



THE BULLETIN

MAY 30TH, 2026

The Voice of CAFDA since 2004
 Editor, Tom Rinaldi – tom@rinaldi1.com since 2014
 When you see **, highly recommended article

CAPITAL SHORT TAKES

- Our thoughts are with our brothers and sisters of the Menands Fire Department as they have suffered a major fire at their fire station on Broadway, Menands, Albany County. Another instance of a vehicle fire inside the station, causing major damage to the apparatus bays and business space. Fire departments from Shaker Road, West Albany, Watervliet Arsenal and Boght Community Fire District responded to the scene.
- A recording of the video Future of the Fire Service, panel discussion and open forum is available on the AFDNYS.org website.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES:

From CAFDA

1. Join us at the NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING Thursday June 11 features dinner for attendees. Please join us.

ZOOM LINK FOR THE june MEETING at 7pm:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82294160041?pwd=2M7DZ1CRDlCFjv6N2LfUw9xxtf5fNQ.1>

2. CAFDA Conference '27, Lake George NY, April 9-10-11, dinner and a vendor show Friday April 10th Fort William Henry Carriage House. Sponsored Mixer the evening of April 9th at the Holiday Inn Resort, food, games, beverages.

3. Mark your calendars now, CAFDA Fall Seminar, Saturday November 7th, at a location in Colonie to be announced.

4 CAFDA Commissioner Training for 2027 will be held in Rensselaer County, Schenectady County, Saratoga County, Schoharie County and Warren County. Dates and locations to be announced.

5> A DAY AT THE RACES to be held again this summer, stay tuned for more information, Friday, August 7th, in the Picnic Paddock Area, lunch included.

CAFDA TRAINING AND EVENT DATES

Day/Date	Time	Type	Location	Notes
FY 2026				
Thursday, June 11, 2026	7:00 PM	General Membership Mtg.	Clifton Park	
July, 2026	NO MEETING			
Friday, August 7, 2026	1:00 PM	Membership Activity	Saratoga Race Course	NYRA Day at the Races!
Thursday, August 13, 2026	7:00 PM	Board of Directors Meeting	Clifton Park	

Thursday, September 10, 2026	7:00 PM	General Membership Mtg.	Clifton Park	
Thursday, October 8, 2026	7:00 PM	General Membership Mtg.	Clifton Park	Officers/Director Nominations
Saturday, November 7, 2026	8:00 AM	Annual Fall Workshop	Verdoy	
Thursday, November 12, 2026	7:00 PM	General Membership Mtg.	Clifton Park	Officer/Director Elections
DECEMBER 2026	NO MEETING			
FY 2027				
Saturday, January 2, 2027	9:00 AM	General Membership Mtg.	Clifton Park	Organizational/Morning Meeting
Thursday, April 8 - Saturday April 10, 2027		CAFDA Conference '27	Fort William Henry Conference Center	Lake George
Thursday, April 6 - Saturday April 8, 2028		CAFDA Conference '28	Fort William Henry Conference Center	

From Other Organizations



Boat Operations ESIP WEBINAR SERIES

Many of us are asked to help people when water is involved. Whether you have open water year-round or just in the warmer months, a common tool is our boats that come in many shapes and sizes. Join us for our overview of basic operations and safe practices when we use boats to support our responses.

Date: WEDNESDAY 6/3/2026 Time: 7:00 PM EST

REGISTER HERE:

<https://mcneilandcompany.us8.list-manage.com/track/click?u=03596f243a9d922954ebaf15e&id=4026c18806&e=781e9a2c81>

NYSAFC is Bringing Hands-On Training to Your Area!

FIRE BEHAVIOR ON THE INSIDE

REGISTRATION: <https://www.nysfirechiefs.com/firebehavior>

FLASHOVER

REGISTRATION: <https://www.nysfirechiefs.com/flashover>

NYSAFC 2026 Seminar Series "Dangerous Spaces: Challenges and Tactics When Dealing with Garage and Basement Fires" With Chief/Commissioner Michael Lombardo (Buffalo Fire Department)

<https://www.nysfirechiefs.com/2026seminarseries>

Pre-registration is encouraged. On-site registration will be accepted if space permits.

Note: A 3% service fee will be applied if paying by credit card.

2026 Dates and Locations are available at the website for this series.

LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS


From Albany


[The 2026 Issues of United Concern are posted on the CAFDA.net website.](#)

See this week's ScoreCard, only one week remaining in this year's Legislative Session.

From Washington

WASHINGTON WATCH

 **AFG, SAFER, and FP&S Grant Programs Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is now OPEN!** Applications for all three grant programs are currently open and will be closing on June 22nd. See **article below for more information.**

 **National Fire Academy Resumes In-Person Emergency Management Trainings.** The National Fire Academy is looking to fill classes beginning as early as May 24th. To [view class openings](#) and to apply, visit the [NETC Online Admissions application](#) website today!

From Federal DOL/OSHA

See the latest from DOL/OSHA at CAFDA.net website.

FIRE DISTRICT FINANCIAL NEWS

Local Government and School Accountability Contact Information:

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

Address: Office of the State Comptroller, Division of Local Government and School Accountability
110 State Street, 12th Floor; Albany, NY 12236

NYS-OSC Fire Service Audits

EATON NO. 1 FIRE DISTRICT – AUDIT FOLLOW-UP

Purpose of Review

The purpose of our review was to assess the Eaton No. 1 Fire District's (District) progress, as of December 2025, in implementing our recommendations in the audit report *Eaton No. 1 Fire District – Board Oversight (2024M-4)*, released in May 2024.

The audit determined that the Board of Fire Commissioners (Board) did not:

- Ensure basic accounting records were maintained or that it received written financial reports to manage operations.
- Ensure bank reconciliations were performed.
- Ensure that the District's required annual financial reports (AFRs) were filed in a timely manner.
- Conduct an annual audit of the Secretary-Treasurer's accounting records for 2020 through 2022.
- Adequately audit claims prior to payment. Of the 108 claims totaling \$209,006 that we reviewed, 55 claims totaling \$116,846 (56 percent) had one or more exceptions.
- Adhere to statutory requirements by seeking competition when purchasing a truck and related equipment totaling \$80,991.

The audit included 13 recommendations to help the Board and District officials improve oversight of the District's financial activities.

Background

The District is located in the **Town of Eaton in Madison County** the Board consists of five elected members, with one member being appointed as Chairperson. The Board is responsible for the District's overall financial management. The Board-appointed Secretary-Treasurer is the chief fiscal officer and is responsible for receiving, disbursing and accounting for District funds; preparing financial reports; and keeping Board meeting minutes. The District contracts with an independent accounting firm that prepares the District's AFRs.

Results of Review

Based on our limited procedures, District officials fully implemented two recommendations, partially implemented eight recommendations and did not implement three recommendations.

READ THE FULL REPORT HERE:

<https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/local-government/audits/2026/pdf/eaton-no-1-fire-district-2024-4-f.pdf>

MACHIAS FIRE DISTRICT – FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

Audit Objective

Did the Machias Fire District (District), Cattaugus County, Board of Fire Commissioners (Board) and Treasurer properly manage the District's financial operations?

Audit Period

January 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025.

We extended the audit period back to fiscal year 2023 to review fixed asset records, and forward to June 18, 2025 to review Annual Financial Report (AFR) filings.

Understanding the Audit Area

A board of fire commissioners (fire district board) is responsible for managing and controlling the fire district's financial operations to help ensure public funds are managed with accountability, transparency and integrity. This critical function can help maintain public trust, ensure legal compliance and prevent mismanagement, waste and fraud. A fire district treasurer (treasurer) should record and report financial transactions in a timely and accurate manner to enable the fire district board to provide financial oversight and to make informed financial decisions. Accurate and timely records are essential for establishing financial accountability, ensuring proper financial management, providing transparency to taxpayers and fire district residents, and protecting public funds from misuse.

The District's budgeted appropriations for 2023, 2024 and 2025 were \$154,000, \$156,000 and \$313,000,¹ respectively.

Audit Summary

The Board and Treasurer did not properly manage the District's financial operations. As a result, the Board and Treasurer hindered their ability to make informed financial decisions, assess the District's financial standing and properly plan for the future. Furthermore, without proper guidance and management of operations, the Board and Treasurer cannot assure taxpayers, District residents and other interested parties that the District's financial activities are adequately accounted for and reported. This mismanagement diminished transparency and accountability and increased the risk of financial errors, loss, waste, and fraud.

Specifically:

- *The Board did not develop and adopt financial policies* required by New York State General Municipal Law (GML), including an investment policy, a procurement policy and a code of ethics.
- *The Board Chairman (Chairman) and four other Commissioners had a limited understanding of their financial responsibilities, and did not complete the mandatory fiscal oversight training as required by New York State Town Law (Town Law) Section 176-e.*
- *The Treasurer did not properly perform bank reconciliations or submit bank statements and bank reconciliations to the Board for review.*
- *The Treasurer did not file the District's AFRs with the Office of the New York State Comptroller (OSC) in a timely manner, as the AFRs for four fiscal years (2020 through 2023) were filed between 355 and 1,441 days late.²*
- *The Treasurer did not submit records to the Board annually as required by Town Law Section 177, and the Board did not conduct an annual audit of the Treasurer's records.*
- *The Board did not develop and adopt written multiyear financial or capital plans.*

The report includes 10 recommendations that, if implemented, will help the Board and Treasurer manage the District's financial operations. District officials agreed with our recommendations and indicated they would initiate corrective action.

READ THE FULL REPORT HERE:

<https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/local-government/audits/2026/pdf/machias-fire-district-2026-14.pdf>

RUSHVILLE HOSE COMPANY, INC. – FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

Audit Objective

Did the Rushville Hose Company, Inc., Ontario County (Company) Board of Trustees (Board) and membership provide adequate oversight of financial operations?

Audit Period

January 1, 2024 – January 5, 2026

Understanding the Audit Area

The Board and membership must provide adequate oversight of financial operations to ensure that Company funds are managed with accountability, transparency and integrity. A lack of oversight can lead to mismanagement, fraud, damaged reputation and jeopardize a fire company's funding and its mission.

From January 1, 2024, through October 31, 2025, the Company's revenues and redeposited startup cash¹ totaled \$66,135 and disbursements totaled \$43,498.

Audit Summary

The Board and membership did not provide adequate oversight of financial operations, enforce the limited financial provisions in the Company's bylaws, or adopt adequately detailed written bylaws to provide guidance to the Company Treasurer (Treasurer) for recording and reporting financial transactions.

- The Board did not ensure that the Treasurer's financial duties were adequately segregated and did not monitor the Treasurer's work to provide compensating controls. *As a result, unsupported and unapproved disbursements were made*, and the Company had an increased risk that errors and irregularities could go undetected and uncorrected, which could result in theft, waste and abuse of Company resources.
- The Treasurer submitted monthly reports, with detailed bank account balances and monthly income (revenue) and expenses (disbursements), to the Board each month, and the Board annually reviewed the Treasurer's manual ledger. *However, the Board did not regularly review bank statements and supporting revenue and disbursement documentation.*
- Also, the Treasurer did not provide canceled check images to the Board for review. Therefore, the Board and membership did not review necessary financial information to help ensure that the Company's financial operations were authorized, adequately accounted for, recorded and reported.
- As a result, the Board and membership were unaware that the Treasurer did not maintain adequate supporting documentation for 35 deposited revenue collections (50 percent) totaling \$9,849.
- In addition, although we determined that 21 check disbursements totaling \$6,489 that exceeded \$100 were adequately supported, 14 *(67 percent) of these totaling \$4,289 were not approved by the membership before they were paid.*
- Furthermore, we reviewed 53 debit card purchases totaling \$10,323 that exceeded \$100 and determined that 52 purchases *(98 percent) totaling \$9,896 were not approved by the membership before they were paid*, and
- seven debit card purchases for rescue equipment, food and fundraising supplies totaling \$1,451 *did not contain adequate supporting documentation.*

The report includes eight recommendations that, if implemented, will improve the Board and membership's financial operations oversight. Company officials generally agreed with our recommendations and have initiated or indicated they planned to initiate corrective action.

READ THE FULL REPORT HERE.

<https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/local-government/audits/2026/pdf/rushville-hose-company-inc-2026-16.pdf>

TABERG VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY, INC. – FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

Audit Objective

Did the Taberg Volunteer Fire Company (Company), Oneida County, Board of Directors (Board) and Treasurers ensure financial activities were properly recorded and reported and funds were safeguarded?

Audit Period

January 1, 2024 – August 26, 2025

Understanding the Audit Area

A fire company treasurer must maintain complete, accurate and up-to-date financial records and reports for informed decision-making, legal compliance and accountability, and to help reduce the risk of theft, waste and abuse of fire company resources. These records are essential for the fire company board and officials when monitoring a fire company's financial health and maintaining membership trust.

Three individuals served as Treasurer during the audit period. The current Treasurer was elected to the position in April 2025. From January 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025, the Treasurers deposited approximately \$682,000 and disbursed approximately \$354,000.

Audit Summary

The Board and Treasurers did not ensure financial activities were properly recorded and reported and funds were safeguarded. Because the Treasurers did not maintain adequate financial records or provide written financial reports to the Board, the Board and membership lacked the information to effectively oversee the Company's financial activities. In addition, weaknesses in recordkeeping and controls over cash collections and disbursements prevented the Board from ensuring that all collections were deposited and that payments were made only for valid Company purposes. As a result, the Company faced an increased risk of theft, waste and abuse of Company resources.

Specifically, we determined the following:

- *The Treasurers did not maintain adequate financial records* to properly account for the Company's revenues, expenses and cash balances for the Company's nine bank accounts. As of March 31, 2025, the Company's bank account balances totaled approximately \$520,000.
- *The Treasurers did not reconcile the Company's bank accounts, and the Board did not review the bank statements and canceled check images to provide adequate oversight of the Treasurers' financial duties.* This oversight is particularly important because the Treasurers performed nearly all Company financial duties, including receiving and depositing funds, issuing checks and maintaining the records.
- *The Company's budgets did not include all financial activities,* and the Board did not receive budget-to-actual reports to monitor financial activity or compare actual revenues and expenses to budgeted amounts.
- *Officials did not maintain adequate records to document collections and related deposits.* We determined that deposits exceeded documented collections by about \$18,000.
- *The Board authorized the Treasurers to pay bills at monthly meetings but did not review supporting claims or documentation.* We determined that 73 payments totaling \$79,416 had one or more exceptions (e.g., inadequate supporting documentation and transactions not properly recorded).

The report includes 14 recommendations that, if implemented, will improve controls over the Company's financial activities. Company officials generally agreed with our findings and indicated they plan to initiate corrective action.

READ THE FULL REPORT HERE:

<https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/local-government/audits/2026/pdf/taberg-volunteer-fire-company-2026-6.pdf>

THE FIRE CHIEF'S OFFICE

****Why Critical Thinking Is the Most Underrated Skill in the Fire Service**

Mike Clements

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Critical thinking is essential in the fire service, impacting the safety of responders and the public during emergencies.
- A lack of critical thinking can lead to rigid adherence to procedures, resulting in slower responses and increased risks.
- Organizational culture plays a significant role in developing critical thinking, with leaders needing to model and encourage this skill.

As firefighters, we're trained for nearly every scenario imaginable: structure fires, hazmat responses, medical emergencies, vehicle extrications, public safety events, and more. But in today's environment, technical expertise and tactical command are only part of the equation. Officers who rise and make a lasting impact are those who are adept at critical thinking.

Let's get one thing straight up front: Critical thinking isn't a "soft skill." In the fire service, it's a survival skill. Just like fitness, tactics, and technical proficiency, critical thinking is a discipline that can be taught, practiced, and improved.

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING, REALLY?

Critical thinking frequently shows up as a skill employers want in new hires and existing employees. Most leaders say they know it when they see it. But ask a room full of officers to define it, and you'll probably find that few can describe it (and even fewer can agree on it).

Here's a practical definition that fits the fire service: *Critical thinking is applying the right amount of discretionary effort towards the right problem, at the right time, with the right intensity and resources—all driven by a deep understanding of how your actions might affect others.* (Simple, right?)

Critical thinking isn't necessarily about working harder than anyone else or being the smartest person in the room. *It's about being situationally aware and outcome-focused while applying good judgment.* In practice, it's the firefighter who:

- Does more than you asked when more is helpful (and doesn't waste effort when it's not required).
- Does it better than expected (but understands that not everything needs to be improved).
- Solves a problem you didn't even know you had, in a way you might not have considered—and took into account all the variables of how the rest of the team might be impacted.

Two kinds of mistakes show up again and again in our work. One is getting it wrong, and the other is not getting it right enough. Critical thinking reduces both.

WHY CRITICAL THINKING IS ESSENTIAL IN THE FIRE SERVICE

Lives depend on critical thinking in the fire service. *Every decision made on the fireground can determine the safety of responders and the public.* In most cases, those decisions must be made in seconds with incomplete information. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) and training provide an essential foundation, but they can't anticipate every variable. Firefighters who think critically know how to apply that foundation flexibly, maintaining alignment with objectives even when protocols must be adjusted on the fly.

No two calls are the same, and even the best-laid plans can unravel in an instant. Firefighters may arrive expecting a straightforward structure fire and find a hazardous materials incident or medical emergency instead. *Critical thinking allows crews to recognize when standard tactics aren't working, then quickly assess risks, weigh options, and select the safest and most effective course of action under pressure.*

For leaders, critical thinking is the glue that holds operations together. It enables officers to size up a scene, assign roles, and communicate clearly while managing evolving hazards. It builds trust and efficiency because crews don't need micromanagement; they can interpret the situation and act with confidence within the commander's vision.

Beyond the fireground, critical thinking helps leaders develop others. A good leader uses judgment not only to make calls but to give the right stretch assignments and determine the next steps in developing and advancing a subordinate.

Finally, critical thinking underpins a culture of safety and accountability. *Firefighters who think critically don't just complete tasks; they ask why, analyze outcomes, and learn from experience.* That mindset fosters continuous improvement and a proactive safety culture, reducing preventable mistakes. Over time, a department that values critical thinking builds a workforce that is not only competent but adaptable, resilient, and capable of thriving in any circumstance.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CREWS LACK CRITICAL THINKING?

When critical thinking is missing, firefighters may stick rigidly to procedures and develop an overreliance on command. *People follow orders and SOPs to the letter, even as conditions change. This can cause them to respond more slowly, misjudge hazards, and overlook warning signs.* Weather, structural conditions, or a single equipment failure can throw the whole operation. A strict adherence to procedures and command can ultimately lead to mistakes that cause injuries, property loss, or fatalities.

Off the fireground, this same dynamic can cause firefighters to become complacent. They may avoid taking initiative or solving problems, which limits the team's overall capability and puts extra pressure on higher-performing members. *For example, post incident reviews might become box-checking exercises instead of growth opportunities. Preventable issues may be repeated in the future.*

All of this means that potential leaders aren't as prepared as they could be when it's time to take command. When organizations don't have a culture that emphasizes and encourages critical thinking, promotions are more likely to be made primarily on tenure, not judgment or readiness. Poor decisions will scale up as leaders climb the command ladder, and overall engagement and culture will suffer.

WHAT KEEPS PEOPLE FROM PRACTICING CRITICAL THINKING?

Critical thinking is one of the most valuable skills in public safety, yet it's often underdeveloped in both training and day-to-day operations. There are several reasons for this. Many people simply haven't seen it modeled. *Leaders often focus on technical skills and task execution, the areas they know best, because few were ever taught how to teach or reinforce critical thinking.*

In fire academies, the problem is compounded by limited time and dense curricula. Instructors must cover a growing list of essentials like fire behavior, medical response, rescue techniques, and more. Cognitive skills like information gathering, situational judgment, and decision making often take a back seat, especially if there's no structured curriculum or approved tools for teaching them.

The fire service's emphasis on structure and protocol, while vital for safety, can also have unintended consequences. *Relying too heavily on SOPs, checklists, and fixed drills can lead people to follow instructions without question.* Over time, that habit erodes initiative and prevents firefighters from recognizing when "the book" doesn't fit the situation. Hierarchical culture can add another barrier. While immediate obedience is essential during active incidents, when that same top-down approach carries over into daily operations, it can discourage dialogue and limit opportunities for shared learning.

Workload pressures make matters worse. When people are stretched thin, fatigued, or burned out, they tend to default to routine. Discretionary effort disappears, along with the willingness to think deeply, innovate, and question assumptions. And if the organizational culture lacks psychological safety, even the most engaged employees will hold back. When curiosity is mistaken for defiance, or when people are told "I don't need you to think, just follow instructions," critical thinking dies on the vine.

Generational differences can add one more layer of complexity. Younger firefighters often ask "why" to understand intent and learn faster, while some veterans may interpret those questions as a sign of disrespect or a challenge to authority. Without intentional bridge-building, frustration grows on both sides.

The good news is that none of these barriers are permanent. Leaders can change the culture by modeling curiosity, creating psychological safety, and making space for people to think, not just act. When that happens, critical thinking begins to thrive.

CRITICAL THINKING BASICS: THE PROCESS IN ACTION

So, what does critical thinking look like in real life? After years of watching strong thinkers at work, I've noticed patterns. The following habits can be taught, modeled, and practiced until they become second nature.

Be present and fully engaged. Long tenure can make people comfortable in their routines, and they may lose the skill of paying attention. Remember that critical thinking is an active process. It's the ultimate in discretionary effort, and the opposite of "phoning it in."

Become a world-class noticer. Critical thinkers see things others overlook. They ask, "What are we really trying to accomplish?" They distinguish activity from progress. They recognize repeatable patterns, position themselves for the next likely outcome, and catch the subtle nonverbal cues that change a scene.

Ask, "Is there a better way?" Tradition matters, but is the old way of doing things still working as the external environment, technology, and community risk profiles change? If you propose a new process, define why it's better. Is it safer, faster, cheaper, or more efficient? What unintended consequences might there be? What tradeoffs are you willing to accept?

Match effort to impact. You only have so much energy, time, and resources. Not every task needs maximum effort. In a fast-moving, high-stakes setting, the ability to prioritize "A" items over "D" items (and to not exhaust yourself and your team!) is an important skill.

Check bias and ego at the door. Critical thinkers strive to be objective. To make the best decisions, you have to consider your own ego, assumptions, and desires, and ensure those things don't impact your thinking. Instead of chasing a "personal win," the goal is to pursue a team win.

Checking your bias isn't a one-time action; it's something that needs to happen throughout the critical thinking process. Think about a round of golf: Is your form better on the 18th hole than it was on the first hole, or worse? In the same way, it's easy to fall back into habitual (and potentially incorrect) ways of thinking if you aren't self-aware.

Involve the right people (and only the right people). The person closest to the problem often has the clearest insight. Know who needs to be in the conversation and who doesn't, and don't get too hung up in hierarchy. If someone is only observing, consider redeploying them to higher-value work.

Collect the right information. "I had no way of knowing" often really means "I didn't ask." Gather the pertinent facts, not everything under the sun. Complexity is the enemy of speed and clarity! Get in the habit of asking, "What do we really need to know?" Use those parameters to avoid distractions. Good questions beat information overload in fast, high-stress moments.

Evaluate before you act. What is fact vs. opinion? What assumptions are we making? Is the source trustworthy, or just persuasive? (Remember, even good people can give you incomplete or inaccurate information.) Could we be chasing a red herring? Pause long enough to avoid preventable error.

Apply what you've learned. Even if two situations are not an apples-to-apples comparison, there may still be commonalities you can leverage. Synthesize prior lessons and combine the best pieces for the current context. Your solution may fix your immediate problem and create two more elsewhere. Think across divisions and functions. Ask, "Who else does this decision touch?"

Make sure you can defend your decisions. Assume that others will question your thought process. Can you give logical reasons and facts to explain what you did? Are there steps that were skipped or alternate solutions you might be missing? What is the counter to your position, and can you address it?

Communicate your conclusion, clearly and briefly. Share your conclusion with everyone who needs to hear it, as well as a brief explanation of how you got there. Make your deeper reasoning available on request.

Accept feedback and learn. Invite questions and let peers find holes in your plan. Taking feedback isn't always comfortable, especially when you've invested a lot, but it's how we get better. Peer review exists for a reason—so that our research and conclusions will withstand scrutiny.

None of this happens overnight. Like physical conditioning, mental conditioning requires repetition. But over time, these habits become muscle memory. Critical thinking and experience reinforce each other, and judgment improves.

CREATING A CULTURE THAT PROMOTES CRITICAL THINKING

If you want to encourage and support critical thinking in your department, it all starts with clearly articulating what critical thinking is, what it looks like, and how it should fit into your culture. I've found that these practices help set the right tone:

Narrate your process

Let people see how you think. *Explain the "why"* behind a tactic that works in one situation but not another, and what factors would cause you to shift. When leaders model transparent thinking during training and debriefs, crews mirror it.

Start with low-stakes learning...

It's hard to teach and learn when the stakes are high, because people become anxious. Instead, allow employees to explore new concepts, take risks, and yes, make mistakes—in a safe environment. This builds psychological safety.

...And move on to stretch assignments.

As people gain confidence and grow, so should their level of responsibility. *Give assignments that stretch employees just beyond comfort:* acting officer roles in drills, admin tasks that improve systems, or a short rotation in dispatch. Then debrief: What did you see? What would you do differently next time?

Make "look backs" and "success plates" a regular practice

After a call or community event, talk about what could have gone better, and why. Be sure that employees of all ranks have a chance to weigh in, and that you aren't giving them the "right" answer. If the team sees a way to improve a standard or process, make it official.

But don't limit yourself to reviewing what went wrong. Employ "success plates" by analyzing what went right. What decisions, communications, and conditions contributed to success? Codify and replicate them. Then recognize and reward behaviors you want to see repeated.

Distinguish between responding and reacting.

Reaction is a knee-jerk. Response is deliberate. When you have time—even 30 seconds—use it. Ask: What outcome am I aiming for? What's the next most important move? Does this align with our values?

Encourage questions and curiosity

Make it safe for firefighters, especially newer ones, to ask “why.” *(And please, eliminate the phrase “because that’s how we’ve always done it” from your vocabulary!)* Praise curiosity, not just compliance. At first, you may have to prompt people: What am I missing? What are the unintended consequences? What questions do you have for me? But as questions and suggestions become the norm, so will independent thinking.

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, LOOK IN THE MIRROR.

If your people aren’t thinking critically, ask, “Am I modeling it?” Critical thinking isn’t a program leaders can assign; it’s a practice that only grows when leaders set the example.

The more you practice critical thinking, the less effort it takes. Over time it becomes part of who you are as a firefighter and leader. You see around corners. You recognize patterns earlier. You make better calls under pressure. You build crews that are confident, curious, and adaptable.

As we move into the future, it’s a given that tools and tactics will keep evolving. So will our communities, our budgets, and our staffing models. But through it all, our mission to serve will stay the same. We’ll always need to think clearly, objectively, and collaboratively to do our jobs. In the fire service, the best tool you’ll ever carry is the one between your ears. Use it, and teach your team to do the same.

THE ATTORNEY’S OFFICE

Lawsuit Blames Rekindle for Destruction of Louisiana Plantation’s Historic Mansion

Curt Varone

The owners of Nottoway Plantation have filed suit against Iberville Parish Government, its president, and the City of Plaquemine following the fire that destroyed the plantation’s historic mansion in White Castle, Louisiana in May of 2025.

Multiple Louisiana news outlets reported that the lawsuit alleges firefighters failed to fully extinguish the fire before leaving the scene, allowing the blaze to rekindle and ultimately destroy the structure. (wafb.com; wbrz.com). WAFB reports that the parish president arrived on scene and ordered the firefighters to “stand-down.” A copy of the complaint is not available to verify the news reports.

Nottoway Plantation, constructed in 1859, was widely described as the largest remaining antebellum mansion in the South. The property operated as a resort and tourist destination and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

According to both WAFB and WBRZ, the lawsuit alleges firefighters initially brought the fire under control, but failed to completely extinguish it before clearing the scene. The reports state the plaintiffs contend the fire later reignited and spread through the mansion, resulting in a total loss of the structure.

WAFB reported that Iberville Parish’s president disputed the allegations, stating the claims are “untrue” and that the parish intends to contest the suit. The destruction of the mansion drew national attention because of the property’s historical significance. Multiple reports noted that while the main mansion was destroyed, some surrounding buildings on the property survived the fire.

Besides the allegations related to the rekindle, the plantation owners alleged the water supply available to firefighters was inadequate.

Obviously, the news reporting about this case left a lot to be desired. However, the complaint itself is rather ambiguous. First, the complaint references “first responders” who arrived on scene and requested mutual aid from the City of Plaquemine Fire Department, which is named in the suit. No other fire department is identified, so it is unclear what agency arrived first on scene, or even whether it was a fire department as opposed to another first responder agency such as police or EMS. It is also unclear why that first responding agency was not named as a defendant, while a mutual aid department was.

Second, the complaint does not allege the fire department left the scene and later had to be recalled due to a rekindle. Rather, the complaint appears to allege that after the “stand down” order was given, firefighters failed to properly check for extension, resulting in a rekindle.

Third, the fire alarm contractor responsible for the building was also named as a defendant.

[Click on this PDF to see notes from DOL related to Prevailing Wage Rates for Construction, Article 8](#)

PREVAILING WAGE RATE NOTES OPEN THIS LINK:

<https://cafda.net/information-on-the-nys-dol-prevailing-wage-rates-for-fire-districts/>

POSITIVE OUTCOMES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FIRE SERVICE

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Minoa Fire Department to hire more workers amid staffing shortage

Marisa Nunez

For more than 113 years, volunteers have been the driving force behind the Minoa Fire Department, Onondaga County, but due to daytime staffing shortages, the department will be hiring 15 to 20 part-time staff.

Minoa Fire Department Deputy Fire Chief Trevor Van Auken said there is going to be some changes to help alleviate the issue.

"We're certainly not turning down any volunteers; we're going to continue to serve this community as we always have, we're just strengthening our abilities," said Van Auken.

The department hired a paid part time chief four years ago, but this is the first-time that part-time staff will be hired. Van Auken said that staffing shortages are not only affecting Minoa, but the problem is something that fire departments across the nation are facing.

"Second shift and third shift workers are just not around here anymore," Van Auken said. "Typical people like me, a volunteer, I work a dayshift job 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and so this will be something where we can strengthen our response capabilities during the day."

Village leaders said the new positions will support volunteers, not replace them. They will be working alongside the volunteers to make sure emergency calls are covered when fewer people are available.

Typically, during the daytime, most volunteers do not work in the village, causing the department's staffing shortage. The new part time firefighters will cover these shifts Monday through Friday

"Things are just changing. People are busy doing two jobs, running their kids to soccer and everything else. The dedication is there, but it takes a lot," Minoa Mayor Bill Brazill.

Van Auken said the department has worked with career staff across Manlius, so while the change in staff is new for Minoa, it's something the department is accustomed to.

The new positions will be paid through the current fire budget, so there will be no tax increase for Minoa taxpayers.

New York State Senator Chris Ryan (D, 50) awarded the village \$107,000 which will cover the cost of repairs to the municipal building's entrance and the installation of 250 Storz fire hydrant adapters.

The Storz adapters allow large supply hoses to connect to hydrants with a simple quarter turn, which is significantly faster than threaded connections. The universal design eliminates the need to distinguish between both ends of the hose, saving firefighters valuable time when every second counts. The village said these improvements will strengthen public safety and serve as a long-term investment into the community's future.

EMS Providers, Take Note: New Policy Allowing for Treatment in Place Payments for New York State Medicaid

AFDSNY law and legislative committee

Effective for services provided on or after October 1, 2024, emergency ambulance services stemming from a 911 call that results in treatment in place (TIP) will be reimbursed based on the New York State (NYS) Medicaid rate at the appropriate base rate, without additional fees for mileage.

All rates are published in the [NYS Medicaid Transportation Fee Schedule](#). Claims in this category should be billed through eMedNY using the appropriate base rate procedure Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) code and the new destination modifier:

W modifier – "'Treatment in place' means the administration of emergency medical services, as defined by Public Health Law (PHL) §3001, by an employee or volunteer of an ambulance service. Such services shall be

consistent with protocols promulgated pursuant to article 30 of PHL." For additional information, providers should refer to the [Social Services Law, Article 5, Title 11, §367-Y](#).

"Emergency medical service" means initial emergency medical assistance including, but not limited to, the treatment of trauma, burns, respiratory, circulatory, and obstetrical emergencies." For additional information, providers should refer to the [NYS PHL, Article 30, §3001 \(1\)](#).

For information regarding Transportation to an Alternate Destination (TAD), providers should refer to the [Ambulance Providers article](#) published in the October 2024 issue of the *Medicaid Update*.

As a reminder, claims in the "Transportation to an Alternate Destination" category should be billed through eMedNY using the appropriate base rate procedure HCPCS code and the destination modifier:

C modifier – Community Mental Health Center (including Substance Use Disorder Center)

F modifier – Federally Qualified Health Center

O modifier – Physician Office

U modifier – Urgent Care Facility

Under the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Emergency Triage, Treat, and Transport Model (ET3), TIP and TAD were allowable for participating ambulance-level services. ET3 ended on December 31, 2023; however, NYS continued to allow payments for TAD but not TIP. NYS is now authorized to provide reimbursement for TIP services.

FIRE SERVICE CHALLENGES

'Shock:' Village, fire officials describe fire at Menands fire station

Fire crews have been diligently working to bring back operations, less than a day after the Menands Fire Department caught fire Sunday evening, heavily damaging the fire station and all of their equipment.

Fire, police and village officials have all been displaced from their workplaces, and are working on next steps.

"I'm still in slight shock," said Brian Marsh, the Village of Menands mayor. "To drive down and see the actual smoke coming from the building was kind of shocking. It was pretty involved pretty fast."

"In 20-plus years of being in this department, you never think it's going to be your own," said David Ognan, chief of the Menands Fire Department.

However, at around 5:30 p.m. Sunday, the fire call came in for 250 Broadway in Menands — home to not only the fire house, but the police station and the village hall.

Additionally, with no working apparatus or a place to call home, Menands was offered help from a nearby fire station, Schuyler Heights. The Town of Colonie Fire Coordinator Michael Romano said since Schuyler Heights recently ceased operations, they offered for Menands to use both their pieces of apparatus, as well as their entire fire station.

Searsmont, ME, Silo Blast that Killed Firefighter Considered Accidental

The silo explosion at a Searsmont lumberyard that claimed a firefighter is being considered accidental. Morrill Firefighter Andrew Cross was killed and several others were injured May 15 in a massive explosion and fire at Robbins lumber mill.

While the incident remains under investigation, the Maine State Fire Marshal's preliminary report released Tuesday indicate the fire started in the area of the unloader mechanism at the base of a silo, WGME reported. As the fire continued, investigators determined "rapid ignition of suspended particulate material resulted in an explosion within the silo."

Witnesses said the blast lifted the silo into the air before it crashed down and ignited other structure fires. The fire suppression system in the silo didn't activate because temperatures never reached the threshold. NIOSH investigators are among those conducting a detailed analysis of the incident.

Clairton, PA, Fire Department Treasurer Accused of Spending \$37K for Personal Expenses

Susan Nicol

Over 100 Amazon orders, ATM withdrawals and payments to Home Depot and other places are among transactions paid for with Clairton Volunteer Fire Department funds.

Joseph Massaro, 46, the treasurer, the only person with access to certain accounts, is facing charges including theft by unlawful taking, receiving stolen property, and misappropriation of entrusted property, [WTAE](#) reported. The unauthorized purchases cost the fire company at least \$37,000.

Keith Massaro said he was blindsided by his son's arrest. "He said they're singling him out. So, well, hey, if you're the treasurer, you're responsible for it all. So, that's what they're doing," he told a reporter who showed up at his house.

*****The Idea of 'Nominal Compensation' Has Serious Limitations for the Volunteer Fire Service***

Mark Lambert

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The core issue in volunteer fire department staffing is not motivation or pay, but the limited amount of available time volunteers can dedicate to responses and training.
- Nominal compensation does not create new response hours, it only compensates those already responding, without expanding the volunteer base.
- Adding pay or modest pay increases risks blurring the line between volunteering and being an employee, raising legal and liability issues.

Last month I wrote an article in which I made a simple argument: the problem facing the volunteer fire service is not motivation. It is math. That argument is now being tested in real time.

Across the country, proposals are emerging to offer what is being called "nominal compensation" to volunteer firefighters. Pay-per-call, standby stipends, mileage reimbursement, and small tax incentives.

On the surface, these ideas sound reasonable. They sound like action. And to be fair, communities pursuing them are responding to a very real crisis. Departments are struggling to staff apparatus, maintain daytime coverage, and retain experienced members. Local leaders are trying to work with the tools and resources they have.

TIME AND MONEY

But that reality forces an even harder question because volunteers are already working one or two jobs. Their spouses are working. They are raising families, commuting farther than previous generations, and scraping together sleep. Then a solution is offered. We should pay them a little and that is the moment where the limits of the argument become clear.

If someone is already maxed out, where exactly are the additional response hours supposed to come from?

Because that is what we are really talking about. Not money, but time.

Every person has the same fixed constraint. There are 168 hours in a week. No grant, legislation or stipend changes that. If you subtract work, commuting, sleep, family responsibilities, and basic life obligations, what remains is not a reservoir of untapped availability. It is a narrow, often overdrawn margin.

Yet we are trying to build a reliable emergency response system at all hours inside those tight limits.

DOES NOMINAL COMPENSATION REALLY HELP?

Nominal compensation does not create new firefighters. It does not create new availability. It does not free someone up at two in the afternoon on a Tuesday when most of the community is at work. What it often does is compensate the same small group that already responds. The same names, the same trucks, the same people leaving work or sacrificing family time.

The burden on today's volunteer firefighters does not spread. It concentrates.

A modest payment may help those individuals feel recognized. It may offset fuel costs or lost wages. It may even delay someone's departure. But it does not necessarily broaden the base of responders. In some cases, tying even small amounts to response activity risks increasing dependence on the very people who are already carrying the load.

There is another practical limit rarely discussed. Legal thresholds. Push compensation past a certain point and the volunteer increasingly begins to resemble an employee, with questions about wages, overtime, benefits,

insurance, and liability. *Communities are therefore forced to operate within a narrow band where payments are large enough to be noticed but too small to fundamentally change behavior or become an incentive. This is not a criticism of departments trying these approaches. It is an acknowledgment of their limits.*

AN OUT-OF-DATE MODEL FOR FIRE DEPARTMENT VOLUNTEERS

The volunteer fire department model that we inherited assumed different conditions, including people who lived and worked in the same community, predictable schedules, lower call volume, and simpler incidents. Those assumptions no longer hold. Volunteer firefighter numbers across the country have declined while emergency call demand and training expectations have steadily increased. At the same time, discretionary time has become harder to find.

The more important question is not how much we should pay per call, it is how many usable response hours actually exist in the community.

It is not how many names are on the roster, or how many people say they are willing. *It is about how many firefighters can realistically respond at any given hour, consistently, year after year, without sacrificing their job, their family, or their health.*

COMPENSATION WILL HELP BUT ISN'T THE ANSWER

Nominal compensation is not worthless. It may improve morale at the margins and offer meaningful recognition to those who still show up. It may buy some time for struggling volunteer fire departments.

But it cannot solve the central constraint because it is not money. It is time. And no amount of nominal compensation can create time that does not exist

STATISTICS FOR THE FIRE SERVICE

FIREFIGHTER HEALTH AND SAFETY – PROTECTING OUR OWN

FIREFIGHTER FATALITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

26

In 2025 we experienced 78 LODDs reported nationally.!

- **Data from US Fire Administration on LODD:** <https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/firefighter-fatalities/>
- **Information on FF injuries and deaths from the Secret List:** <https://www.firefighterclosecalls.com/>
- **Information of Fire Apparatus MVCs:** <https://www.emergencyvehicleresponse.com/>

Fire Apparatus Accidents

- Ferguson, MO fire crews were responding to a call when a car turned into a ladder truck and damaged it. While no firefighters were injured, damage to the truck are estimated to be \$100K.
- While crews were operating on the scene of an MVC on I-65, an Upton, Kentucky Fire Department apparatus positioned in a secured blocking position to protect responders and provide advanced warning of the accident scene ahead was rear-ended by a large box truck. The apparatus was unoccupied at the time of the collision. There were no injuries to firefighters but the apparatus sustained major damage.

Firefighter Maydays, Serious Injuries and Deaths

- Robert T. Kilduff, a dedicated third-generation Boston firefighter assigned to Rescue 2 died after a fall from a third floor window during a three-alarm fire in the Dorchester section of Boston.

THE BUILDING AND FIRE CODE ISSUES – WEEKLY REPORT ON FIRE FATALITIES

- **Home Fire Fatalities in the News:** <https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/civilian-fatalities/>

Fire Deaths in 1&2 Family Dwellings in NYS

32

5/28/26 Saugerties, Ulster, Co. Female age 48.	
Fire Deaths in any type of Dwelling in NYS	80
Fire Deaths in 1&2 Family Dwellings Nationally	535
Top 3 States with the greatest 1&2 Family Deaths	#1 PA/ 45
	#2 OH 34
	#3 NY 33
Civilian home fire fatalities in 2026: 872	
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 my question to you is; when does a new home become an old home?	

NOTE: The New ICC Code-NYS Edition went into effect on December 31st 2025 although the implementation of the energy code provisions have been withdrawn until further notice.

FIRE APPARATUS

Portable Ladder Storage on Pumpers

Rick Mosher

Because the fire service mission is ever evolving, the fire apparatus that we operate have changed and grown as our role has expanded. Sometimes, changes in size and maneuverability don't align with response district streets and parking lots. I believe that smaller, simpler apparatus often are the key to a more efficient and effective fireground and emergency scene. Curbside portable ladder storage on the classic high-side/low-side pumper body can be beneficial to a department's capability to respond and to return to service quickly, effectively and safely.

Note: It's important to remember when building a fire apparatus that there always is a cause and effect. One modification can result in a cascade of changes throughout the rest of the vehicle.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Pumper bodies remained relatively unchanged until the late 1980s, when some began to include specification of hydraulic ladder racks. In most cases, this offered two additional high-side compartments or two tall rescue body compartments, with one high-side or a half high-side, depending on the ladder rack mounting configuration. This allowed for a full-width hosebed, and the body height remained lower than or even with the cab in most cases, to allow for an acceptable travel height.

As the vista roof, or now commonly called the raised-roof, cab entered the market, manufacturers began to match body height to cab height. In most cases, the hydraulic ladder rack travel height exceeded 10 feet, and drop-down height exceeded five feet. Because the removal of ladders can be made more complex when districts lack curbed streets, a member must remove ladders while standing in an open drainage culvert or on the sloped surface of an open drainage culvert. Furthermore, when parked automobiles are involved, the ladder rack might not be capable of being lowered fully. This caused some departments to specify street-side ladder racks, although this can be complicated by traffic or other obstacles.

In the 2000s, manufacturers began to offer a flat, through-the-tank portable ladder storage area. The increase in body height because of the raised-roof cab allowed this. However, the effect of this change required tank manufacturers to create a ladder tunnel through the tank. Although still allowing for a full-width hosebed, the hosebed vertical storage height was reduced, and the hosebed vertical access height often was raised more than six feet.

As this option gained popularity, it was offered in a beam portable ladder storage option. This has become very popular with most departments. It can allow for a lower ground-to-hosebed access, with additional vertical height of hose storage. The access height can vary from 4 feet, 6 inches to 5 feet, 7 inches.

Two effects result from this option. The first is a reduced-width hosebed of 57½ inches or an uneven hosebed. The second is portable ladder intrusion into the pump house. Storing portable ladders flat or beam can require a larger pump house or less-than-desirable plumbing and valve configurations. This also can hamper

fireground pump problem-solving and pump maintenance, and removal of ladders can be made more complex when another apparatus parks directly behind the ladder storage.

RETURN TO CURBSIDE ACCESS

As the engine company culture renaissance continues, departments are returning to a traditional high-side/low-side body configuration with curbside portable ladders. This permits a low ground-to-hosebed access and a full-width hosebed of 68 inches. This also can allow for multiple bulk beds of fire hose or preconnected hoselines.

Many departments also are returning to a flat-roof cab, to allow a reduction in overall travel and body height while gaining valuable scrub of the deck-mounted turret. A curbside ladder option allows for ladders to be removed at five feet. The height can vary depending on manufacturer when choosing triple wheel well torpedo tubes that commonly are used to store spare SCBA bottles. This height can vary depending on equipment storage on the deck that's below the ladders.

Any time that this body option is specified, the department should request that the ladders be mounted on adjustable channels, so ladder deployment height can be adjusted. Ladder removal is made easy with the member, in most cases, standing on level ground even in areas where no curbs exist. The portable ladders also can be removed when parked cars are close to the fire.

Some might argue that the loss of compartment space limits storage of ALS and BLS equipment, ground monitors, and other equipment. That isn't true. In fact, compartments even can be included to accommodate future needs.

SECONDS COUNT

When specifying a high-side/low-side body with curbside portable ladders, departments should conduct a thorough needs assessment. This should consider ladder deployment, hosebed storage, hose deployment, ladder access body height and response district.

Departments should work with the manufacturer to explore body and mounting options and shouldn't hesitate to ask for additional measurements on the overall drawing of the apparatus. Departments also should ask for a separate drawing of the ladder-mounting configuration. This provides the ability to see exactly where the ladder will be mounted and whether any overhang or overlap will occur.

Seconds—even milliseconds—count in the fire service. Rapid deployment of portable ground ladders should be an urgent priority when fire apparatus are specified. The lives of citizens and company members depend on it.

GREEN ENERGY AND THE IMPACT ON THE FIRE SERVICE

iPad Suspected in Fire at NY Firehouse that Destroyed Apparatus, Forced Department Relocation

Menand's Officials said the apparatus where the fire is believed to have originated is a total loss, while two other vehicles sustained severe damage and are being evaluated. Chief Ognan estimated replacement costs for the apparatus alone could exceed \$1 million. No one was seriously injured in the fire, according to a joint statement released by the village, police department and fire department.

The department is now operating out of the nearby Schuyler Heights Fire District station after the district offered its facility and apparatus to Menands crews. [*Fire inspectors suspect an iPad in the front seat of the department's Squad 6 may have ignited the fire.*](#)

Lithium battery blamed for igniting Camden scrapyard fire

A lithium battery is being blamed for igniting a massive fire at a Camden, NJ scrapyard facility on Friday morning, prompting local leaders to demand the facility be shut down.

In a statement, EMR, the operator of the facility blamed an improperly disposed lithium-ion battery for sparking the fire. They called on New Jersey and federal authorities to establish regulations and guidelines about the disposal of lithium-ion batteries.

"This incident is a reminder of the serious and growing challenges posed by lithium-ion batteries being improperly disposed of and finding their way into recyclable materials," EMR wrote. "EMR USA continues to

urge New Jersey and federal authorities to establish clear, enforceable regulations governing lithium battery disposal."

EMR said it will pause operations at the Camden facility as an investigation into the fire unfolds.

[Lithium-ion battery fire prompts hazmat response at Mililani, HI apartments, 2 displaced](#)

Two residents are now displaced from their home after a lithium-ion battery sparked inside an apartment building on Thursday. The Honolulu Fire Department received a 911 call at 10:57 p.m. for a building fire reported at Waikalani Drive in Mililani.

Officials said, based on information from the caller stating that the fire involved a lithium-ion battery-powered electric bike, the incident was upgraded to a second alarm, dispatching additional resources, including a Hazmat Unit.

NEIGHBOR'S HELPING NEIGHBORS, thank you for your support!!

[Warrensburg Fire Department Chicken Dinner](#)

Our Famous Chicken Barbeque, **Saturday June 20, 2026**, Serving Time 3:30PM

TAKE OUT ONLY! \$15.00 per dinner

Call 518-623-9766 - For Reservation

18 Elm Street

Warrensburg, New York

Benefit: Warrensburg Vol. Fire Company

[Gansevoort Fire Department Breakfast](#)

Sunday June 21st Breakfast will be served starting at 8AM. **Last breakfast until the fall.**

[Clifton Park Fire Department Breakfast](#)

Next Breakfast will be held in October at a date to be announced.

[Speigletown Fire Department Breakfast 2nd Sunday of each month](#)

Sunday October 11th from 7:30 to 11:30, \$10 adults, \$5 children, under 5 free

We salute all of the kitchen help who hustle, giving up their Sunday mornings, to make these events special for all the attendees and work hard to support their fire company's. Thank you for your tough work and dedication.

GENERAL INTEREST TO ALL

[How Much Do You Really Know About DEF, Besides Your Apparatus Needs It?](#)**

The FAMA Chassis Subcommittee

Over the past few decades, fire departments have had to adapt to major changes in diesel engine technology. A big turning point came around 2010, when new emissions regulations required diesel engines to dramatically reduce pollutants—especially nitrogen oxides (NO_x). To meet these standards, most engine manufacturers adopted a system called Selective Catalytic Reduction, or SCR. And, SCR systems rely on diesel exhaust fluid, better known as DEF.

At its core, FAMA's TC081 Service Guide, "DEF Sensor Reliability Guidance," is about keeping fire apparatus in service, even when DEF sensors become unreliable. It explains what DEF is, how it works, why sensors sometimes fail, and what departments can do if they run into trouble.

Let's start with the basics. DEF is a clear, odorless liquid made of 32.5% urea and 67.5% distilled water. It's not toxic or flammable, but it can corrode metal if spilled and left unrinsed. That's why any spills during filling should be washed down with water. There's also an international quality standard—ISO 22241-1—that ensures the DEF you're buying meets the correct specifications. The guidance strongly recommends

purchasing DEF that meets this standard or carries an "API classified" symbol. Using good-quality DEF is one of the simplest ways to avoid problems.

So, what does DEF actually do? In diesel engines equipped with SCR systems, DEF is injected into the exhaust stream after combustion. When it hits the hot exhaust gases, it turns into ammonia. That ammonia reacts with nitrogen oxides inside a catalyst and breaks them down into harmless nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and water vapor. In simple terms, DEF helps clean up the exhaust before it leaves the tailpipe.

Although having to add DEF might seem like an extra hassle, SCR systems actually offer some benefits. They tend to improve fuel economy compared with other emissions approaches, reduce maintenance frequency in some cases, and help maintain strong engine performance.

Because DEF plays such an important role in emissions control, the system has to monitor it closely. Modern vehicles include sensors that measure DEF level and temperature. Starting in 2016, regulations also required sensors to measure DEF quality—meaning whether the fluid has the correct concentration. That's where things started to get more complicated.

Dashboard warning lights alert operators to issues. There's typically a DEF indicator lamp and a Malfunction Indicator Lamp (MIL), sometimes called the check engine light. If DEF levels are low, a warning appears. If there's a more serious issue—such as incorrect fluid type or a system malfunction—additional warnings may show up.

For most nonemergency trucks, running out of DEF or having incorrect DEF quality can trigger "derates," which reduce engine power and even limit vehicle speed to as low as 5 miles per hour. This was designed to ensure compliance with emissions rules. *However, fire apparatus are treated differently.*

*****Thanks to advocacy from FAMA, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and engine manufacturers, emergency vehicles were granted a special exemption by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This exemption allows fire apparatus to avoid automatic engine derates because of DEF issues. In other words, even if there's a DEF level, temperature, or quality problem, the engine will not automatically reduce horsepower, torque, or speed.***

That's an important protection for emergency response. Still, the guidance document makes it clear that departments shouldn't ignore DEF issues. Running without DEF for long periods can damage certain components, like the DEF injector, which relies on DEF for cooling. So, while the engine may continue operating normally, maintenance shouldn't be delayed indefinitely.

Now let's talk about the heart of the issue: DEF sensor reliability.

Starting in 2016, the rules required systems to measure not just DEF level and temperature but also quality. That added complexity to the sensors. Instead of simple analog devices, newer systems use more advanced electronic components to determine whether the DEF mixture is correct. Unfortunately, these newer sensors have experienced higher failure rates.

The heavy truck industry overall has struggled with DEF sensor reliability. Fire apparatus manufacturers have worked closely with suppliers to improve designs, but challenges remain. The global chip shortage only made things worse, leading to parts shortages and longer wait times for replacements. As a result, some departments have found themselves with faulty DEF sensors and no immediate replacement available.

Recognizing this widespread issue, the EPA and the California Air Resources Board stepped in with temporary relief. They understand that vehicles, including emergency vehicles, need to stay in service. So, they granted permission for engines to operate even if the DEF sensor was not functioning, at least until supply issues were resolved.

For departments facing this situation, there is guidance available. First, if a qualified technician diagnoses a faulty DEF sensor and no replacement is available, you can generally keep the apparatus in service. Both the DEF light and the MIL may remain illuminated, indicating an emissions issue. While emissions-related problems should always be corrected, when possible, **a DEF sensor failure alone will not cause immediate engine damage or shutdown, especially in emergency vehicles with the derate exemption.**

Second, it's important not to assume that every MIL light is caused by the DEF sensor. The check engine light can indicate many types of emissions system issues. Departments should regularly monitor fault codes to confirm that the only problem is the DEF sensor and not something more serious. Depending on the vehicle, fault codes can be viewed on an onboard display or retrieved using an inexpensive diagnostic reader from an auto parts store.

The guidance also emphasizes simple preventive practices. Always use high-quality DEF. Top off the DEF tank whenever you refuel the apparatus. Keeping the tank relatively full reduces the chance of air bubbles, which can cause false concentration readings and trigger fault codes.

There's also a DEF filter in the system. Under normal conditions, it doesn't require service until extremely high mileage, often around 300,000 miles, which most fire apparatus will never reach. However, contaminated DEF can clog the filter prematurely, which is another reason to buy quality fluid.

The document breaks down DEF sensor issues by engine model year. Engines from 2009 and earlier don't use SCR systems at all, so they have no DEF and no DEF sensors. Engines from 2010 to 2015 used simpler sensors that measured level and temperature only. These systems tend to be more reliable and have lower failure rates. Engines from 2016 and later are more likely to experience DEF sensor issues because they must measure level, temperature, and quality. The added complexity increases the potential for failure.

Finally, the document addresses a common concern: whether DEF sensor problems affect diesel particulate filter (DPF) regeneration. The answer is no. There is no direct relationship between the DEF sensor and the DPF's ability to perform regeneration. DEF does not control exhaust temperature, and a DEF warning will not prevent parked regeneration from occurring.

In the end, this guidance is really about reassurance and practicality. Emissions systems have become more complicated, and DEF sensors, particularly in 2016 and newer engines, have not always been as reliable as hoped. But fire departments are not powerless. *With the EPA derate exemption, regulatory flexibility during sensor shortages, careful monitoring of fault codes, and consistent use of high-quality DEF, departments can continue operating safely while awaiting repairs.*

Don't ignore warning lights forever but don't panic either. Understand what the lights mean, confirm the diagnosis, keep the DEF tank topped off, and work toward replacement when parts become available. With a little awareness and routine attention, DEF-related issues can be managed without disrupting emergency service.

The TC081 Service Guide is available for free download at <https://bit.ly/4bu3Ued> .

TAKE A MOMENT TO SMILE

Old age has come at a bad time, just as I was beginning to know everything, I'm now forgetting everything I knew!!

CLASSIFIED

CAFDA IS SEEKING A TREASURER FOR OUR FIRE SERVICE NOT-FOR-PROFIT ASSOCIATION.

Our current excellent treasurer has announced that he will be giving up the position as soon as we find a replacement due to increased workload with his own business. Any candidate should be familiar with Quick Books and the structure and operation of a not-for-profit organization as well as some familiarization with the operation of fire districts in New York State. CAFDA offers a stipend which won't make you rich, but you get to hang out with some great people, get free meals prior to meetings and trying to provide a service to fire district officials. The Association requires our treasurers to be bonded. If you are interested let us know by providing a resume and cover letter to secretary@cafda.net.

Station Keeper Position Available

Station Keeper position is available at **Niskayuna Fire District Two, Schenectady County**. Starting salary and medical benefits negotiable. For information email sk2@nfd2.com Please include email and phone contact info.

WHO ARE YOUR CAFDA OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS FOR 2026?

OFFICERS

President, Tom Rinaldi, Commissioner, Stillwater Fire District
1st Vice President, Ellen Martin, Deputy Treasurer Clifton Park Fire District

DIRECTORS:

Les Bonesteel Past Commissioner, Burnt Hills/Saratoga,
Skip Smith, Commissioner, West Crescent/Saratoga
Joyce Petkus Treasurer Greenfield/Saratoga,
Ed Woehrle Commissioner Niskayuna #1/Schenectady
Art Hunsinger, Ex-Officio Member Clifton Park Fire District.

We would consider expanding the number of Directors if individuals from other counties would volunteer to participate!!

APPOINTEES

Secretary Molly Jenkins, Region 1 Director, Assoc of Fire Districts, NYS
Treasurer: Tony Hill
Sargent at Arms: Tom Wood, Commissioner, Northumberland Fire District
Chaplain: Dane Fagan
Legal Counsel: Greg Serio, Safety Officer, Verdoy Fire District

***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 join!
If your Fire District is a member, you are a member!!***

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

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

Financial issues should be addressed to: TREASURER@CAFDA.NET

518-407-5020

[Wish to become a member of CAFDA, go to CAFDA.net/membership to apply.](http://CAFDA.net/membership)

CAPITAL AREA BUSINESS PARTNER'S

Business Partner Applications Available At: WWW.CAFDA.NET

Stay tuned for some new Business Partners for 2026.

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 2026. You are invited to our monthly membership meeting and to any of our social events..

FIRE SERVICE LEGAL SERVICES



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