seminar begins promptly at 8am**

- Bob Mitchell, Fire Station Legal Liability and a properly designed Decon Laundry
- Alyssa Snyder, Running a Proper Election – Fire District & Fire Company
- Greg Serio, Ethics and roles of the players, Fire District & Fire Company
- Lunch with the experts, ask the panel of experts

Register at CAFDA.net

3. **CAFDA is happy to announce the dates for Conference '26 in historic Lake George,**  
**April 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026 plan on joining us.**
4. **CAFDA will be offering two Fire Service Financial training 2 day sessions in 2026**

At Rombout Fire Department, Fishkill, Dutchess County on March 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> and at McNeil Insurance in Cortland, Cortland County at on March 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>. Training is provided by trainers from the Office of the State Comptroller. Continental Breakfast and Lunch will be included.

**All correspondence & Capital Area Fire Districts Association Mailing Address should be directed to:**

CAFDA PO Box 242 East Schodack, NY 12063 or EMAIL: [SECRETARY@CAFDA.NET](mailto:SECRETARY@CAFDA.NET)

Financial issues should be addressed to: [TREASURER@CAFDA.NET](mailto:TREASURER@CAFDA.NET)

### **Proposed Amendments to the State Association By-Laws**

The State Association will be voting on a number of By-Law amendments at the October Annual Meeting. A review of the proposed amendments can be found here:

[https://d15k2d11r6t6rl.cloudfront.net/pub/8ziy/udmzgsvm/n3z/6je/n41/PROPOSED%20AFDSNY%20BYLAW%20AMENDMENTS\\_3.pdf](https://d15k2d11r6t6rl.cloudfront.net/pub/8ziy/udmzgsvm/n3z/6je/n41/PROPOSED%20AFDSNY%20BYLAW%20AMENDMENTS_3.pdf)

CAFDA's Officers and Board of Directors supports these amendments and urges delegates to vote "Yes".

**WHEN YOU SEE \*\* IT'S A RECOMMENDED READ, TAKE THE TIME TO INFORM YOURSELF!!**

## **THE LATEST FROM THE STATE CAPITAL**

### **Legislative Commentary**

To see what the fire service accomplished during this legislative session go to the following LINK:

<https://cafda.net/what-did-the-fire-service-accomplish-during-the-2025-legislative-session/>

**Now that the legislature is out of session, the ScoreCard will be reviewed for activity monthly.**

### **\*\*Are You PESH Prepared?**

It seems that recently PESH has been inspecting fire departments in the area, remember that in NYS volunteers are considered to be employees of the AHJ.

One of the things that PESH will be looking for are the required posters to be posted in each fire station. For Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH), a New York-specific regulation, the required poster is the "Job Safety & Health Protection" (P208) poster. In addition to the state PESH poster, public employers in New York must also display federal OSHA posters if applicable to their specific sector, along with other federal and state labor law posters relevant to their business. You can find the official PESH poster on the New York State Department of Labor website or purchase them from a number of vendors such as:

[https://www.laborlawcenter.com/new-york-labor-law-posters?a\\_aid=laborpostersorg&a\\_cid=5e39a18e&chan=laborposters&data1=topblock&data2=](https://www.laborlawcenter.com/new-york-labor-law-posters?a_aid=laborpostersorg&a_cid=5e39a18e&chan=laborposters&data1=topblock&data2=)

In addition, employers **must** keep a "Log and Summary of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses" even if the number is zero. They must post **the Summary page (OSHA Form 300A), as required by OSHA**, in the workplace on February 1. **They must keep the Summary posted for three months.** Forms are available at:

<https://www.osha.gov/recordkeeping/forms>

## **THE LATEST FROM WASHINGTON**

## **Support the Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act (S.237) to Add Cancer to Federal Death and Disability Benefits for Firefighters**

Congress is considering amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and the Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act is under consideration. TAKE ACTION TODAY!

- Visit [CFSI's Legislative Action Center](#) for information on asking Congress to include the Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act (S.237) in the NDAA. [An email script is provided!](#)
- Watch [CFSI's One Minute Advocate video](#) to learn how to find your members of Congress!

### **FEMA Announces 2025 National Preparedness Month Toolkit**

The [toolkit](#) offers ready-to-share messages and graphics for social media, emails, and newsletters to help spread preparedness tips. The theme for National Preparedness Month is "Preparedness Starts at Home," encouraging everyone to: understand possible emergencies they might face, create a family plan, build an emergency supply kit, and get involved in community preparedness.

### **FEMA Blog: How Communities Fight Fires With FEMA's Fire Management Assistance Grants**

[Click here to read FEMA's blog post](#) that discusses the Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) program and how it works!

### **Join USFA for the 2025 U.S. Fire Administrator's Summit on Fire Prevention and Control**

Please read this message from the U.S. Fire Administration:

The USFA is proud to host the Annual Summit on Fire Prevention and Control on Tuesday, October 7, 2025. The Summit will bring together national fire service leaders, federal representatives, fire service personnel, and a virtual audience of up to 2,500 fire service professionals.

Join us as we bring together fire service leaders to discuss real world incidents, and challenges confronting the fire service. Our workgroup leads will participate in a discussion on the results of our collaborative communities of practice focused on Emergency Operations, Health, Wellness, Safety and Survival, Training and Competency, and Community Risk Reduction. The afternoon will feature representatives from fire and EMS communities to review needs, challenges and solutions focused on and for the responder.

Don't miss this opportunity to engage with experts, explore the latest research, and address emergent issues impacting the fire service. Be part of shaping the future of fire prevention and responder safety.

For more information or to register <https://web.cvent.com/event/08487065-5c2d-4d01-b7a5-71b96d893b0f/summary>

## **FIRE DISTRICT FINANCES**

### **OSC Audits of Fire Service Organizations**

#### **Holtsville Fire District – Financial Management**

#### **UNDERSTANDING THE AUDIT AREA**

Holtsville is located in Suffolk Co, Long Island, NY

A fire district (district) board of fire commissioners (board) is responsible for managing the district's fiscal activities and safeguarding its resources. To properly manage financial operations, the board should develop and adopt reasonably estimated and structurally balanced budgets based on historical data or known trends in which recurring revenues finance recurring expenditures. In preparing a budget, a board must estimate the amounts a district will spend and receive, the amount of fund balance that will be available at the end of the fiscal year to use towards the next year's budget and the expected real property tax levy. Accurate estimates help ensure that the tax levy is not greater than necessary. Reserve funds are established to provide resources for an intended future use with a clear purpose or intent that aligns with the statute authorizing the fund. If a board chooses to accumulate money for future capital improvements and equipment, it must pass a resolution to formally establish a capital reserve fund. The District's budgeted appropriations for fiscal year 2024 totaled \$3.8 million, and capital reserve fund balances totaled \$2.6 million as of December 31, 2023.

#### **AUDIT SUMMARY**

- The Board did not adopt budgets with reasonable estimates or properly establish and manage capital reserve funds. As a result, from 2019 through 2023, the Board transferred an additional \$1 million

into reserve funds. This was 45 percent more than the \$2.2 million in transfers planned, with no indication of the Board's plan to use the funds. The District's tax levy increased by \$771,762 from 2019 to 2024, meaning that real property taxes may have been higher than necessary.

- The Board developed and adopted budgets that resulted in a total operating surplus of \$4.8 million between fiscal years 2019 and 2023. The Board underestimated revenues in 2023 and consistently overestimated expenditures during the audit period, resulting in budget variances in four of the five fiscal years reviewed totaling \$1.4 million, or 11 percent of the \$13.8 million in appropriations. The Board also appropriated fund balance totaling \$68,598 in three of the fiscal years reviewed that was not utilized.
- Additionally, the Board did not properly establish two capital reserve funds. Board meeting minutes from 1972 (the year the District was established) mention the reserve funds and balances at the time of the meeting. However, there was no Board resolution or other supporting documentation indicating that the Board properly established the reserve funds. Furthermore, the District did not have a fund balance and reserve policy to address these matters and made unbudgeted transfers to these reserves that were not transparent. Although the Board planned to transfer \$2.2 million into the capital reserve funds between 2019 and 2023, \$3.2 million was transferred during that time because of operating surpluses.

Because the Board did not adopt budgets with reasonable estimates, have a fund balance and reserve policy or ensure that the District's capital reserve funds were properly established, the Board's intentions regarding fund balance were not clear, reserves may have been overfunded and real property tax levies may have been higher than necessary. Additionally, official's financial management practices were not transparent and officials did not inform taxpayers on how all District funds were being used or reserved.

The report includes six recommendations that, if implemented, will improve the District's ability to adopt budgets with reasonable estimates and properly establish and manage capital reserve funds. District officials disagreed with certain aspects of our findings but indicated they planned to initiate corrective action. Appendix C includes our comment on an issue raised in the District's response letter.

We conducted this audit pursuant to Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article 3 of the New York State General Municipal Law (GML). Our methodology and standards are included in Appendix D.

#### Recommendations

- The Board should: 1. Ensure that annual budget documents include a detailed estimate of revenues to be received and an estimate of fund balance.
- 2. Ensure that adopted budgets contain realistic revenue and expenditure estimates based on historical trends. The Treasurer should:
- 3. Update prior years' accounting records and continue to reconcile future accounting records at year end.
- 4. The Board should consult with the District's legal counsel to take action to ratify the "de facto" capital reserve funds by adopting an appropriate resolution, subject to referendum requirements if necessary.
- 5. Adopt a written fund balance and reserve fund policy to govern the levels of reserve fund balances to maintain. The policy should state the Board's rationale for establishing each reserve fund, the objectives for the reserve, optimal or maximum targeted funding levels and conditions under which the reserve will be used or replenished.
- 6. Include transfer amounts and reserve figures in the proposed annual budget documents to transparently convey how the District intends to use current fiscal year funds and the intended future purpose and use of reserved funds to taxpayers.

**READ THE COMPLETE AUDIT REPORT HERE:** <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/local-government/audits/2025/pdf/holtsville-fire-district-2025-4.pdf>

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#### ***Local Government and School Accountability Contact Information:***

Phone: (518) 474-4037; Email: [localgov@osc.ny.gov](mailto:localgov@osc.ny.gov)

## STEP INTO THE CHIEF'S OFFICE

### *Beyond the Smoke: What Is Driving People Away from the Fire Service?*

Kristopher Blume

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Authoritarian fire department leadership styles that include micromanaging often lead to disengagement and stifled innovation of members.
- The manipulative nature of gaslighting, which undermines confidence in an individual's perception of reality via blame shifting, revisionist narratives and isolation, leads to burnout, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of fire department members.
- Fire service leaders who are inconsistent or act punitively degrade the perceptions of competence, benevolence and integrity upon which fire department trust is built.

Leaders must lead with humility and a biased disposition toward introspection. Often, organizational challenges are minimized intentionally or unintentionally or dismissed altogether. However, a reality that all of us must confront is that many professionals quietly are leaving the profession—not because of the calls themselves but because of dysfunctional leadership behaviors.

The National Volunteer Fire Council reports that 70 percent of agencies face staffing and retention challenges. Although many reflexively cite red herring causes, such as operational demands and generational changes, increasing evidence suggests that leadership practices within organizational culture drive this trend. Micromanagement, emotional manipulation and the breakdown of trust are core contributors.

How have we collectively found ourselves in this predicament? These issues can be framed through the lens of psychological contract theory and toxic leadership theory. In doing so, we gain a clearer understanding of why firefighters at all ranks are taking the off-ramp early.

#### THE DAMAGE OF MICROMANAGEMENT

Micromanagement in fire departments often appears under the guise of enforcing standards, but it can be an early indication of distrust and a desire for (excessive) control. According to Peter G. Northouse, who authored “Leadership: Theory and Practice,” authoritarian leadership styles, although, perhaps, efficient on the surface, often lead to disengagement and stifled innovation. Further, according to Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in “The ‘What’ and ‘Why’ of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior,” micromanagement has been shown to erode job satisfaction and diminish a sense of autonomy and purpose. The results of the 2022 study, “Disengaged in Turnout Gear: An Exploratory Study of Organizational Withdrawal in Mid-Career Firefighters” (Journal of Fire Service Leadership), indicated that mid-career firefighters ranked micromanagement as one of the top reasons for considering departure from their profession. What shouldn’t surprise us is that study participants bemoaned a workplace environment in which trivial infractions drew more scrutiny than actual performance and outcomes. Multiple experts state that this not only erodes morale but also breaches the psychological contract that’s the foundation of employee-employer expectations.

#### GASLIT

Another term that I have become familiar with in the fire service is gaslighting. It’s a manipulative tactic that undermines an individual’s confidence in that person’s perception of reality. According to Dr. Robin Stern, who is the author of “The Gaslight Effect: How to Spot and Survive the Hidden Manipulation Others Use to Control Your Life” (Harmony Books), it is damaging particularly in hierarchical systems, such as the fire service, where challenging authority is discouraged culturally. Tactics of gaslighters include blame shifting, revisionist narratives and isolating those who speak out against them. The authors of “Organizational Betrayal and Gaslighting in the Firehouse: A Departmental Climate Survey” (American Journal of Emergency Leadership) found that 34 percent of fire service personnel reported feeling gaslit by a supervisor. These experiences were associated significantly with burnout symptoms, including emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Sean Hannah, P.D. Harms and Seth Spain wrote in “Leader Development and the Dark Side of Personality” (The



Leadership Quarterly) that gaslighting leaders often display narcissistic or Machiavellian traits, which are components of the “dark triad” that’s associated with toxic leadership.

### **SLOW COLLAPSE OF TRUST**

From all corners of our profession, trust is elicited as the foundational secret to organizational success—or failure. Although it seems obvious and is a repeated mantra that trust is central to effective team performance and a healthy organizational culture, not everyone can establish and maintain trust. James Davis, Roger Mayer and David Schoorman tell us in “An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust” (The Academy of Management Review) that trust is built on perceptions of competence, benevolence and integrity and seems to be the guiding consensus for success in the fire service. However, when leaders are inconsistent or act punitively, those pillars collapse. Multiple experts believe that a culture that’s devoid of trust stifles communication, limits collaboration and fosters a spiral of distrust, a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle that generates fear and erodes psychological safety. For the fire service, this dynamic can be deadly, resulting in silence when feedback is needed most.

### **DEEP WOUNDS OF MORAL INJURY**

Although much attention is placed on trauma from emergency responses, internal stressors often inflict deeper wounds. Moral injury, which is defined as psychological harm that results from betrayal by leadership in high-stakes environments, is increasingly common in fire departments, Brett Litz and his fellow authors contend in “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy” (Clinical Psychology Review). The Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance’s “Wounds of the Spirit: Moral Injury in Firefighters” reports rising incidences of burnout, emotional withdrawal and suicidal ideation, all of which are linked to leadership betrayal. Central to her work, Dena Ali of the First Responder Center for Excellence thematically emphasizes that the core issue isn’t emergency calls but rather organizational culture.

### **A WAY FORWARD**

The fire service needs more than policy tweaks. It requires reorientation of leadership norms. These issues aren’t relegated to small departments nor are they isolated in metropolitan agencies. Searching for a collective path forward, several best practices have emerged:

Lead with vision, not control. According to Bernard Bass and Ronald Riggio, who authored “Transformational Leadership” (Psychology Press), transformational leadership emphasizes empowerment, vision and ethical modeling, to counterbalance toxic command-and-control habits.

Hold leadership accountable. Bruce Avolio and William Gardner write in “Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership” (The Leadership Quarterly) that institutions must adopt anonymous peer reviews, 360-degree feedback and leadership development strategies.

Build psychological safety. In “The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation and Growth” (John Wiley & Sons), Amy Edmondson argues that effective leaders create an environment where people feel safe to speak up.

Use exit interviews strategically. Insight from departing personnel can help to identify root issues that hinder retention. Equally important would be to conduct stay interviews to elicit why people are staying with the agency.

### **REFORMING LEADERSHIP IS CRUCIAL**

Firefighters aren’t leaving the job because they are soft or uncommitted. They are leaving because the leadership culture in some departments undermines their sense of purpose and well-being. Micromanagement, emotional manipulation and broken trust aren’t abstract leadership failings; they are existential threats to organizational survival. Reforming fire service leadership isn’t optional; it’s a matter of survival. By embracing the currency of transparency, cultivating trust and empowering personnel, leaders at all levels within the agency can foster a culture that retains talent and sustains our sacred mission.

## **STEP INTO THE ATTORNEY’S OFFICE**

### ***Dalton, MA Fire District Violated State Open Meeting Law By Failing To Keep Accurate Minutes Of Executive Sessions***

Dylan Thompson, the Berkshire Eagle

The Dalton Fire District violated the state's Open Meeting Law by failing to announce and record the results of any periodic review of its executive session minutes, according to the state Attorney General's Office.

"The Open Meeting Law requires that a public body 'create and maintain accurate minutes of all meetings, including executive sessions,'" Elizabeth Carnes Flynn, assistant attorney general of the Division of Open Government, wrote in a letter dated Aug. 20.

The AG's Office received two complaints on July 24 from Christian Tobin, the former Dalton fire chief, who was terminated on Jan. 7 following months of administrative leave and an outside investigation into allegations of inappropriate workplace behavior.

Tobin's complaints alleged that the district failed to list or keep documents, handouts and exhibits used in public meetings, failed to include an insufficiently specific executive session topic on the notice for its June 23 meeting, and failed to periodically review executive session meeting minutes for release.

In the Aug. 20 letter, Flynn said the AG's office had found the fire district failed to announce the results of any periodic review of its executive session minutes. The Attorney General's Office reviewed 17 sets of open session minutes for district meetings between July 30, 2024, and May 13, 2025.

The Attorney General's Office ordered the fire district's "immediate and future compliance with the Open Meeting Law," and warned that similar future violations "may be considered evidence of an intent to violate the Law."

Fire District Chair James Driscoll said the reason the executive session minutes had not been released yet is "they're still in the process of being sorted out." The district did not believe it had to release the minutes until that process was complete, he said.

"We are definitely going to have a meeting this month in the next week or so to go over all the executive session [minutes] to make sure we're not in lapse of any of the ones that can be released, and if they can be, they will be," Driscoll said.

Flynn wrote that during the 10-month period, the district "made no announcement regarding the results of a periodic review of its executive session minutes."

"The Law provides the minutes of executive sessions may be withheld from the public for as long as publication may defeat the lawful purposes of the executive session, but no longer," Flynn wrote.

However, in the Aug. 20 letter, Flynn stated the AG's office declined to review whether the district failed to list or keep unidentified records and that they found no violation of the notice for the district's June 23 meeting.

Flynn explained that Open Meeting Law complaints must allege violations with a degree of specificity and their office does not "conduct broad audits of public bodies based on generalized allegations."

The Attorney General's Office also found no violation that the notice for the district's June 23 meeting "included an insufficiently specific executive session topic where the meeting was canceled." Flynn explained that when a public body does not deliberate on a noticed topic, it can't violate the Open Meeting Law with respect to that topic.

The Fire District was previously found to have violated the Open Meeting Law in January for its July 30 meeting, prompting changes in how the body operates. That meeting was held on the second floor of the Dalton Fire Department, which is inaccessible to people with disabilities. Those meetings are now held on the station's first floor, or at the Stationery Factory.

The complaint originated from Tobin, where he alleged four violations by the district related to the July 30 meeting. Two of those allegations were founded, according to the letter — namely, that commissioners had engaged in "deliberation outside of a properly noticed meeting" and held the meeting at a location that was inaccessible to people with disabilities.

Tobin filed a wrongful termination and whistleblower lawsuit against the Fire District on May 14 in Berkshire County Superior Court. Tobin is suing members of the fire district and town officials in connection with the board's decision to terminate his contract as fire chief through the use of threats, unequal standards, collusion and "adverse employment actions."

Tobin is seeking damages, back pay and reinstatement as fire chief.

Tobin, who joined the department in January 2024, was fired from his position on Jan. 7 after an independent investigation concluded he had engaged in "inappropriate workplace behavior."

Tobin's firing follows a series of controversies within the Dalton Fire District, including allegations of misappropriated funds and the 2023 firing of the department's previous chief, James Peltier. He

was terminated in 2023 after a unanimous board vote and a further vote of no confidence by the department's firefighters.

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### **\*\*First Responders And Their Rights Of Speech: A Primer**

First responders are often called upon to serve their communities in highly visible, high-stress roles. Fire and EMS professionals have a front seat to the consequences of the more socially and politically charged environment we operate in today.

Alongside the professional and clinical responsibilities of the job, first responders, like all employees, also must navigate the boundaries of their rights to free expression. This is especially true in an era where personal opinions, frustrations and experiences are frequently shared on social media.

Many first responder training and workplace orientation programs dedicate nearly all their time to teaching clinical and operational skills. While these are important, they are only part of the dynamic set of skills that equip our team to care for the patients and the communities we serve.

Fire and EMS professionals must remember, a super-majority of the population never actually utilize our services, but are beneficiaries of our readiness to serve. This means, their confidence in our ability to care for them in their time of need is paramount and cannot be tarnished or diminished by divisive or hateful speech. One of the most common complaints I hear from first responders is that they want to be recognized as a professional. Yet, in my 36 years of experience as an EMT, firefighter, EMS executive, HR consultant or employment attorney, I've found we rarely discipline or terminate employees for clinical or operational errors. In fact, terminations for these errors are rare. Most of the remediation fire/EMS organizations perform is tied to the non-clinical/operational aspects of the profession. I encourage first responders, at all levels, to recognize that professionalism is who you are both on and off duty.

Repeatedly, fire and EMS professionals fail to understand that their personal social media posts can result in workplace discipline, including termination. We have seen this over the last several years through the civil unrest following the Black Lives Matter movement, numerous presidential elections, and most recently, following the death of Charlie Kirk in Utah on Sept. 10, 2025. It is clear that our training and onboarding programs need to be updated to include employee off-duty conduct, including social media use.

#### **THE FIRST AMENDMENT**

There is a common belief that the U.S. Constitution provides all citizens a freedom of speech. This is true. However, the First Amendment Right to Free Speech is not absolute. There are several categories of speech that are not protected or are "less than protected" under the Constitution. These include speech intended to incite imminent lawlessness; threatening, intimidating or harassing speech; obscenity; defamation; and fraudulent or deceptive speech.

Even protected speech can be regulated in certain circumstances depending upon how, when and where the speech occurs. The most used example of this is a person yelling "fire" or "bomb" in a crowded movie theater or marketplace where they have no good faith belief that the stated threat exists. I assure you; you can be both civilly and criminally liable for those actions.

Let's examine how free speech rights apply to public safety employees, both in the workplace and online, and what agencies and providers should know to balance personal freedoms with organizational and professional integrity.

#### **1. Constitutional protections: Public vs. private employers**

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects individuals from government restrictions on speech. For fire and EMS personnel, this protection depends on whether the employer is a public entity (such as a municipal fire department or county EMS service) or a private EMS organization.

- **Public sector personnel.** Speech may be protected when it involves matters of public concern (e.g., public safety funding, working conditions, patient care system design). However, courts apply a balancing test: the employee's right to speak as a citizen must be weighed against the employer's interest in maintaining workplace efficiency, public trust and discipline.
- **Private sector personnel.** The First Amendment generally does not apply to private employers. Instead, employee speech protections come from other sources, such as the National Labor Relations



Act (NLRA), whistleblower statutes or anti-retaliation provisions in employment workplace regulations.

## 2. Social media speech and employment consequences

Social media has blurred the line between personal and professional speech. Posts made on Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) or TikTok, even outside working hours, can have workplace consequences. Often, employees believe that their activity on social media is distinct from their professional life. However, commonly, a first responder's "personal" social media page is covered with work-related content and pictures. For example, EMTs, paramedics and firefighters often post pictures of themselves in uniform or in an agency vehicle. Common risks include:

- **Patient privacy violations.** Posting identifiable information or images of patients is prohibited under HIPAA and state privacy laws, and violations may result in termination, license discipline, or civil penalties.
- **Damage to employer reputation.** Even personal opinions, if associated with an employer, can be grounds for discipline if they undermine public trust or violate agency policy. Possible exceptions to this are whistleblower or union/labor actions covered by the NLRA.
- **Harassment or discriminatory content.** Posts that involve discriminatory remarks, threats or harassment toward colleagues or the public may create liability under anti-discrimination and harassment laws. In particular, the ACA Section 1557, non-discriminatory provisions are intended to ensure that all individuals have access to care and can actively participate in their care. Hate or divisive speech can interfere with first responder's ability to gain the public or patient's trust in their role as the caregiver to the patient and their community.
- **Damage to professional reputation.** First responders are essential to the nation's healthcare system and a critical piece of the fabric of every community. Being proficient in clinical and operational skills is important. The most skilled or trained first responder cannot meaningfully care for a patient or a community member if they do not trust and feel comfortable with the professionals caring for them.

This issue has been addressed several times over the years. The quote I believe most appropriately captures this aspect of the freedom of speech issue was addressed by in an article authored by EMS attorney David Givot titled, ***"EMS providers are held to a higher standard, which includes social media."***

Givot said, *"EMS providers are perhaps the most human of humans, but they, like no other humans, cannot allow their objectivity to be clouded by political, social, or religious beliefs. The public trust is the best currency EMS has to accomplish what is expected: it is a currency that cannot afford to be gambled away."*

## 3. Labor and collective action protections

The National Labor Relations Act protects both unionized and non-unionized employees when they engage in "concerted activity" related to workplace conditions (e.g., pay, safety, scheduling). For example, EMS providers discussing unsafe ambulance staffing on a private Facebook group may be engaging in protected activity. However, venting about a supervisor, coworker or patient in purely personal terms may not be protected.

## 4. Whistleblower and retaliation protections

First responders may also be protected when their speech involves reporting unlawful practices, patient safety concerns or regulatory violations. State and federal whistleblower laws, as well as OSHA protections, prevent employers from retaliating against employees who raise legitimate compliance or safety issues.

## 5. State law protections

There are several states that have enacted laws that protect certain off-duty employee conduct. These laws vary but typically address participation in certain off duty political activities or off-duty cannabis use in states where cannabis has been legalized. However, due to the safety sensitive nature of work that first responders perform, many employers may still be able regulate an employee's cannabis use, even if it is off duty.

Off-duty political activity generally refers to employees engaging in political speech, association, campaigning, lawful protests or similar actions. In my experience, this is widely misunderstood by employees who rely on internet "research" which is ill performed and informed. This is an incredibly legally complex issue and demands an educated legal analysis.

Even in states with protections, these laws are not unlimited. Common limitations include:

- **Lawfulness.** The off-duty political activity itself must be lawful. Illegal activity is not protected.
- **Employer interests/conflict of interest.** Employers may sometimes show a reasonable, rational connection between the off-duty behavior or speech and the workplace (e.g., undermining business operations, violating confidentiality, creating risk). This could include an undermining of the public's trust in the EMS system/provider or firefighter/department.
- **Working hours/premises.** Speech during work hours or on work property is often more regulable. Employers often have more leeway to restrict or discipline political activity in the workplace itself.
- **Use of employer resources.** Using employer equipment, systems or time may remove protection.
- **Public sector vs. private sector.** Public employees often have stronger constitutional protections (First Amendment), but also more regulatory constraints. Private sector protections rely mostly on state statutes; the majority of states do not protect political speech/activities off duty.

Protection varies substantially from state to state, and employers and employees should review the laws in the state where they live and operate.

## 6. Best practices for fire/EMS agencies

To balance free speech rights with organizational needs, EMS agencies should:

- **Develop clear policies:** Social media, confidentiality and workplace conduct policies should be transparent, consistently applied, and regularly communicated and updated. We always recommend agencies have their policies reviewed by counsel annually.
- **Provide training.** Regular education on HIPAA, social media risks and professional conduct helps prevent inadvertent violations. This should occur at hire, annually and following any organizational incident. I strongly recommend regular reminders to your team.
- **Encourage reporting.** Create safe channels for employees to raise concerns internally without fear of retaliation.
- **Apply discipline consistently.** Enforcement of policies should be fair and uniform to avoid claims of selective discipline.

## PROVIDING CONTEXT TO FREE SPEECH

First responders, like all workers, have important rights of speech, but those rights are not unlimited. The context of the employer (public vs. private), the subject of the speech (personal gripe vs. public concern) and the platform used (in person vs. online) all shape whether expression is protected. By understanding these boundaries, fire and EMS professionals can better protect themselves, and departments/agencies can foster a culture that respects both individual rights and the critical mission of first responders.

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For information only and not for the purpose of providing legal advice. The opinions expressed are the opinions of the individual author at the time the facts were presented and based on the law then applicable. The information contained in these opinions is not guaranteed to be up to date. The information provided is not legal advice. Since legal advice must be tailored to the specific circumstances of each case, and laws are constantly changing, nothing on this site should be used as a substitute for the advice of competent legal counsel. The authors assume no responsibility to any person who relies on information contained herein and disclaim all liability in respect to such information. You should not act upon information in this publication without seeking professional counsel from an attorney admitted to practice in your jurisdiction.

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## OUR CHANGING FIRE SERVICE –CHALLENGES & POSITIVE IDEAS. LEARNING FROM OTHERS

### POSITIVE OUTCOMES

#### **N.Y. FD Ambulance Billing On Track To Beat Budget, Reach \$1.9M**

Brian Hubert-Daily Hubert

The city's comptroller expects revenues collected from insurers for the city-run ambulance service this year to exceed the \$1.5 million budgeted for in the 2025 approved budget, possibly reaching \$1.9 million by year's end. City Comptroller John Tuetz told the Common Council's Finance and Audit Committee on Wednesday, Sept. 10, that revenues collected from billing private insurers and Medicare and Medicaid for the Fire Department's ambulance service averaged \$160,000 over the past four months. That included \$200,000 in

the most recent month, he added. Revenues could reach \$1.9 million by the end of this year and \$2 million in 2026, according to Tuey.

Medicaid cuts by the Trump Administration are not expected to have a significant impact in either 2026 or 2027, he said. That said, Tuey cautioned that he tries to temper his budget expectations, as he doesn't want there to be a situation where he budgets too optimistically, only for revenues to come in under expectations. "I'm skeptically optimistic," he said. He also cautioned lawmakers that the ambulance service has experienced financial pressures from significant amounts of overtime. Tuey emphasized that costs remain favorable to the city, as opposed to contracting out to a private provider, and the city is also receiving a higher quality service at the same time. The city took over ambulance service from private provider Empress EMS at the beginning of 2024.

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### ***Pact to Share Staffing Eyed by Lancaster County, PA, Fire Officials***

Three Lancaster County fire companies last month announced a plan to join forces in response to the manpower crisis that's affecting volunteer departments across the state.

The Lafayette and Witmer fire companies, both located in East Lampeter Township, along with the Upper Leacock fire company said they plan to form a "fire-rescue compact." Officials said the fire companies will share personnel and resources while also training together, but the departments will remain separate entities. Sam Huber, chief of Upper Leacock Fire Company, said the compact will help preserve the companies' volunteer model. He said a growing list of training requirements is a big reason that volunteer departments are struggling to recruit.

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### ***A Day With First Responders Connects Emergency Workers With Community in CA***

Nathan Chiochios, Chico Enterprise-Record, Calif.

The community was out in full swing at "A Day with First Responders", an event put on by The Arc of Butte County in partnership with first responder organizations across the county. From dogs to firetrucks, there were plenty of attractions for everyone attending the event. The event also had a main stage, where various presentations were held, like canine training and fire safety. The CalTrans cone mascot interacts with event-goers at the Day with the First Responders event at the Chico Marketplace on Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025 in Chico, California.

The Arc of Butte County event coordinator Brooke Jeffers said the event was held to celebrate first responders and connect them with community members, with an emphasis on those with disabilities, to raise awareness on safety.

"We really wanted to create a non-emergency setting where we could all come together and celebrate the first responder heroes," she said. "As well as all of our differences, our disabilities and differences."

Jeffers added that they have found that community events like this, where people are brought together, are very important to raising awareness for both people with disabilities and first responders. Among the first responder groups present were Cal Fire, Chico Police Department, North Valley Animal Disaster Group and more.

Cal Fire Butte Unit's Public Information Officer, Dan Collins, said that connecting with members of the community, especially the youth, as early as possible and making them aware of fire safety is shown to make the community safer.

"The idea is to engage with the kids now and teach them about fire safety, calling 911, stop dropping and rolling, or most importantly, knowing your address and knowing your parents' phone numbers," he said. "Studies have shown that areas with robust fire prevention programs have less problems later on with juvenile fire setters, and fires in general."

Beyond just Cal Fire, Collins said the main goal of events like A Day with First Responders is to "get the word out" about the services offered in Butte County and raise awareness, from fire prevention to law enforcement to animal safety.

Rich Hartman presents a K9 training course to event-goers at the Day with the First Responders event at the Chico Marketplace on Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025 in Chico, California. (Nathan Chiochios/Enterprise-Record) Collins added that, being with the fire department, getting visitors to their booths is not a very hard task.

“We’re the fire department, we got the big shiny engines and lights and we got free stuff,” he said. “So it’s easy for us to attract folks to our booth.”

Collins also introduced Cal Fire’s mascot, Captain Cal, on stage at the event to help teach kids about fire safety. Chico Police Department Public Information Officer Kayla Gates was also on stage earlier in the day, reading to children about the story of Officer Buckle and his canine Gloria.

Gates sat at the Chico police booth, where a bubble machine was shooting bubbles to the excitement of passing children, echoed Collins, saying that building connections is important in humanizing the work they do. She also said that they had a great turnout.

“The event is a lot bigger than I expected, there’s some great equipment out here, and we’re happy to be a part of it,” she said. “I will say that I think our bubbles have been a pretty good contribution.”

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### **Artificial Intelligence Now Taking Non-Emergency Calls In One Ohio County**

Calls made to police and fire in Bath Township through the non-emergency numbers are now being answered by artificial intelligence. The city is partnering with Summit County Regional Dispatch to let AI handle their non-emergency calls.

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### **FIRE SERVICE CHALLENGES**

#### **Corning, NY, Fire Station Classified as Hazardous Materials Superfund Site**

The land where the Corning fire station was built has been classified a Superfund hazardous materials site. Testing by state officials found semi-volatile organic compounds and metals that exceed acceptable levels in the soil. Boron was also found to have contaminated groundwater at the fire station site. Testing by state officials found semi-volatile organic compounds and metals that exceed acceptable levels in the soil. Boron was also found to have contaminated groundwater at the fire station site.

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#### **Ohio FD Adds 6 Full-Time Ffs To Keep Up With Growth**

Bill Carey

The Columbia Township Fire Department is expanding to keep pace with rapid growth.

After moving from volunteer to part-time staffing, the township won a 2022 levy to hire its first full-time firefighter/paramedic and added three more full-time members in October 2024.

[News 5 Cleveland](#) reported that officials hired six additional full-time firefighters, including a part-time firefighter, with more than 20 years of service, who began work on Sept. 15.

“We’re trying to stay ahead of the curve to protect the people in the community,” Fire Chief Ray Anthony said. “When we were totally volunteers, you just crossed your fingers and hoped someone would show up when the call came out.”

*The hiring will allow staffing of two full-time and one part-time firefighter on each shift, with an administrative officer working 48 daytime hours per week.*

Columbia Township is growing fast. Since 2010, the population has increased by more than 25%, with over 19% of that growth since 2020. Anthony said medical calls have also climbed — about 20% in recent years. New home developments are also increasing.

*Anthony said the township has secured two parcels of land for potential new fire stations if growth warrants. He also hopes to add more full-time staff in the coming years.*

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## **RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT**

### **Training: Volunteer Recruitment and Retention**

**Clifton Park - October 18-19**

Corning - October 25-26

MissionCIT’s recruitment and retention workshop is back with two sessions this October for fire and EMS leaders looking to strengthen their teams.

Clifton Park: October 18-19

Corning: October 25-26

This immersive two-day experience will equip you with proven strategies to recruit effectively, retain members, and build a stronger department culture. Whether you're a seasoned officer or just stepping into a leadership role, this training will help you create lasting impact.

**REGISTER NOW AT THIS LINK:**

<https://firefightersassociationofthestateofnewyork.cmail20.com/t/y-l-qijitky-ikjuyhjliy-m/>



Does your fire or EMS department need more volunteers? The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) is here to help! Use the FREE department portal from the NVFC's Make Me A Firefighter campaign to access tools and resources to help you find and keep volunteers.

**Get started:**

- Register for free at [portal.nvfc.org](https://portal.nvfc.org).
- Post your volunteer opportunities so potential recruits can find and connect with your department at [MakeMeAFirefighter.org](https://MakeMeAFirefighter.org).
- Customize recruitment materials with your department's details using the materials generator.
- Share your message with ready-to-use flyers, PSAs, social media content, and videos.
- Track your applicants and follow up with ease using the recruit tracking tool.

**Plus, access additional resources to help with recruitment and retention, including:**

- "What to Expect" Guide for the Families of New Recruits
- Volunteer Retention Research Report
- Volunteer Value Calculators
- Recruitment and Retention Guide
- Recruitment and Retention Online Training
- And Much More!

**GET STARTED NOW AT THIS LINK:**

<https://tracking.police1.com/t/9495565/187515077/7816037/1/1006865/?b44ed14b=YmY5NWQ4NzktNW RmOC00MWJkLTkzMdctNzg0Y2VhZTNjMzYy&x=1ee5e8f9>

## ***FIREFIGHTER HEALTH & SAFETY; PROTECTING OUR OWN***

# 63

### ***LINE OF DUTY FIREFIGHTER DEATHS FOR 2025***

***In 2024 we experienced 64 LODDs reported nationally.!***

*Overall, 2024 was one of the safest years on record for U.S. firefighters with 64 on-duty deaths recorded, down from 74 in 2023 and reflecting a steady decline in annual fatalities in recent decades since a high of 174 in 1978. (The trend calculations don't include the 340 firefighters who died in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.)*

### ***DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A FATALITY-JUST A DIBILITATING INJURY, YOU JUST NEVER KNOW!***

- Our sympathies to the family and friends of Central Bridge Fire Chief Brian Baker.
- CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Two firefighters and an EMT were stabbed while responding to a mental health call. Officers arrived to find two firefighters and an EMT suffering from serious stab wounds.
- A Bonita Springs, Florida battalion chief was critically injured early Saturday morning after being struck by an SUV while directing traffic on Interstate 75.

- The two Houston firefighters were injured while hooking up to a hydrant at a church fire. One suffered a fractured femur while the other broke his ankle. According to a witness, they were connecting the hose to the fire hydrant and the truck was pulling the hose away. It kind of caught them behind the legs and knocked them down."
- After suffering a medical emergency while transporting a patient, Houston firefighter, Stephen Scott was flown to the hospital for treatment. According to the Houston Fire Department, the ambulance was enroute to HCA Kingwood with a patient when the firefighter fell ill. The member was transported to a Kingwood hospital where medical officials said they needed further treatment.
- While a medical helicopter was attempting to land in an Autauga County, Alabama pasture, a nurse was struck by a ricochet bullet. The flight nurse was treated at the scene, and the original call victim was taken to the hospital by ambulance.
- Aspiring firefighter Fendrick Gabaud, 40, died after experiencing shortness of breath during a physical agility test at the Flagler County fire academy.

### **FIRE APPARATUS ACCIDENTS FOR THE WEEK**

- From City of Laurinburg, NC Fire Department: While responding to a Motor Vehicle Accident tonight on Highway 74, our engine, which was providing traffic control for our responders, was struck by a motorist who failed to move over. Fortunately, none of our responders were injured. As of September 5<sup>th</sup> one firefighter and the EMT had been released from the hospital. The other firefighter remains hospitalized in stable condition.
- Two Arizona firefighters and another driver were killed when an ambulance collided with a vehicle on State Route 260. The Timber Mesa Fire and Medical District confirmed the two firefighters were on duty in the ambulance. The driver of the other vehicle also died which had crossed the center line and struck the ambulance head-on.
- A Wichita, Kansas fire truck was involved in a crash Friday morning in downtown. An Eagle reporter who witnessed the collision said the fire truck had its emergency lights and sirens activated and was headed south in the northbound lanes of Main Street, near Second Street, when a white car turned in front of it. The car was driving south, attempting to turn into the parking lot of a law office at the time. The fire truck struck the car around 10 a.m. A Wichita fire truck was involved in a crash Friday morning in downtown.
- An Eagle reporter who witnessed the collision said the fire truck had its emergency lights and sirens activated and was headed south in the northbound lanes of Main Street, near Second Street, when a white car turned in front of it. The car was driving south, attempting to turn into the parking lot of a law office at the time. The fire truck struck the car around 10 a.m. The car's driver was examined by EMS and did not want to go to the hospital, a fire investigator said.
- Grand Haven, Michigan engine struck by drunk driver, no injuries reported.
- Dallas Bay, TN Fire & Rescue says one of their fire engines crashed into a culvert Monday, causing minor injuries. DBFR says this was a single-vehicle accident. The engine was on the way to a structure fire when Dallas Bay says driver took evasive action to avoid a head-on collision with a vehicle that had crossed the double yellow line.
- Both eastbound and westbound lanes of I-10 in Louisiana are closed near the 185-mile marker, between the Sorrento and Airline Highway exits, after a single-vehicle crash involving a fire truck, no injuries have been reported.

## **FIRE APPARATUS**

### **Developing a Portable Ladder Package**

Mark Miller

Mark Miller reminds members of apparatus committees of the importance of analyzing apparatus type, staffing response district and run cards prior to specifying portable ladder requirements.

Specifying portable ladder packages is part of the initial analysis that must be completed by the apparatus committee. Of the numerous metrics that must be considered when making this analysis, apparatus type,



availability of staffing, response district(s) and run response cards are perhaps the four most important. Unlike other design aspects of apparatus, portable ladders take up a specified amount of space that can't be altered because of their rigid construction. Once the apparatus committee determines the size, quantity and type of portable ladders to be carried, mounting and ease of deployment are essential aspects to ensure effective fireground operations.

## **APPARATUS TYPE**

Apparatus type plays a significant role in the portable ladder package that will be carried on the apparatus. Most basic engine companies are specified with a single straight ladder, an extension ladder and a folding ladder to meet minimum standards. Single ladders typically are 14–16 feet in length; extension ladders are 24–28 feet in length; folding ladders usually are 8–10 feet in length. A utility, or A-frame, ladder also might be necessary for service and investigation incidents.

*When specifying rescue-engines or squad companies, departments often specify longer portable ladders in case they are assigned the role of a traditional ladder company on the fireground.* These include 16-foot straight ladders and 28-foot or three-section 35-foot extension ladders. Again, a single folding ladder and utility ladder often are required for service and investigation incidents. Multiple extension ladders frequently are recommended, thus greatly exceeding minimum portable ladder requirements.

Aerial apparatus come in an array of types and styles. Nonetheless, *if the aerial apparatus is to fulfill the role of the ladder company on structural fires, a substantial portable ladder package must be included to achieve standard fireground objectives.* Again, minimum portable ladder standards are just that: a minimum. This applies for both quint and straight aerial apparatus types. Often when I assist an apparatus committee with this step in its analysis, it quickly becomes apparent that the need is two- to three-fold that of minimum requirements.

Aerial apparatus have the advantage of longer body styles compared with their engine company counterparts. With this comes the advantage of greater portable ladder storage. This can be accomplished through the main torque box in the rear or side-stacking on the body. Combinations of both are extremely popular for quint and straight aerial apparatus and easily are designed by most apparatus manufacturers. This also can allow you to carry a two-section ladder, as opposed to a three-section one, which can cut substantial weight and banking widths from the ladder in most cases.

Aerial apparatus generally carry two to as many as four extension ladders from 24 feet to 50 feet. Multiple straight ladders from 16 to 20 feet also are required generally, as are multiple 8- to 14-foot folding ladders and a utility ladder. The current trend of 100-foot, single-axle quint apparatus makes this type of portable ladder package highly unlikely without a drastic reduction of compartmentation. Overwhelmingly, this can result in the portable ladder package suffering and being reduced to minimum requirements.

## **STAFFING**

Staffing levels differ greatly across the fire service, and most staffing levels never will get better than they are today. *Although most extension ladders can be raised with a two-person crew, members differ in one way or another in physical ability—thus, this is where training comes in to understand individual limitations.*

Depending on the portable ladder's construction, every ladder that's 35 feet and shorter can be a maximum of a two-person raise. This increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the exterior ladder team. *Portable ladders that are 45 feet and longer might consume an entire company of four personnel to raise.*

Two-section ladders that are 24 feet and 28 feet in length are the go-to ladders of the fire service. Both can be thrown easily by a single person. The 28-foot ladder gives the added advantage of capturing the third-story window in most garden apartments with a terrace level on the first floor. Straight ladders offer rapid placement to upper floors and roofs with a quick, single-person throw. Commonly, these range from 14 to 20 feet and have slim banking widths, so a member usually can carry several that are stowed together tightly. Thus, a single firefighter who is carrying tools can grab two off of the apparatus at once and quickly cover multiple points on the fire building.

## **RESPONSE DISTRICT**

Response district plays a significant role in determining the portable ladder package that's required for both first-due and extended response districts. Larger municipalities often have different portable ladder packages

on identical aerial devices because of the differences in their first-due response area. *As the lines in the urban-suburban interface continue to become blurred in many regions of the country, building heights and development densities can increase in what was historically a suburban neighborhood, thus increasing the importance of portable ladders.*

Increased demand for longer ladders comes with these changes in building heights and development densities. *Multifamily-dwelling fires can consume a portable ladder package on a ladder company quickly.* Adding to the need are changes in building construction methods. Most buildings that are considered legacy construction have a standard floor joist, where a 35-foot ladder easily can reach a fourth-story window or a third-story roof. *Today's 18–24-inch manufactured floor joists put most fourth-story windows out of reach of a standard 35-foot ladder depending on the topography that's around the structure.*

Likewise, companies that routinely respond to single-family dwellings benefit from having shorter ladder packages. Multiple 24- or 28-foot ladders are common, and perhaps only a single 35-foot ladder is required for the running area.

When conducting the analysis, ensure that rear yards are taken into account. It's common for entire streets to have substantial grade changes in the rear yard, which places a finished attic's window out of reach of a 28-foot ladder.

## **RUN CARDS**

*Knowing how many portable ladders respond to a report of fire is just as important for the incident commander as knowing how many aerial devices respond. Portable ladders that are on the apparatus do firefighters no good when they aren't placed on the fire building.*

Once the portable ladder complement that's on an aerial apparatus is consumed, the portable ladders from the engine companies that are on scene are retrieved until the incident is stabilized. Fireground policy should set specific parameters for placing portable ladders on the fire building.

Occupancy type is another good indication of portable ladder requirements. Many computer-aided dispatch systems are capable of differentiating between occupancy types. There usually is a reduced response for single-family structures compared with their multifamily counterparts. Likewise, commercial building fires likely get even more resources.

It's easy to adjust run cards accordingly to ensure that enough portable ladders respond, particularly for multifamily structures, which quickly become a sponge for portable ladders and seemingly never have enough portable ladders on scene initially.

## **LADDER MOUNTING**

*Portable ladder mounting on the apparatus must be identified once the analysis for the size, quantity and type(s) of portable ladders is completed. This has a significant effect on the body style of an engine, a rescue-engine or squad, and an aerial device.*

Options for engine and rescue-engine or squad companies range from side-mounted, center or outside arm ladder rack systems, side-mounted dropdown systems, and through-the-body and through-the-hosebed storage.

Options for aerial devices include through the torque box, through the body and side-mounted, and deck-mounted for mid-mount aerials.

Like everything that's specified on apparatus, there are pros and cons to each mounting option. Some ladder rack types require a significant amount of room for the arms and ladders to deploy, because the ladders are mounted on top of the apparatus. This might become problematic in high-density areas or on rural roads where real estate doesn't exist.

Any through-the-body or through-the-hosebed mounting has an adverse effect on hose storage and a body's compartmentation depth.

## **HEADING OFF LADDER DESIGN FAILURES**

There isn't one portable ladder package that works for every community. *That's why an apparatus committee must analyze thoroughly the needs of the unit's response district and the effects that the portable ladders have on apparatus design.* Taking time at this step helps to eliminate apparatus design failures that otherwise will be with the organization for quite some time over the operational life of the apparatus.

### *Fire Station HVAC 101: Making the Right Choice for Your Station*

Patrick O. Stone, Joseph E. Balicki

When selecting the optimal heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system for your fire station, it is essential to evaluate both conventional options and emerging technologies to ensure an informed decision is made in today's evolving market.

Traditional systems offer advantages such as cost-effectiveness, established reliability, and consistent air distribution. However, they may also present disadvantages, including inefficient energy use, high maintenance expenses, and limited control capabilities.

It is key to acknowledge that an HVAC system's success hinges on its ability to maintain indoor comfort levels, regardless of outdoor conditions. These systems also seek to maintain a balance between dry bulb temperature (the temperature you feel or sense), versus relative humidity, which is the ratio of the amount of water vapor present in the air to the greatest amount possible at the same temperature. This balance is known as the "comfort zone."

Choosing the right HVAC system isn't just about cost savings — it's fundamental to ensuring comfort, supporting job performance, and maintaining safety. Tools like the psychrometric chart can help determine which system best supports your comfort zone for your specific location. Still, your ultimate choice should also consider factors such as budget, functionality, user-friendliness, and potentially your openness to exploring innovative solutions.

#### **COMFORT ZONE**

One important consideration to make when selecting a new HVAC system is its ability to maintain a stable indoor temperature. A well-balanced temperature in the workplace has been linked to increased productivity levels, as a University of Chicago study found that productivity can drop by as much as four percent per degree when temperatures rise above 80 degrees.

Furthermore, comfort zones also consider relative humidity (RH), which is ideally maintained within a range of 48 to 60 percent. RH levels are subject to seasonal variation and may decline to approximately 25 percent during winter in certain regions due to drier air conditions. Implementing an HVAC system capable of consistently regulating both temperature and indoor RH is essential for ensuring optimal job performance and promoting occupant well-being.

It is crucial to prioritize occupant comfort within the living and administrative spaces of a firehouse, which are often referred to as "cold spaces, or green zones". Maintaining consistent, comfortable temperatures offers first responders an environment in which they can adequately recover and rehabilitate — serving as a cool respite following summer emergencies or providing warmth and dryness during winter operations.

#### **PROS OF TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS**

There are a variety of positives that come with traditional HVAC systems. A constant air volume (CAV) rooftop unit is a straightforward, low-maintenance solution that stays unobtrusive on the roof. It provides consistent, even air distribution, which creates trusted comfortability. A CAV system also provides effective dehumidification, heating, ventilation, and cooling, all in one unit package.

A heat pump split system combined with a dedicated outdoor air system (DOAS) offers multiple thermostats, enabling precise control of individual spaces. This arrangement enhances energy efficiency and minimizes unnecessary energy consumption. This system offers both heating and cooling capabilities year-round. It operates with low costs and utilizes minimal to no fossil fuels, making it environmentally sustainable, and features an extended service life exceeding 20 years.

Traditional boiler plant systems operate by heating water and circulating it throughout the building to provide warmth where needed. This type of system doesn't necessarily require unsightly and expensive ductwork, is highly durable and dependable, creates better zoning and controllability, and provides effective and consistent heating, as water tends to hold heat better than air.

For strictly cooling, an evaporative "swamp" cooling system comes with low installation costs, uses much less energy than some other options, and is environmentally friendly as it does not utilize refrigerants.

## CONS OF TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS

CAV rooftop units have constant airflow to all spaces, which can lead to an abundance of energy wastage, while constant airflow can restrict comfort control or flexibility. By nature, rooftop units also have greater potential for roof leaks, produce higher noise levels, and can be visually unappealing.

A heat pump split system equipped with DOAS typically involves higher installation expenses, presents maintenance challenges, and has historically operated with reduced efficiency under low temperature conditions. Furthermore, the entire heat pump system is limited to functioning in either heating or cooling mode at any given time.

Traditional boiler plant systems typically incur elevated installation expenses because of intricate setup and maintenance requirements; they lack integrated cooling functions and typically rely on fossil fuels for operation. Additionally, these systems require substantial space for construction and present a risk of leaks.

Evaporative cooling systems have limited cooling capacity and rely on the evaporation effect. For larger spaces with higher occupant numbers, it may be difficult for an evaporative cooling system to maintain comfort levels. In addition to this, evaporative cooling systems require frequent cleaning to avoid bacteria growth and are ineffective in more humid climates.

## ADDITIONAL VARIABLES

Factors like call volume, bay door usage, and temperature recovery time all affect a system's return on investment (ROI) and efficiency and should be considered when choosing the best option for a station. As a quick example, a busy station in northern America will experience constant cycles where the bay doors are opened, and the heat in the bays is lost. Understanding these cycles is crucial when designing the HVAC system so recovery time is reduced, while also trying to be as efficient as possible.

Geographic location is an important factor influencing indoor temperatures and must be taken into account, along with the intended functions and specific areas within the facility. Variations in state regulations and mandated energy efficiency standards will result in differing building envelop designs, which, in turn, will also impact system requirements.

The type of utility in use depends on the region and can influence ROI. For instance, in the northeast, gas-fired packaged CAV rooftop units, cooling-only rooftop units, and heat pump split systems with DOAS are more commonly used traditional systems compared to other regions.

## NEW AGE SOLUTION

*A variable refrigerant flow (VRF) Heat Recovery System is an HVAC system that can simultaneously provide both heating and cooling to different zones of a building.* These innovative systems offer the same benefits as a heat pump system, but with better temperature and humidity control. VRF Heat Recovery System's also provide higher energy savings than a traditional heat pump and provide better efficiency.

Although VRF Heat Recovery System installation expenses are greater when compared to conventional systems, these costs may be reduced when the system is integrated with other systems. This method was ultimately chosen by the Massapequa Fire District for their Park House on Long Island, NY. The District was looking for a system that focused on aesthetics, comfort, and the area's limited space constraints. Ultimately, a hybrid system was selected, with the VRF system designated for all cold/green zone areas and CAV rooftop units assigned to serve the larger spaces on the second floor.

After building commissioning was completed, this hybrid model functioned well for the client. The average measured space temperature was 70 degrees, and the RH came in at 51 percent, right in line with the Fire District's desired comfort zone.

## CONCLUSION

Selecting the most appropriate HVAC system for a fire station may appear challenging, given the wide range of available options, varying price points, and the necessity to consider geographic location and other essential factors.

Regardless of what avenue you choose, the end goal should always be the comfort and safety of first responders. While factors like climate, geography, and system type are critical in the decision-making process, they ultimately serve a greater mission: supporting those who serve others in the community.

Whether opting for a traditional system, a new-age solution, or a hybrid of the two, fire stations must prioritize systems that ensure clean air, consistent temperatures, and reliable performance. The comfort and well-being of first responders isn't just a luxury, but a necessity.

**BUILDING CODE ISSUES AND REPORTED FIRE FATALITIES**

*If we had sprinklers in 1 & 2 family homes by now the death toll of 700+ would be a hell of a lot less and fewer firefighters would be injured. But because builders and realtors make big contributions to politicians, sprinklers have been negotiated out of the Code!!*

*An awfully expensive price to pay to save money. Stop the carnage, install residential sprinklers.*

*Residential sprinklers are a component of the plumbing system, with approximately 1 head per room. The purpose of residential sprinklers is to allow time for the occupants to escape.*

*Residential sprinklers are designed for quick response and only one at the most two heads may be triggered. With residential sprinklers present, the civilian death rate is 89% LOWER.*

*Residential sprinklers will assist responding firefighters to do their jobs and save firefighters lives also, especially since everyone is short staffed!!*

*CHIEFS NEED TO SPEAK UP: Our fire problem would not be as bad if there were residential sprinklers!!*

HOME FIRE FATALITIES REPORTED BY THE MEDIA FROM THE US FIRE ADMINISTRATION FOR 2025	
Fire Deaths in 1&2 Family Dwellings in NYS	53
Last fire death 8/9/25 Eaton, Madison Co., Female 69	
Fire Deaths in any type of Dwelling in NYS	88
Fire Deaths in 1&2 Family Dwellings Nationally	733
Top 3 States with the greatest 1&2 Family Deaths	#1 PA/60
	#2 NY/53
	#3 IL /43
Civilian home fire fatalities in 2025: <b>1480</b>	
2046 civilian home fire fatalities in 2024	
<b>Week 36 of 2025, fire has claimed on an average 41 lives PER WEEK.</b>	
Both the states of Maryland and California as well as Wash. DC require sprinklers in 1&2 family dwellings.	
According to realtors and builders only old homes burn, so sprinklers are not needed in new homes: so when does a new home become an old home?	

**Connecticut Officials Considering Single Exit**

Connecticut officials are considering a change to state building codes that would allow some residential buildings to have only one way to exit, rather than two.

*The proposal would allow new buildings with up to five stories of residences and up to four units of housing per floor to have just one stairway as an exit, if the building has certain fire-resistant technology. Up to six stories would be allowed in cases where there is a commercial space on the first floor.*

Current state building code allows single-stairway exits for residences up to three stories tall.

The state's Codes and Standards Committee, which reviews changes to building and fire codes, recently heard from firefighters about what they said were the dangers of the change during a public hearing. The committee has already voted once in favor of the proposal. Advocates say the change would make it easier to build housing, while opponents fear the change would be unsafe.

*"Fire codes were created not by great ideas but from major losses of life and unfortunate lessons,"* said Greg Priest, the fire chief of West Hartford and a representative of the Joint Council of Connecticut Fire Service Organizations.

After the public comment period ends Oct. 11, the committee will have a month to respond to comments. It'll vote on the measure for a second time before sending it to the legislative Regulation Review Committee, which



will also vote on the new code. The code is largely based on standards from the International Code Council. Connecticut updates its code according to the standards every few years.

The proposal on means of egress stems from a measure included in the 2024 bonding bill in which lawmakers mandated that the committee review a change. *The goal was to make it easier to build more housing and address a shortage that experts say has caused housing costs to rise.*

"I think it's a good direction for us to move in, in terms of housing policy," said House Majority Leader Rep. Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford, when the measure passed.

Roger Nelson, the Bloomfield Center fire marshal and the president of the Connecticut Fire Marshals Association, said he was "vehemently opposed" to the proposal because the one exit could become blocked and would need to be wide enough for firefighters to enter a building while residents exit.

*"Unfortunately, the single-exit provision has become a political issue, not a life safety issue,"* Nelson said.

Residential building fires killed about 2,700 people annually from 2018 to 2020. About 80% of those fire deaths in the United States occurred in one- or two-family homes, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

*Connecticut's proposal would apply to new construction and says that in order to have only one set of stairs to exit, the buildings must have an automatic sprinkler system and one-hour fire resistive material. There also must not be more than 20 feet between any housing unit and the exit stairway.*

The change wouldn't apply to boarding houses, the proposal documents say.

Single-stairway legislation is growing in popularity among some housing advocates who say with new technology and building materials, the fire risk is minimized in apartment buildings of four to six floors. Colorado and Tennessee are among states that have legalized single stairs in some form. Some cities including Memphis and Austin have also gotten on board.

"The limitation of the building code has meant that smaller, missing middle-type homes, multifamily home developments just have a significant amount of barriers preventing them from being constructed," said Pete Harrison, Connecticut director for the Regional Plan Association, in an interview.

He said modern fire suppression technologies and other safety planning can make buildings safe and make it easier to build townhomes and smaller apartment complexes, particularly as infill between existing buildings. He added that more fire deaths occur in single-family homes than apartment buildings of this size.

Harrison said

*"It has everything to do with affordable housing, and it unlocks a really critical type of home construction that is illegal in Connecticut, but was legal for a very long time,"*

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: AS I HAVE SAID THESE HOUSING ADVOCATES, ELECTED OFFICIALS AND ARCHITECTS WILL BE NO WHERE TO BE FOUND WHEN THE DISASTER OCCURS AND SOMEONE DIES. IT WILL THEN BE SOMEONE ELSE'S FAULT.]*

## GREEN TECHNOLOGY & THE FIRE SERVICE

### **Battery in Remote-Control Car Blamed for Three-Alarm NH Fire**

Paul Feely – The New Hampshire Union Leader, Manchester

A lithium-ion battery in a remote-controlled car is being blamed for sparking a three-alarm house fire in Milton. Strafford County dispatchers received a call from the area of 36 Charles St. around 6 p.m. or a reported structure fire after black smoke was seen coming from the porch of a home.

Upon arrival, fire crews reported heavy fire showing from the residence. A second alarm was immediately requested, and the incident was ultimately elevated to a third alarm, bringing mutual aid from surrounding communities to help battle the blaze.

Firefighters worked aggressively to contain the blaze and prevent it from spreading, Milton Fire Chief Nicholas Marique said in a statement. The home sustained significant fire, smoke, heat and water damage. No injuries were reported.

The State Fire Marshal's Office responded to the scene and assisted Milton Fire with the investigation. "The cause of the fire was determined to be accidental in nature, likely caused by a failure of a lithium-ion battery in a remote-control (RC) car," Marique said. Fire crews cleared the scene around 9 p.m., while investigators remained on scene working until approximately midnight.



Mutual aid at the scene was provided by crews

from Rochester, Wakefield, Farmington, Middleton, Somersworth, Berwick, Lebanon, Shapleigh, Wolfeboro, Ossipee Corner, Frisbie EMS, and the State Fire Marshal's Office. New Durham provided station coverage during the incident.

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### **Cause of MI EV Battery Warehouse Fire Under Investigation**

Dylan Goetz – mlive.com

Fire crews responded to a fire at an EV battery warehouse and training center in Flint Township on Sept. 17. A firefighter sustained a minor injury during the response and is being treated at a local hospital, according to the Flint Township Fire Department.

The warehouse was located in the 5000 block of Exchange Drive, near the Flint Bishop International Airport. The cause of the fire is under investigation. Flint Township fire crews were assisted by the Burton and Flushing fire departments.

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### **Hybrid Vehicle Battery Explodes After Car Catches Fire Inside Pittsburgh Auto Repair Facility**

A hybrid vehicle caught fire inside an auto repair facility in Pittsburgh's Lawrenceville neighborhood late Wednesday, leading to the car's battery exploding.

Firefighters were called to the building in the 50 block of 38th Street at around 11 p.m.

Officials said a hybrid vehicle inside the building caught fire, which caused the lithium-ion battery to overheat, ignite and then explode.

Crews on scene were able to contain the fire to just the vehicle. The hazmat team responded and safely disposed of the battery.

No injuries were reported.

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## **STUFF FOR YOUR OFFICERS AND MEMBERS!**



### **2nd Annual Lake George Training Symposium**

The 2nd Annual Lake George Training Symposium returns to the beautiful shores of Lake George from Saturday May 15th to Sunday May 17th, 2026!

Whether you're returning or attending for the first time, this weekend is designed to help volunteer firefighters enhance their skills, develop leadership, and connect with a statewide community.

Be sure to make time for the Annual Golf Tournament at Cronin's Golf Course — a weekend highlight featuring a fun scramble format, BBQ dinner, and a fantastic atmosphere.

### **Save Me a Seat for Lake George 2026**

<https://fasny.com/training/annual-firetraining-symposium/>



### **2025 Seminar Series, Short-Handed Firefighting**

34 years ago, this class was developed by Firefighter Andrew A. Fredericks. At that time, the fire service was starting to suffer from a shortage of members, especially but not limited to the volunteer ranks. Today, as we all know, departments across the nation have experienced a large drop-off in membership. With today's hotter, faster-moving fires, it is imperative that we get on the road ASAP and are ready to mount an aggressive interior attack — especially where life-saving attempts must be carried out. This class will look at new apparatus and equipment designed to make our jobs less labor-intensive. In many places, where it used to take one or maybe two departments to handle the job at a single-family residence, now up to six departments are necessary due

our diminished ranks. We must protect our residents and, just as important, our members and make sure everyone goes home.

**Mike Healy** has been a member of the Rockland County fire service for 54 years, serving with the Blauvelt F.D. for 14 years, followed by the Central Nyack F.D. for 40 years. He has served as a chief for three terms. Healy is currently the coordinator of education for the Rockland County Fire Training Center. **Jeff Daniels** is a 23-year fire service veteran. He served with the Air National Guard as a crash rescue firefighter for 17 years and was a member of the West Haverstraw Volunteer F.D. for 14 years. In 2002, he was hired as a NYS DMNA firefighter and served for over four years before being appointed to the FDNY. Daniels was assigned to Ladder Co. 39 for 12 years and was later an instructor for the FDNY Fire Academy. Currently, he is a member of Squad 61. He also teaches at the Rockland County Fire Training Center.

**Coming to These Counties in 2025 (7:00 p.m. Starting Time):**

**Cortland** (October 28) • **Erie** (October 8) • **Jefferson** (October 15) • **Nassau** (November 5) • **Niagara** (March 12) • **Onondaga** (February 18) • **Orange** (April 29) • **Rensselaer (October 20)** • **Rockland** (April 23) • **St. Lawrence** (March 24) • **Suffolk** (April 2)

**\$35** – NYSAFC members • **\$50** – non-members (per person)

**REGISTER AT THIS LINK:** <https://www.nysfirechiefs.com/2025seminarseries>

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**Attend an NVFC Training Near You!**

The NVFC hosts in-person trainings at locations across the country on topics including hazardous materials response, electric vehicle response, leadership, fire service culture, and much more. View upcoming courses [here](#). Don't see a training near you? Consider hosting a training at your department or regional event. View a listing of available courses and request a training [here](#).

---

**ASSOCIATION OF FIRE DISTRICTS OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK**

Coming Attractions:

- **October 2-4, 2025, Thursday - Saturday**, Annual Meeting and Vendor Expo at the Saratoga Hilton and City Center, Saratoga Springs
- **October 8-10, 2026**, Annual Meeting and Vendor Expo at the Saratoga Hilton and City Center, Saratoga Springs



**NATIONAL VOLUNTEER FIRE COUNCIL – TRAINING TIMES – COURSES/WEBINARS/EVENTS**

**LINK TO THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM:** [https://virtualclassroom.nvfc.org/featured\\_courses](https://virtualclassroom.nvfc.org/featured_courses)

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**NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS**

**Vischer Ferry Fire Department Lobsterama**

Get Lobster and support your local fire department. **Saturday October 4<sup>th</sup>** 750 Grooms Road, Rexford. Order at VFLOBSTERAMA.COM, Starting at \$20. Same day from Maine!

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**Gansevoort Fire Department Breakfast**

The fire company thanks you for your support!! Breakfast will resume on **Sunday September, 21<sup>st</sup>**.

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**Clifton Park Fire Department Breakfast**

See you **Sunday October 5<sup>th</sup>** when we start up again. **Thank you for your support!**

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**GENERAL INTEREST**

### **First responders face investigations over social posts about Charlie Kirk's killing**

First responders and public employees in several cities have become the subject of investigations or have been placed on leave over social media posts reacting to the fatal shooting of conservative activist Charlie Kirk. Kirk, a close ally of President Donald Trump, was shot and killed on Sept. 10 at a Utah Valley University event. Authorities say a single shot was fired from a rooftop before the gunman escaped.

The suspect in Kirk's death was taken into custody on Sept. 12.

#### **Nashville Fire Department**

In Nashville, Tenn., [WSMV](#) reported the fire department put an employee on paid administrative leave after a post circulating online appeared to reference Kirk's death.

The department said it opened an internal fact-finding review and would not comment further while it's underway.

#### **Prince George's County Police Department**

Prince George's County (Md.) Police Department confirmed an internal investigation into an officer's social media post that read, "When you're spewing hate, hate will eventually rear its head and find you...."

[WJLA](#) reported the department said ***the post may violate general orders governing employee conduct on social media***. There was no immediate indication that the officer's duty status had changed.

#### **New Orleans Fire Department**

In New Orleans, [WDSU](#) reported that the fire department said it is investigating after an employee appeared to mock Kirk's killing in a social media comment.

The comment allegedly said in part: "That bullet has a right to be there because it's a gift from God."

Louisiana Attorney General Liz Merle called the remark "unacceptable and disturbing," adding that invoking God in the message "was even more disturbing." Louisiana Rep. Clay Higgins vowed to use congressional authority and pressure on tech platforms to seek lifetime bans for users who mocked Charlie Kirk's killing. In an X post, he praised Kirk and said he'd target posts that "belittled" the assassination.

#### **Toledo Fire & Rescue**

Toledo (Ohio) Fire & Rescue is investigating a member over an alleged social media post about Kirk's death, [WTOL](#) reported.

The department did not release details about the post, but comments on its recent social media pages claim a lieutenant wrote it and alleged Kirk was killed because of his political beliefs and affiliations.

A department spokesperson said all fire stations in Toledo were placed on lockdown on Sept. 12 as a precaution following online backlash to the comment. While no direct threats were made to personnel, leadership decided to restrict access to stations to keep members safe.

#### **Maui Police Department**

A Maui police officer has been placed on administrative duties and is under internal investigation after allegedly celebrating the assassination of Kirk on social media, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported.

The officer is accused of posting, "Charlie Kirk's demise takes us one step closer to healing this country" in the aftermath of Kirk's fatal shooting.

"We take this matter extremely seriously," Maui Police Chief John Pelletier said. "We hold our employees to the highest standards of the policing profession, and when actions fall short of those standards, they are addressed immediately."

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### **Real Safety vs. Liability Safety, Part 2**

Kevin Roberts

Warning, this article is about risk. If you live in an echo chamber, you may think you are safe due to your behavior. If you wish to maintain that mindset, look away ... now.

#### **FIRST**

What does "real" mean? From Oxford Languages:

1 – "actually existing as a thing or occurring in fact; not imagined or supposed."

2 – “of a substance or thing; not imitation or artificial; genuine.”

For the purpose of this article, I will employ the following: Reality versus perception, objective versus subjective.

## SECOND

Absolutes do not exist. You are probably alive today because of that simple fact. It is in probability that we commonly find safety.

To Proceed: Do you drive more recklessly on dry roads than you do on wet roads?

If you either said, “Of course not” or if you think there are only two answers to that question, this article is probably not for you, but it is certainly about you. Your answer to the above question will depend on your devotion to, and your practice of, self-awareness.

*If you actually think there are only two answers to that question (yes or no), you would make a fine Senate Committee member. These people make their living by demanding yes or no answers to inane questions about complex situations that demand nuanced analysis. LOL*

If you answered, “Of course not”, and are still reading, I have another question for you.

Do you drive more carefully on wet roads than you do on dry roads?

Notice that consistency demands similar answers.

I ask this question in class occasionally and find that the most common answer to the first question is “Probably.”

I suspect this is because the average automotive technician practices a higher level of self-awareness than the average senator. (Honest self-awareness does not generally get you votes)

In this world of risk, you can hope, or you can plan. If you want to be one who plans, one of the ways is to purchase insurance.

There are two types of insurance. Both are “paid for” before an “incident”.

One protects you after the fact. It is reactive. This is a normal government required and regulated insurance policy.

You get this normal insurance by purchasing a policy from a company that will contribute financial help to protect you from mistakes or bad luck. This provides **liability safety**.

But unfortunately, normal insurance can motivate bad actors to make false claims. This, known as the deep pockets law, can simply make you a target. The larger your department or organization, the larger the target you present to others. This is a side of success that never seems to make it to a motivational poster.

But there is another type of insurance that I will call, “creative insurance”.

*Creative insurance means being proactive. It is found in following, “Best Practices”. Its goal is to prevent an “incident”. There is distinction (with some overlap) between real and liability safety.*

In the area of Emergency Vehicle Service, **real safety** consists of a well-designed rig that is properly maintained, properly repaired on a timely basis when repairs are needed and operated in a safe manner by the crew using the rig. Let’s look at an ambulance as an example.

This is the rig that you want to be available should one of your loved ones need medical transport. To accomplish this real safety takes time, money, and expertise. For example:

**Design:** *Certain rigs are inherently more dependable and robust than others. How does a purchasing agent discriminate? He needs to educate himself about the differences between the type of rig, the chassis manufacturers, and the FSAMs.* One of my customers was told by his ambulance dealer to not expect a certain Inter Facility Transport rig to exceed 150K-mile life cycle.

**Maintenance and Repair:** *Certain shops are better staffed and equipped to understand the operational needs and distinctives of Emergency Vehicle operation.* The Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) must be educated in how to identify a service provider that can accomplish what is needed.

**Operation:** Even though driving has had a broad cultural application for the last several generations, it is not as ubiquitous as it once was. Plus, *American drivers have always overrated their skill set. (Today, about 80% of drivers rate themselves as above average.)* These items alone provide the AHJ with a daunting task. But even having the best rig maintained by the best shop and operated by the best crew will **not** provide, in an absolute sense, the real safety that is the AHJ’s goal. Remember, there are no absolutes. This rig shares the highways with the public. Driving in traffic dramatically increases the possibility of an “event” due to variations in the individual skill set of each driver with whom your crew shares the road. (The common clay of the new west)

*When all is said and done, there is no absolute protection against bad outcomes. We must perform our due diligence to minimize our exposure. For that we need to play the game.*

Liability safety is a game that the culture plays with itself as it tries to make the world nicer. If bad luck pulls you into this game, you need to know the rules. Subjective perception often trumps objective reality. Also, people can be manipulated. Even as we like to think we are just as careful on dry roads as wet, we like to think that, in the event of an accident, blame must always be assigned.

*Money is not only a tool, it is a target for bad actors. Our legal system incentivizes the public by offering, "You don't pay unless we win." It is the offering of a lottery ticket at no cost.*

Having insurance is necessary, but only for **liability safety**. Fleets need **real safety**. The kind that comes from exercising due diligence, awareness, and asking, "What if?" instead of "What now?" Under which category does technician certification fall? Clearly both. **A technician cannot go through the certification process without improving his proficiency.** Plus, the paperwork that comes with certification provides one factor that mitigates liability. Obviously, we need real safety: prevention; not just liability safety: cure.

In order to get that real safety, our team must be made up of certain individuals. These individuals must have traits that will be introduced in the next article.

IF YOU MISSED IT, PART ONE CAN BE READ HERE:

<https://www.rigspot.com/features/2025/08/real-safety-vs-liability-safety-part-1/>

## LAUGH OUT LOUD!!

I've made a huge to-do list for today...I just can't figure out WHO is going to do it!!!

## CLASSIFIED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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**The Capital Area Association represents any fire district that wishes to join CAFDA. Fire District Officials include Commissioners, Treasurers, and Deputy Treasurers. Secretaries and Chiefs are also invited to participate!**

**Please advise your secretaries that all correspondence should be mailed to:**

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### **Long Way to Travel? Zoom into the General Membership Meetings!**

**It's our desire that every member fire district have the opportunity to attend Capital Area meetings. We know we cover a large area, in 8 counties and beyond, and wish to give all of our members a chance to participate in the general membership meetings. You have a voice, and we would like to hear it. Join us at our next meeting either in person or**

*via Zoom. The link will be sent via constant contact prior to each general membership meeting. Thank you for being a member and we hope you will join us.*



# CAPITAL AREA BUSINESS PARTNER'S

Business Partner Applications Available At: [WWW.CAFDA.NET](http://WWW.CAFDA.NET)

*We invite our business partners to submit educational information to be included in this Bulletin for district commissioners and chief officers*

*We want to thank all of our Business Partners for renewing their partnership for 2025. You are invited to our monthly membership meeting and to any of our social events..*

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**PHILIP VANDER MOLEN**  
PRESIDENT

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*The Weekly Capital Bulletin is reaching well over **700+** subscribed fire district members and now other members of the fire service on a regular basis. This is a service of CAFDA through the effort of Tom Rinaldi who can be reached at [tom@rinaldi1.com](mailto:tom@rinaldi1.com) for comments and content contributions are always welcome.*

## BECOME A MEMBER OF CAFDA!

The Capital Area Association has voted to amend its By-laws to allow both individual and regional or county Fire District Associations to join. The updated By-laws are posted to the CAFDA.NET website.

Individual membership fee will be \$50 annually, fire district association fees will be \$300 annually.

Download THE APPLICATION available on the home page at CAFDA.NET

### MEMBERSHIP IN THE CAPITAL AREA FIRE DISTRICTS ASSOCIATION (CAFDA)

Would you like to join Capital Area Fire Districts Association along with 100 members in 14 counties? Individuals, fire district associations, fire protection districts and Village departments are all eligible for membership.

Annual dues (January 1st to December 31st) shall be as follows and shall be based on the annual budget of the Fire District/Organization;

\$0 to \$200,000: \$50

\$200,001 to \$400,000: \$100

\$400,001 to \$600,000: \$200

\$600,001 plus: \$300

Individuals \$50.00 or Other County or Regional Associations \$300 annually.

**Business Partners: \$100.00 annual member fee**

### **If You, Your Fire District or Department is not a Member of CAFDA You Can be?**

Individuals can be members of CAFDA. The annual membership fee is \$50, which will provide you access to this Bulletin, attendance at meetings and social gatherings. Provides networking with other fire district officials and a source of the constant barrage of information related to today's fire service.

**FOR A MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR A BUSINESS PARTNER APPLICATION GO TO THE FOLLOWING LINK:**

<https://cafda.net/membership-info/>

## CAPITAL AREA FIRE DISTRICTS ASSOCIATION

# SAVE THE DATES!

CAFDA has been busy, and 2025 is shaping up to be a great year!

## COMMISSIONER TRAINING

AVERILL PARK FIRE DISTRICT	Saturday, February 1, 2025 — Snow Date: Sunday, February 2, 2025
CLIFTON PARK FIRE DISTRICT	Saturday, March 1, 2025 — Snow Date: Sunday, March 2, 2025
BERKSHIRE FIRE DISTRICT	Saturday, March 29, 2025 — Snow Date: Sunday, March 30, 2025
WARRENSBURG FIRE DISTRICT	Saturday, April 5, 2025 — Snow Date: Sunday, April 6, 2025

## OTHER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

FINANCIAL TRAINING FOR FIRE DISTRICT OFFICIALS	Fulton-Montgomery Community College — Thurs-Fri. March 13-14, 2025 — 2805 State Hwy. 67, Johnstown
FINANCIAL TRAINING FOR FIRE DISTRICT OFFICIALS	Brighton Fire District — Tues-Wed. March 25-26, 2025 — 3100 East Avenue, Rochester
CAFDA CONFERENCE	Fort William Henry Hotel & Conference Center, Lake George — Thurs-Sat. April 10-12, 2025
ANNUAL FALL SEMINAR	Verdoy Fire District — Saturday, November 1, 2025 — 988 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham

## SOCIAL EVENTS

OFFICER INSTALLATION DINNER	Century House, Latham	Saturday, March 8, 2025
ANNUAL DAY AT THE RACES!	Saratoga Race Course, Saratoga Springs	Friday, August 8, 2025

## MEETINGS – CLIFTON PARK FIRE DISTRICT & ZOOM

General Membership Meeting	Saturday, January 4, 2025
General Membership Meeting	Thursday, February 13, 2025
General Membership Meeting	Wednesday March 5, 2025
Board of Directors Meeting	Thursday, April 3, 2025
General Membership Meeting	Thursday, May 8, 2025
General Membership Meeting	Thursday, June 12, 2025
Board of Directors Meeting	Thursday, August 14, 2025
General Membership Meeting	Thursday, September 11, 2025
General Membership Meeting	Thursday, October 9, 2025
General Membership Meeting	Thursday, November 13, 2025



## FOR MORE REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Website	<a href="http://www.CAFDA.net">www.CAFDA.net</a>
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## OSHA INFORMATION SUPPLEMENT

PROVIDED AS A SERVICE FROM THE CAPITAL AREA FIRE DISTRICT'S ASSOCIATION – CAFDA

*NEWEST INFORMATION ALWAYS AT THE TOP WITH RED ARROW*

### By Dave Denniston NVFC OSHA 1910.156 Taskforce Chair

The NVFC continues to meet with the IAFC and IAFF as we wait for next steps from the Department of Labor and OSHA. There have been significant changes in leadership at these organizations. We are under the belief that they continue to digest the large volume of information and feedback offered during the process and are modifying the proposed standard into something that is much more agreeable. The proposed standard as written does not work for anyone, volunteer, combination, or career departments. All three organizations agree significant changes are needed from the proposal. *We anticipate that they will craft a new standard that is technically and economically feasible using what is referred to as logical outgrowth from the process.* The representatives from the IAFC, NVFC, and IAFF all agree that the best of all worlds would be to remove the NFPA standards by reference, bring a lot of the regulations back to the control of the home state and authority having jurisdiction, and make logical requirements that will help protect our first responders. We continue to monitor progress and are ready to pursue the next steps if the process does not yield a document that we can all live with. *We have also voiced our opposition to a pure exemption of volunteer firefighters as*



*we feel that the move would be counterproductive and further divide the two major factions of our emergency services.* We have long fought for parity in items such as presumptive heart, cancer coverage, workers compensation benefits, equal representation, and firefighter safety. To simply exempt the volunteer fire service would be a huge disservice to these initiatives and leave combination departments in an extremely awkward, if not unmanageable situation. It would also be extremely difficult for municipalities to manage with two different sets of rules.

The three organizations are also hard at work building resources to support emergency services organizations moving forward. These resources include training, sample emergency action plans, risk management plans, community assessment forms, sample policies, and advocacy materials. The right tools will aid everything from a small rural volunteer department with a \$50K budget all the way up to the large municipal all-career city department, and everything in-between. We are very excited by the working relationship being built by these national organizations and all involved in the process feel we are seeing ground-breaking results. If you have any questions or concerns about the process, we encourage you to reach out and get involved in the discussions. I can be reached at 607-423-1636 or [ddenniston@afdsny.org](mailto:ddenniston@afdsny.org). By working together, we can help build a fire service that will serve us well for years to come.

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### **IT IS TIME TO MOVE FORWARD WITH A WORKABLE OSHA 1910.156 REVISION**

Dave Denniston, 1<sup>st</sup> VP AFDSNY

As the process to update OSHA 1910.156 continues, it is important that we understand where we have been, and options for the process moving forward. Since the proposed rule was published for review 18 months ago, there has been a significant amount of input and feedback from stakeholders addressing possible concerns about the economic and technical feasibility of the proposal. Stakeholders from across the country participated in the process and offered suggestions. One of the early possible solutions suggested was to simply exempt volunteers, and other parties, from the proposed rule as written. The mindset was that if it didn't affect "us" it was not our problem. While this concept appeared to be a quick solution, it fell short of addressing the true needs or problems.

The real issue at hand is that the proposed rule as written had challenges for everyone and you would be hard pressed to find any department, career, combination, or volunteer, that could meet the intent of the standard. The proposed standard also took a one-size-fits-all approach. We know that the emergency service agencies across this country are very different. They have different resources, different exposures, different concerns, and different levels of risk. It is true that emergencies, fires, and hazards are the same regardless of the type of responder. What is different is the likeliness that a particular event will occur in any jurisdiction. Local jurisdictions must be required, and empowered, to address significant risk, and the needs of a community, at a local and state level with just enough federal oversight to give it teeth and ensure safety for all of our responders. The bottom line is that the current 1910.156 is outdated and needs significant revision to address the needs and safety concerns of today's first responders. The proposed standard, as written, went too far in trying to address these needs. What we need is a middle ground solution that is designed to relieve significant risk and does so at a level that is economically and technically feasible for local communities, organizations, and the municipalities that govern and fund them.

Some are asking why simply exempting the volunteers is not in the best interest of volunteers across the country. First, by exempting the volunteers, we are failing to address the growing concerns and exposures facing this group of responders. Second, the largest growth area for most of our local fire departments is a move toward combination and career departments. How would it be possible to have one set of rules apply to part of an organization and not the other? Does it make sense to have volunteer responders face one set of rules, while career responders on the same truck follow another? Are we not all responding to the same emergencies with the same exposures? The approach of exempting volunteers would add both confusion and resentment moving forward. The third part of the issue is that the standard, as written, is just as problematic for the communities that have career departments as it is for those that only have volunteers. We need a standard that brings us all together, not one that drives us further apart.

So, what do the solutions look like? Where should OSHA and the Department of Labor go from here? After pouring through the thousands of comments brought forth during the process, an opportunity is right in front of us. There were a multitude of comments throughout the process that carried common themes. By using logical outgrowth of the process, OSHA now has the opportunity to massage the rule into one that we all can live with, and provide the level of safety they are tasked to provide the workers of this country.

It is now in OSHA's hands to finalize the rule as proposed, make logical changes, scrap it, or go back to the drawing board. During the process, OSHA continuously asked for proposed solutions, and many excellent solutions were entered into the record from those that participated. We would suggest that OSHA and the Department of Labor use the extensive input from the process to make necessary changes to the document and work to finalize the rule. A rule that meets the intent of reducing significant risk in a manner that is reasonable and responsible for our first responders and communities.

Using logical outgrowth, OSHA now has the opportunity to remove the incorporated NFPA standards. Many of the participants and the NFPA itself asked for this to be done in their comments. The incorporation of those standards brought many of the pain points organizations were concerned about. The NFPA standards instead should be used as a tool for compliance, not a weapon of enforcement. By removing the incorporation of dozens of NFPA standards, the rule would also become far less confusing and economically infeasible. The next step is to transfer as much of the obligation of providing safety down to the local jurisdiction and state levels as possible. These are the people that know the nuances of the local responders and hazards in any given area. This, too, was supported by the comments throughout the process. The third opportunity is rather than exempting anyone, to build a baseline standard that applies and protects everyone, and then increase the requirements where the data shows increased exposure and risks. All of these changes are supported by the logical outgrowth requirements and would alleviate most of the pain points addressed by the participants of the process.

Regardless of the solution, we would be remiss if we failed to realize there will be opposition to any action taken moving forward. We also need to realize that any solution, or even no solution at all, will have pain points for some that it will affect. It has often been said that firefighters hate two things, change and the way things currently are. Hopefully, we realize that we are at a historic time, with an amazing opportunity to get this right. This process has been fair and offered plenty of opportunities for those interested in participating to make their opinions and feelings known. It is time to move the ball over the goal line and continue to work together for the betterment of emergency services in this country.

I encourage you to speak to your local elected officials. Let them know there is a workable solution right in front of us, and ask them to encourage the Department of Labor and OSHA to continue this opportunity and finalize a reasonable OSHA 1910.156 that applies to all fire departments, regardless of the composition of their staff.