THE BULLETIN

JUNE 27, 2026

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

CAPITAL SHORT TAKES

- **"In 2026, we celebrate America's 250 years of freedom, with liberty and justice, by honoring all those who have given their lives to serve their country and preserve its freedom." Have a happy and safe 4th of July!**
- A recording of the video Future of the Fire Service, panel discussion and open forum is available on the AFDNYS.org website.
- ***Don't say it can't be done, you won't know until you try. If you give up, they win!!***
- Quick Response special event for first responders, July 11th. Free for first responders and their families see the flyer on the last page of this Bulletin.
- Congratulations to Dutchess County on their new state-of-the-art Live Fire Training Building officially opened Saturday, June 20, at the county's Emergency Response campus on Creek Road. The three-story modular burn building is constructed using reinforced shipping containers and features movable wall partitions that can be reconfigured to simulate realistic interior environments such as hallways and rooms. This flexibility enables firefighters to train for a broad range of emergency situations with the highest level of authenticity.
- Our sympathies to the Halfacre family on the passing of 38 year old Captain Shaun Halfacre of the Eagle Matt Lee Fire Company in Ballston Spa, Saratoga County, NY. Shaun fought a courageous battle against cancer.
- Our sympathies are also with the Proctor family, on the passing of Clifton Park firefighter Jeff Proctor's mother Jeanne.
- **June 30th is the deadline for your external auditor to submit the annual external audit for the 2025 fiscal year and the LOSAP audit to the Office of the State Comptroller.**
- **DripDrop Hydration, PBC, has partnered with the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) for the seventh year to donate 200,000 sticks of their electrolyte drink mix to a minimum of 1,000 volunteer fire departments to help prevent firefighter dehydration and heat-related injuries.**

  Criteria/Eligibility
  - **To be eligible for the donation, departments must meet the following requirements:**
  - **Department must have at least one active NVFC member. Check your membership status HERE. You can learn more about NVFC member benefits and join HERE.**
  - **Be over 50% volunteer; paid on-call is considered volunteer.**
  - **Be located in the U.S. and legally organized under state law.**
  - **A physical address must be provided for shipping; DripDrop cannot be shipped to P.O. Boxes. Applications with a P.O. Box will be disqualified.**
  - **Be willing to share a department photo or video and publicize the donation award (NVFC will provide sample promotional tools and templates to help).**
  - **Only one application will be accepted per department; subsequent applications received for that department will be deleted.**
  - **While 2025 recipients may apply again in 2026, preference will be given to departments that have not previously received this donation; subject to availability.**

- **The application period will be open June 16-30. Questions? Email Lori@nvfc.org**
- **After the application period ends, DripDrop representatives will review the applications. A minimum of 1,000 volunteer fire departments will be selected to receive one to two cases of DripDrop electrolyte drink mix, depending on the size of the department. The selection process will be nondiscriminatory. All applicants will be contacted directly before the public announcement is made.**

TRAINING OPPORTUNTIES:

From CAFDA

1. ***Join us at the NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING Thursday September 10 features dinner for attendees. Please join us.***

ZOOM LINK FOR THE SEPTEMBER MEETING at 7pm:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89275151494?pwd=H9Wzo77bprmGQd5beFEjODUJxebjJC.1

2. ***Mark your calendar for the CAFDA Conference '27, Lake George NY, April 9-10-11, dinner/vendor show Friday April 10th Fort William Henry Carriage House. Sponsored Mixer the evening of Thursday April 9th at the Holiday Inn Resort, food, games, beverages. The response has grown each year and we are in the process of identifying the subjects for 2027.***

3. ***Mark your calendars now, CAFDA Fall Seminar, Saturday November 7th, at Guilderland Fire Department, 2303 Western Ave. (US Route 20), Guilderland, NY. The Education Committee has identified the subjects including the ever popular "Experts Panel".***

4 CAFDA Commissioner Training for 2027 will be held in Averill Park, Thomas Corners, Clifton Park, Schoharie and Warrensburg.

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				
July, 2026	**NO MEETING, See next month's Day at the Races**			
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**	Guilderland FD	2303 Western Ave.
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

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

When you review the summary of the legislation that is related to the volunteer fire service in the state, it will become clear that the Majority Party legislators in the senate and the assembly do not genuinely care about you and I; they have a much different agenda which does not support the survival of the volunteer fire service. Out of all the substantial bills (approximately 60) related to the fire service introduced; only seven made it through both chambers and one of those bills requires something that has a negative impact on membership; additional training. The one thing we are unified in complaining about!

The legislators have demonstrated by their actions that they are more concerned with their pronouns and progressive agenda, than the health of the volunteer fire service in this state.

There were 25K bills introduced during the 25/26 session; how many can the legislators pay real attention to? Note that only bills introduced by the Majority Party have made it through the committee process to a floor vote and to the Governor's desk. We will wait to see what she signs into law.

Next time one of these politicians asks "what they can do for you" the answer is "genuinely support us" and pass the legislation that we endorse that will improve participation in the volunteer fire service!

S8832 KAVANAGH (D)	**A9504 GLICK (D)**	**1/2/126 PASSED SENATE 2/10/26 PASSED ASSEMBLY**	**THE PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER AMENDMENT IS TO FACILITATE THE INCLUSION OF E-BIKE AND E-SCOOTER BATTERIES IN THE RECHARGEABLE BATTERY RECYCLING PROGRAM AND TO PROMOTE CONSUMER SAFETY, CONVENIENCE, AND AWARENESS**	**2/13/26 SIGNED CHAPTER 87**
S6368B SKOUFIS (D)	**A3126B LUNSFORD (D)**	**4/22/26 PASSED SENATE 3/30326 PASSED ASSEMBLY**	**AN ACT TO AMEND THE EXECUTIVE LAW, IN RELATION TO REQUIRING THAT WHEN A COMPLAINT IS MADE TO LOCAL CODE ENFORCEMENT OF A VIOLATION OF THE UNIFORM FIRE PREVENTION AND BUILDING CODE OR LOCAL BUILDING CODES WHICH RESULTS IN THE ISSUANCE OF A COMPLIANCE ORDER, THE COMPLAINANT SHALL ALSO BE PROVIDED A COPY OF SUCH ORDER**	**PENDING SIGNATURE**
S9502A MARTINEZ (D)	**A10885B STERN (D)**	**6/2/26 PASSED SENATE 6/1/26 PASSES ASSEMBLY**	***TO AUTHORIZE* LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO ADOPT A PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES OF**	**PENDING SIGNATURE** PENDING PASSAGE BY EACH LOCAL

			PAID FIREFIGHTERS WHO ARE KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY.	GOVERNMENT BY RESOLUTION
S7316 HINCHEY (D)	A8008 LUNSFORD (D)	5/18/26 PASSED SENATE 6/1/26 PASSED ASSEMBLY	REQUIRES THE FORFEITURE OF BENEFITS TO BE PAID PURSUANT TO A SERVICE AWARDS PROGRAM TO VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS WHO HAVE BEEN CONVICTED OF FELONIES COMMITTED AGAINST A VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY, FIRE DISTRICT, OR FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT.	PENDING SIGNATURE
S5614 ADDABBO (D)	A3681A WOERNER (D)	6/2/26 PASSED SENATE 1/28/26 PASSED ASSEMBLY	AN ACT TO AMEND THE GENERAL MUNICIPAL LAW, IN RELATION TO REMOVING RESTRICTIONS ON THE FREQUENCY CERTAIN AUTHORIZED ORGANIZATIONS MAY CONDUCT BINGO GAMES	PENDING SIGNATURE
S4675 JACKSON (D)	A688 BUTTENSCHON (D)	5/6/26 PASSED SENATE 4/29/26 PASSED ASSEMBLY	AN ACT TO AMEND THE EXECUTIVE LAW, IN RELATION TO PROVIDING MINIMUM BASIC TRAINING RELATED TO HANDLING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS INVOLVING INDIVIDUALS WITH ANY PHYSICAL AND/OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY TO ALL FIRE-FIGHTERS	PENDING SIGNATURE REQUIRES ADDITIONAL TRAINING
S6233A MARTINEZ (D)	A6790A MCMAHON	6/1/26 PASSED SENATE 5/14/26 PASSED ASSEMBLY	THIS BILL INCREASES THE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' AND AMBULANCE WORKERS' PERSONAL INCOME TAX CREDIT FROM $200 TO $800 FOR ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS AND FROM $400 TO $1600 FOR ELIGIBLE MARRIED JOINT FILERS. ALSO ALLOWS FIRST RESPONDERS TO TAKE THE PROPERTY TAX CREDIT ALSO.	PENDING SIGNATURE
S10075 SOLAGES (D)	A11162 ZELLLNER	6/2/26 PASSED SENATE 5/29/26 PASSED ASSEMBLY	EXTEND THE PROVISION OF THE COMPETITIVE BIDDING STATUTE [GENERAL MUNICIPAL LAW §103] WHICH PERMITS PIGGYBACK PURCHASING. THE STATUTE HAD A SUNSET PROVISION MEANING THAT IT WOULD EXPIRE ON JUNE 30, 2026. THE BILLS PROPOSE TO AMEND THE STATUTE TO EXTEND THE SUNSET PROVISION UNTIL JUNE 30, 2027	6/18/26 DELIVERED TO GOVERNOR FOR SIGNATURE

From Washington

WASHINGTON WATCH

📌 Three New Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program (FFFIPP) Reports Released. These reports include the conditions and circumstances leading to firefighter deaths and injuries, and recommendations to prevent similar events in the future based on the FFFIPP investigation.

Career Firefighter Injured after Falling from Ladder while Self Extricating from Boarding House Fire – Pennsylvania (Report Slides) **CLICK ON THIS LINK:**
https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/firefighters/programs/pdfs/f202602.pdf?ACSTrackingID=DM155726&ACSTrackingLabel=June%202026&deliveryName=DM155726

Four Career Firefighters Injured from a Floor Collapse in an Abandoned Residential Structure Fire – Kansas (Report Slides) **CLICK ON THIS LINK:**
https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/firefighters/programs/pdfs/f202601.pdf?ACSTrackingID=DM155726&ACSTrackingLabel=June%202026&deliveryName=DM155726

53-Year-old Sergeant Dies from Cardiac Event While Asleep in Station During Duty Shift – Indiana **CLICK ON THIS LINK:**
https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/firefighters/programs/pdfs/f202512.pdf?ACSTrackingID=DM155726&ACSTrackingLabel=June%202026&deliveryName=DM155726

From Federal DOL/OSHA

When we hear something, we'll post it here.

FIRE DISTRICT FINANCIAL NEWS

FIRE DISTRICT BUDGET PROCESS SCHEDULE 2026

On or before September 29th

- Adopt proposed budget for 2027, including fund balance estimate for end of 2026

- File proposed budget with District Sectary
- Post budget on fire district's website
- Provide copy of proposed budget for 2027, including fund balance estimate for end of 2026 to town clerk of towns in which district is located

September 30th to October 5th

- Post notice of **budget hearing** on fire district website and signboard (if district maintains a website/signboard)
- Provide copy of notice of budget hearing to town clerk of towns in which district is located. Town clerks must also post the notice on clerk's bulletin board and town signboard)

On or before October 15th

- Publish notice of budget hearing in official newspaper or, if not official newspaper, in newspaper having general circulation in district, and publicly post notice
- **Treasurer Performs Following Task on Comptroller's Website**: After adopting proposed budget complete tax cap levy form for New York Comptroller's Office and "save" but do not submit. Determine if proposed budget will exceed tax cap

Annual Budget Hearing Date Selected

- 2026 Date October 20th [**can be any day in the third week of October**]

October 20th to November 4th

- Subject to certain restrictions, make changes, alternations and revisions to proposed budget. After hearing, can lower budget but not raise.
- **Before adopting Fire District Annual Budget** determine if the tax levy will exceed tax levy cap and if so the Fire District must pass a resolution by a 60% vote of its board to override the tax cap

On or before November 4th

- Before passing any resolutions necessary to override the tax cap levy and adopting the Fire District Annual Budget "submit" the Fire District budget/ tax cap form to the New York State Comptroller's Office on the form prescribed by them
- Adopt fire district annual budget

On or before November 7th

- Fire district secretary delivers two (2) certified copies of fire district annual budget for 2026 to town clerk of towns in which district is situated, (TL§181[3][c]) **and obtains receipt.**
- Make certain the final budget submitted includes any changes made to proposed budget after Budget Hearing, there is no going back!!

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

GORHAM FIRE DISTRICT – ONTARIO CO. - PROCUREMENT

Audit Objective

Did Gorham Fire District (District) officials ensure the procurement of goods and services in an economical manner?

Audit Period

January 1, 2024 – March 25, 2026

Understanding the Audit Area

A fire district board of fire commissioners and its officials should seek competition for goods and services to ensure the best value for taxpayers, prevent conflicts of interest and maintain public trust. Seeking competition also guards against favoritism, extravagance and fraud, while allowing interested vendors a fair and equal opportunity to compete.

The District purchased $475,224 in goods and services during the period of January 1, 2024, through October 14, 2025, including payments of $239,662 toward a building capital improvement project (capital project).

Audit Summary

District officials did not always use a competitive process to procure goods and services in an economical manner or in accordance with statutory requirements set forth in New York State General Municipal Law (GML) *and the District's procurement policy (Policy) adopted on June 9, 2025*. When District officials do not seek competition or document the methods used, taxpayers have less assurance that the purchase was made in the most prudent and economical manner, in the District's best interest, without favoritism and in compliance with applicable statutes. Specifically, of the 77 purchases totaling $446,884 we reviewed, District officials did not use competitive methods for 68 purchases totaling $403,377. Officials did not:

- *Seek competitive bids for a capital project with an initial total contract cost of $236,812.*[1]
- *Ensure that 62 purchases made before the Policy adoption totaling $131,533 were procured in an economical manner.*
- *Obtain quotes for one purchase totaling $6,464 made after Policy adoption.*
- *Solicit requests for proposals (RFPs) or use any other form of competitive process before procuring professional services from eight providers paid $120,333.*
- ***Periodically review natural gas and electric rates, resulting in the District paying at least $6,817 more for its natural gas and electric supply than it needed to.***

The report includes four recommendations that, if implemented, will improve the District's procurement of goods and services. District officials generally agreed with our recommendations and indicated they plan to initiate corrective action.

FULL REPORT HERE: https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/local-government/audits/2026/pdf/gorham-fire-district-2026-37.pdf

THE FIRE CHIEF'S OFFICE

*****The Flipside of Leadership: Self-Accountability Might Be the Most Important Skill in Today's Firehouse***

Flip Griffin

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Self-accountability is the foundation of a healthy firehouse culture, promoting ownership over actions, standards, and communication.
- Fire service leadership should model ownership by openly admitting mistakes, providing clear expectations, and fostering trust through consistent behaviors.
- Simple tools like expectations checks, personal "ownership audits," and clarifying questions can significantly improve accountability and communication.

This is where we talk about the things that don't always make it into reports, policies, or training manuals. The real conversations, the tension, the leadership moments that happen in the bay and around the kitchen table. The things that actually shape a crew, for better or worse.

There is this equation out there in the high-performance job circles, and it's this: high risk + high performer = high accountability

Just as powerful, there is also a phrase in the fire service that carries weight the second somebody says it.

"WRITTEN IN BLOOD"

That phrase exists because our profession has learned many of its greatest lessons through tragedy. Standard operating guidelines (SOGS), mayday procedures, accountability systems, seatbelt policies, collapse zones, PPE standards, air management, two-in/two-out, and radio discipline were not created because somebody had a great idea during a committee meeting. They were created because firefighters got hurt, trapped, disabled, or killed. *We built systems around those lessons to make sure history did not repeat itself.*

The fire service has become exceptional at operational accountability when the tones drop. We train relentlessly for the fireground. We rehearse chaos. We standardize communication. We create checklists. We assign accountability tags. We build systems that reduce human error because we know high-risk environments demand consistency.

But here is the uncomfortable truth.

Many departments do a far better job managing accountability on the fireground than they do inside the firehouse itself. And that gap is creating some of the profession's biggest cultural problems today: recruitment struggles, retention issues, burnout, toxic leadership, passive-aggressive communication, shift division, gossip culture, entitlement, lack of trust and poor follow-through. ***Leaders exhausted from chasing adults around trying to enforce basic expectations.***

Most of those issues are not born in emergency scenes. They are born during ordinary moments at the kitchen table, in the apparatus bay, or during the 12 hours nobody is watching.

ACCOUNTABILITY IS DESIRED BUT OFTEN IGNORED

That is why I believe self-accountability is the single most important leadership trait in today's fire service. Not accountability as punishment and not accountability as public humiliation. Accountability isn't a leadership buzzword.

Self-accountability is the ability to own your actions, standards, attitude, preparation, communication, and performance before somebody else has to force you to.

That is the trait that changes firehouses. The modern fire service is a high-risk, high-performance profession. That means it must also become a high-accountability profession. *The problem is that many departments accidentally misunderstand what accountability is actually supposed to look like*.

Here is one of my hot takes: If leaders constantly have to "hold people accountable" daily, then the organization probably does not have an accountability culture at all. It has a compliance culture and there is a difference.

Compliance says: "I'll do it because somebody above me said I have to." while accountability says, "I'll do it because it is the standard I hold for myself and my crew."

One relies on supervision. The other relies on ownership.

BUILDING ACCOUNTABILITY, NOT CHASING IT

That is not sustainable leadership. And honestly, I do not believe that *Far too many leaders today spend most of their energy chasing accountability rather than developing it. They are correcting preventable mistakes, repeating themselves over and over, managing avoidable drama, or micromanaging people who should already understand the expectation; eventually, that creates frustrated leaders, defensive firefighters, and exhausted cultures.*

That is not sustainable leadership. And honestly, I do not believe that is how the fire service was ever intended to operate. The irony is firefighters already understand this concept operationally. We know that under stress, humans rarely rise to the occasion. They fall back on their level of training. Former U.S. Marine Corp four-star general James Mattis famously said, "You don't rise to the occasion, you fall back on your training."

That principle applies just as much to culture as it does to tactics. Culture under pressure falls back on habits. If ownership is not practiced daily, it will not magically appear during conflict, tragedy, staffing shortages, or stressful leadership transitions. *If firefighters feel accountable only when someone is being yelled at, then accountability itself becomes associated with negativity rather than professionalism*.

That is where many departments get it wrong. We unintentionally teach firefighters that accountability is something done to them rather than something developed within themselves. That mindset creates defensive organizations. People hide mistakes instead of owning them. They become more concerned with avoiding blame than solving problems. Communication suffers because firefighters stop bringing issues forward early. Leaders become reactive instead of proactive. Eventually, trust begins to erode quietly in the background and trust is everything in this profession.

We literally ask people to trust us with their lives in zero-visibility environments. Yet many organizations struggle to create cultures where people feel safe admitting mistakes, asking questions, or clarifying expectations. That should concern us.

TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILTY

One of the biggest myths in leadership today is that accountability and trust are somehow in opposition. In reality, the exact opposite is true. Accountability actually creates trust when it is done correctly because it removes uncertainty. *People perform better when expectations are clear, standards are consistent, and ownership is normalized across every rank.*

In our workshops, we teach that accountability should be the rule, not the exception, long before discipline ever becomes necessary. Discipline should be the exception, not the daily operating system.

Want another hot take? The majority of accountability in a healthy firehouse should come from self-accountability and peer accountability, not supervisory correction.

The officer should not have to remind grown professionals every shift to care about the station, training, their communication, or their crew. Leaders absolutely have a responsibility to intervene during discipline issues, safety problems, or life-or-death situations. That is part of leadership. ***But if leaders spend all day correcting basic professionalism, then the organization has drifted away from an ownership culture and into a babysitting culture.***

Nobody joins the fire service wanting to be micromanaged. At the same time, most firefighters also do not want chaos, inconsistency, or weak standards. They want fairness. They want competent leadership. They want trust. They want to feel like they are part of something meaningful. The good news is accountability actually helps create all of those things.

FALLOUT OF SHORTCUTS

One of the simplest leadership truths I have learned over the years is that people become what they repeatedly see.

If firefighters watch leaders cut corners, they will eventually accept shortcuts as normal. If they watch leaders gossip, they will normalize gossip. If they watch leaders blame others and trash-talk those above them, they will normalize excuse-making, too.

But if they consistently watch leaders own their mistakes publicly, communicate clearly, follow through on commitments, and hold themselves to the same standards they expect of everyone else, accountability begins to spread culturally without constant enforcement.

Culture spreads through observation long before it spreads through policy. That is why self-accountability has to be demonstrated, not just preached.

One of the things I worry about in the modern fire service is that many organizations are trying to address cultural problems with motivational slogans instead of operational systems. We love systems on emergency scenes because systems create consistency. Yet inside the firehouse, many departments still rely heavily on personalities, traditions, or emotional reactions rather than repeatable leadership processes. That inconsistency creates friction between shifts, stations, and ranks.

The answer is not making the firehouse robotic. It is creating simple leadership systems that consistently reinforce ownership. The same way we use checklists on the fireground, we should be creating cultural systems that make accountability easier to practice daily.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS AT ALL LEVELS

That can look like clear expectations, consistent communication, regular mentoring, simple follow-through systems, after-action discussions without ego, leaders publicly owning mistakes, and crews clarifying expectations instead of assuming understanding.

Self-accountability also includes having the maturity to seek clarity before failure occurs. That matters more now than ever because today's fire service is dealing with multiple generations, changing expectations, staffing shortages, public scrutiny, and rapidly evolving leadership dynamics. Departments cannot afford cultures built purely on fear, silence, or authority anymore. Those systems are collapsing under modern pressure.

The future belongs to firehouses that can combine high standards with high trust. That requires leaders who model ownership first, not performative leadership, not social media leadership, not slogan leadership.

They want real leadership, the kind that quietly takes responsibility when things go wrong. The kind that admits mistakes publicly. The kind that does not ask firefighters to uphold standards the leaders themselves refuse to live by.

So what can you actually do about it?

One of the biggest mistakes we make in leadership development is overcomplicating change. Firefighters are problem solvers by nature, but sometimes we try to solve cultural problems with giant initiatives, endless committees, or fifty-page leadership plans that nobody actually uses after the rollout meeting.

A CULTURE ROOTED IN ACCOUNTABILITY

The truth is accountability culture is usually built through small, repeated behaviors, not massive speeches.
Just like physical fitness, fireground confidence, or muscle memory, self-accountability grows through repetition. *Small actions done consistently over time become habits. Habits become standards. Standards eventually become culture*.
The good news is this can start immediately, regardless of rank. You do not need bugles on your collar to improve accountability in your firehouse, you need intentionality.
The 'ownership audit'
One thing I challenge firefighters at every level to do is conduct a personal "ownership audit" at the end of every shift. Nothing formal or complicated, just five quiet minutes before leaving the station to ask yourself a few honest questions:

- *Did I make this crew better today or harder to lead today?*
- *Did I leave something better than I found it?*
- *Did I avoid a conversation I should have had?*
- *Did I blame others for something I could have owned myself?*
- *Did my attitude help or hurt the station?*

That level of self-reflection sounds simple, but most people never intentionally pause long enough to evaluate themselves honestly. Self-accountability starts with self-awareness. If you never examine your own behaviors, habits, or blind spots, improvement becomes accidental instead of intentional.
Another simple thing firefighter's can do immediately is stop saying "somebody should" and replace it with "I'll take care of it." That one shift in language changes ownership fast:

1. ***"Somebody should clean the whiteboard."***
2. ***"Somebody should update the preplans."***
3. ***"Somebody should organize the EMS closet."***

No, if you see it and it matters, own it. That mindset spreads quickly through a firehouse.
For company officers and leaders, one of the easiest accountability tools you can implement on the next shift is a simple five-minute expectation check at the kitchen table or during lineup, not during a lecture, a policy reading or a punishment session.
To arrive the point of clarity, ask three simple questions:

- What matters most today?
- What could hurt us today if we ignore it?
- What does good look like today?

That is, it! High-performing organizations thrive on clarity. *Most frustration inside firehouses does not come from firefighters refusing to work. It comes from inconsistent expectations, mixed messaging, and assumptions that everybody is on the same page when they are not.*
Another simple implementation tool is what I call "public ownership by leadership."
When leaders make mistakes, own them out loud, such as:

- "I missed that."
- "That communication failure is on me."
- "I should have clarified that better."

That may sound small, but culturally it is massive because it gives everyone else permission to prioritize honesty over ego. One accountable leader can dramatically shift the psychological safety of an entire crew.
Here is another hot take: if firefighters are terrified to admit mistakes in your station, then your culture is quietly becoming dangerous. People who fear embarrassment hide problems. Hidden problems become operational problems. Operational problems eventually become safety problems. That is why self-accountability must become normalized before a crisis ever occurs.
Finally, one of the best team accountability tools any firehouse can implement immediately is this: normalize clarification.
In our workshops, one of the phrases we push hardest is: "Can you clarify that for me?"
That single phrase removes assumptions, reduces resentment, and improves communication almost instantly. ***It also creates maturity within the organization because people stop pretending they understand things they actually do not.***
Good accountability cultures do not assume understanding. They confirm it.

Maybe that is where accountability really begins? Not with punishment, rank or discipline, but with mature professionals who are humble enough to own themselves first.
That's leadership.

THE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

***Where you aware?**

The Law for NYS Fire Districts

Under New York State law (**Article 19-c of the General Municipal Law**), fire districts are legally classified as "municipal corporations". This law mandates strict reporting and training guidelines that directly shape a district's disaster recovery and incident response protocols:

- **Mandatory 72-Hour Incident Reporting:** Fire districts must report any cybersecurity incident or ransom demand to the *New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES)* within **72 hours** of discovery. [1]
- **Ransomware Deadlines:** If a district decides to make an extortion or ransom payment, they must notify DHSES within **24 hours**. A full written explanation detailing the amount, the reasoning, and compliance steps must follow within **30 days**. [1, 2]
- **Annual Cybersecurity Training:** All fire district employees and officials must complete annual cybersecurity awareness training. [1]

Building a Compliant Plan for a Fire District

While you do not need to follow the dense NY Department of Financial Services financial framework, your district's cyber disaster recovery plan should be built around the NYS DHSES Reporting Portal. A resilient local government plan should emphasize:

1. **Low Materiality Thresholds**: Because state law requires reporting any incident without a minimum size threshold, your internal plan must define "incident" broadly enough to catch minor compromises (like a single phished email or a lost device) before the 72-hour window closes.
2. **State Assistance Triggers**: The DHSES is required to provide advice and technical support following an incident. Your recovery plan should include clear steps on how and when to request this state-level emergency assistance.

Cybersecurity Training Requirement (State Technology Law § 103-f)

- Starting January 1, 2026, local government employees who use technology as part of their official job duties must take annual cybersecurity awareness training
- The state will make training available at no cost
- Equivalent cybersecurity awareness training may also be provided by other sources
- Training must take place during compensated regular work hours

Consult with your municipal/fire district insurance provider for the availability of training, AMSURE, ESIP and VFIS all offer cybersecurity on-line training for employees.

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

- Aspiring firefighters ages 14 to 18 participated in Hillsborough County, Florida Fire Rescue's annual two-week summer program from June 8-18 at the Public Safety Operations Complex, where students received hands-on training and learned about careers in the fire service.
  Throughout the program, students took part in a variety of realistic training exercises designed to introduce them to the demands of the profession.
  "(Wednesday's) activities for the students are the 75-foot ladder climb, the rappelling and lowering

drill, and they're going to finish off with a vehicle extrication," said Norman Brown, the cadet program administrator. "We partner with one of our local tow companies and they will donate these vehicles to us."

FIRE SERVICE CHALLENGES

- The Buffalo Fire Department has suspended the routine practice of allowing lower-ranking officers to temporarily fill higher-ranking command positions, according to WGRZ.
  Fire Commissioner Daniel Pizarro issued the order May 29, ending a longstanding practice dating to the 1980s in which captains and other officers could "act out of title" when staffing shortages occurred. Pizarro said officers should serve in positions for which they have been trained and promoted.
  The commissioner noted that acting assignments were identified as a contributing factor in reviews of several critical incidents, including the 2023 fire that killed Buffalo firefighter Jason Arno. He emphasized that the practice itself did not cause those incidents but was cited in investigations.
  Under the new policy, higher-ranking officers will be used to fill vacancies whenever possible, with temporary acting assignments reserved for limited circumstances. WGRZ reported that the firefighters union supports the change.

- Easton, Pennsylvania officials are evaluating changes to fire staffing, inspections and emergency response procedures following the release of a federal report examining a Hotel Hampton fire earlier this year.
  The Feb. 20 blaze destroyed the 462 Northampton St. rooming house that was home to more than 40 residents. All occupants escaped, but a Wilson Borough firefighter suffered serious injuries, including a broken back and ankle.
  During a city council committee meeting Tuesday, officials and council members discussed staffing shortages, inspection practices and several recommendations outlined in a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) report. Fire Chief Henry Hennings said the city would likely need three full-time fire inspectors, with responsibilities divided among different areas of the city, in order to perform more frequent inspections of high-risk buildings.
  Dwayne Tillman, the city's director of planning and codes, said Easton doesn't have a dedicated, fully certified fire inspector performing those inspections citywide. Tillman reported that officials identified approximately 730 high-risk buildings citywide, including commercial, mixed-use and rental properties. Of those buildings, 133 have fire pre-plans and 129 have received rental inspections, leaving nearly 500 properties to be prioritized for future inspections. Chief Hennings said Easton is preparing to begin a regionalization study funded through a 2025 grant that will examine potential consolidation with Wilson Borough. He said a long-term vision could involve a countywide fire and EMS system that would distribute costs across a larger population base.

- A fire at a cold-storage warehouse in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles CA., has been knocked down after ***eight days***, fire officials said Wednesday, June 24. However, debris inside the approximately 500,000 square-foot Lineage Logistics facility will continue to smolder as firefighters transition to an overhaul phase. Firefighters will continue watering the structure to extinguish any remaining flames, fire officials said. Earlier this week, Lineage Logistics, the tenant-operator of the building, said in a statement that it believes the fire began on the roof when Altus Power was conducting tests on solar panels. **[SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT IN THOSE JURISDICTIONS THAT HAVE MEGA BUILDINGS/WAREHOURSES]**

SATISTICS FOR THE FIRE SERVICE

FIREFIGHTER HEALTH AND SAFETY – PROTECTING OUR OWN

FIREFIGHTER FATALITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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

- A Troup County, Georgia fire truck rolled over on State Route 1 on Wednesday morning, blocking traffic and causing minor injuries to the driver and passenger. The driver failed to maintain the lane, causing the fire engine to travel onto the west shoulder of the road. The driver then overcorrected the steering while attempting to return to the roadway. The sudden maneuver caused the fire engine to rotate counterclockwise and overturn directly into the middle of the highway lanes.
- Several Atlanta firefighters have been transported after a driver hit their truck as they were responding to a call. The motorist who hit the fire apparatus has been cited.
- Two firefighters were injured when the fire truck they were in wrecked and overturned north of Kernersville, NC on Tuesday morning, and a bystander nearby was injured by a part that flew off the truck, according to the N.C. State Highway Patrol. The fire truck was heading to a call with lights and siren when it ran off the right side of the road in a curve near Warren Road. The driver overcorrected, and the truck overturned onto the left side of the road. When the truck wrecked, its windshield came off and hit a man who was weeding in his yard.

Firefighter Maydays, Serious Injuries and Deaths

- One person was killed and four others were injured following an explosion and fire at a Miami-Dade Fire Rescue logistics facility. The facility used to fuel Miami-Dade Fire Rescue vehicles and do maintenance. From what we see, it may have been a gasoline cell that's underground.

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	44
6/25/26 Syracuse, Onondaga Co., 1 deceased under investigation	
Fire Deaths in any type of Dwelling in NYS	93
Fire Deaths in 1&2 Family Dwellings Nationally	605
Top 3 States with the greatest 1&2 Family Deaths	#1 PA 51
	#2 NY 44
	#3 OH 38
Civilian home fire fatalities in 2026: 981 = 37.7 weekly	
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.

RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT

"Too Much" Training Is Not a Barrier to Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

Joe Maruca, Brittany Hollerbach, Ken Willette

WE HEAR IT at all volunteer fire and EMS service gatherings: "We can't recruit new volunteers because there is too much training." We have plenty of anecdotal evidence suggesting that extensive training hinders volunteer recruitment and retention. But is too much training really the problem? A new study reveals that no, it's not. The problem isn't the amount of training. ***The problem is the topics we are training on and the delivery method.***

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Research Foundation, the North American Fire Training Directors (NAFTD), and the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) recently completed a comprehensive study called *Understanding the Role of Training in Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention.* The project was funded by a grant from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG), Fire Prevention & Safety (FP&S).

The Findings

Here's what the study revealed:

- State training academies are underutilized by small departments. (*partly because it's in the middle nowhere*)
- Training is fundamental and critical to the volunteers' roles and the resources of the fire department.
- *Training must be flexible to fit into volunteer life/work schedules*.
- ***Training must be modular to allow departments to focus on the topics most relevant to them****. (which it is not)*
- Training must be hands-on and immersive.
- *When possible, training must be delivered locally. Skilled instructors are essential*.

If the volunteer fire service follows these principles, then training won't be the significant barrier to recruitment and retention that many think it is.

The study is the most in-depth and comprehensive look at training needs in the volunteer fire service to date. *While it has data on a wide range of community sizes, it focuses on fire departments serving communities with populations under 2,500*. Fire departments serving towns under 2,500 people represent about 45% of all fire departments in the United States. Until now, little data has been collected on these departments and the volunteer firefighters who support them.

The study used a variety of methods to gather data. The researchers conducted a literature review of peer-reviewed articles, reports, trade journals, and NFPA training standards. They also held regional focus groups and conducted interviews with volunteer firefighters and leaders from around the United States. However, the most compelling element of the study was the data collected through a national survey of volunteers.

The national survey gathered 2,053 responses from across the United States. Of the responses, 32% came from departments serving communities of 2,500 or fewer residents.

KEY FINDINGS

Perceptions of training as a barrier to recruitment and retention varied by role.

Chiefs and officers were more likely to identify training as a barrier, whereas firefighters were more likely to report that training was not a barrier or that they were unsure. This suggests that leaders are more attuned to the operational or administrative challenges associated with training requirements.

Training must be relevant and modular.

Time management is critical for today's volunteer firefighters. If people think their time is being wasted, they won't volunteer. *This means that the fire service needs to break training into focused modules so that each department can select the modules relevant to its resources and the risks it faces*. ***For instance, a community without an aerial ladder truck would not train new recruits on aerial ladder trucks, just as an urban department that has 100% hydrant coverage can skip tanker/tender operations training.***

This approach allows departments to focus on essential topics, reducing the time and resources needed to safely deploy new volunteer firefighters. As training becomes longer and incorporates more nonessential topics, it may create barriers to recruitment and retention.

Immersive and hands-on training is key.

We need to move out of the classroom as much as possible. A consistent message from the data is that firefighters value hands-on and scenario-based training. It's engaging and should be designed to reflect the

situations they deal with. Immersive training—the use of two or more senses at once—doesn't necessarily mean you need high-tech, augmented reality goggles. *It can mean you have firefighters discussing video-based fireground scenarios in a group setting.*

A consistent message from the data is that firefighters' value hands-on and scenario-based training. It's engaging and should be designed to reflect the situations they deal with.

Local delivery is important.

A long trip to get to training can be a strong disincentive for volunteers. In many areas, volunteers must drive hours to attend training sessions. *Bringing training to local or nearby fire stations presents an opportunity that state training institutions should prioritize*.

Skilled instructors should lead local training.

A skilled instructor is someone local who is knowledgeable in the subject matter and able to create an engaging learning environment. *This does not necessarily mean a formally certified instructor, if participants did not identify certification as a priority.*

This study doesn't answer every question about fire training and how it impacts recruitment and retention for volunteer firefighters. But it does, for the first time, give us comprehensive data and clear direction. The challenge for us in the volunteer fire service is to become advocates for what the study and the data have taught us.

FIRE APPARATUS

Keeping Up with Rapidly Changing Fire Apparatus Technology

Michael Huber

While these advancements have improved safety, efficiency, and performance on the fireground, they have also placed extraordinary demands on fire apparatus repair facilities.

For fleet managers, technicians, and shop supervisors, the challenge is no longer just "fixing trucks." The challenge is keeping pace with technology that changes faster than traditional training cycles, budget planning, and staffing models were ever designed to support.

FROM WRENCHES TO LAPTOPS

Modern fire apparatus rely heavily on electronic control systems. Multiplexed electrical systems, CAN bus networks, pump controllers, and chassis-mounted diagnostics are now standard. A single fault can increase problems across multiple systems, producing warning lights that appear unrelated to the original issue.

In my world, we had a front-line engine that began intermittently losing cab power during responses. Operators reported radio resets, flickering dash displays, and a pump controller issue. Initial suspicion centered on the alternator and batteries. However, after several hours of diagnostics, technicians traced the issue to a single corroded ground in the multiplex system. *That one bad connection disrupted multiple systems, giving the impression of far more serious failures. Always double and triple check your grounds was the lesson learned, the hard way.*

In a purely mechanical time, this issue might never have existed. In today's world, it required electrical knowledge, diagnostic software, and the ability to interpret multiplex logic—not just turning wrenches.

THE TRAINING GAP IN ACTION

One of the most significant challenges facing fire shops is the widening gap between advancing technology and available training. Apparatus manufacturers continue to innovate, but training opportunities are often limited by cost, staffing, and availability.

A few years back, we placed a series of new pumpers in service equipped with an advanced pump control module and electronic pressure governor. Within months, operators reported erratic pressure readings. The shop lacked formal training on that specific system and relied on vendor support. Each incident required scheduling an outside technician, resulting in repeated out-of-service periods.

Eventually, the department invested in manufacturer training for technicians through an agreement with the apparatus manufacturer. Within weeks of completing the course, the same issues were diagnosed and resolved internally—cutting downtime dramatically and reducing vendor costs over the following year.

This is one example of the hard truth: Training is expensive, but not training often is much more expensive.

DIAGNOSTICS OVER PARTS SWAPPING

Rapidly changing technology has made trial-and-error repairs both inefficient and risky. Modern components are expensive, back orders are common, and replacing parts without addressing root causes often leads to repeat failures.

An engine experienced repeated diesel particulate filter (DPF) regeneration failure. Over several months, sensors were replaced, software updates were applied, and downtime continued. Finally, a comprehensive diagnostic review revealed excessive idle time combined with short response distances that never allowed full regeneration cycles.

The fix was not a part—it was an operational change paired with updated regeneration procedures and operator training. Once implemented, the problem disappeared.

It is abundantly important for units to achieve highway speed for a period of time to allow the engine to properly regenerate, if it is needed. The engine will identify when a regen is needed.

MANAGING VENDOR DEPENDENCE

As apparatus become more complex, reliance on vendors is inevitable. Chassis manufacturers, body builders, and component suppliers all play critical roles. However, excessive dependence can create bottlenecks and erode in-house expertise, not to mention increase downtime.

We had an engine involved in a collision. The engine was sent out for frame and suspension evaluation. The repair vendor recommended extensive component replacement at a very high price. Personnel familiar with the vehicle's maintenance history and telematics data questioned the scope and requested additional measurements and documentation.

That joint examination resulted in a more targeted repair plan—saving both time and money while maintaining safety and compliance. Remember: The name of the game is to keep rigs on the road. The rigs do no one any good sitting in a repair shop.

TELEMATICS AND PREDICTIVE MAINTENANCE IN PRACTICE

Telematics systems now provide data on engine hours, pump usage, fault codes, and driving behavior. When integrated into maintenance planning, this information can dramatically improve fleet reliability.

A nearby department noticed recurring transmission faults across multiple units of the same model. Telematics data revealed a pattern: aggressive acceleration combined with frequent short-distance responses. Using this data, the shop worked with training staff to address driving habits and adjusted preventive maintenance intervals. The result was a measurable reduction in transmission-related repairs over the next 12 months.

DOCUMENTATION AS A PROTECTIVE TOOL

As technology increases, so does the importance of documentation. Accurate records support compliance with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1910, *Standard for the Inspection, Maintenance, Refurbishment, Testing, and Retirement of In-Service Emergency Vehicles and Marine Firefighting Vessels*, protect the department from liability, and preserve institutional knowledge. As a technician, one of the best self-preservation tools is documentation. Without documentation, it becomes a back-and-forth blame game. ***It has been proven many times that courts rely heavily on proper documentation when determining fault.***

PREPARING FOR WHAT'S NEXT

Electric and hybrid fire apparatus are beginning to enter service. These units introduce high-voltage systems, battery management software, and new safety hazards for maintenance personnel.

We were recently tasked with exploring the potential to go to electric apparatus. We were fortunate enough to be involved in a manufacturer focus group on the introduction of electric units into the fire service. What we found was that our infrastructure was not sufficient in both the stations and the maintenance facility to provide charging on the units. The cost to upgrade was prohibitive to move forward with purchasing.

If we had waited until the apparatus was ordered, it would have resulted in catastrophic systemic failure and not being able to use the unit. ***Just because it's new and cutting edge does not mean it is the best for the department.***

Other technologies on the horizon for fire apparatus that will mimic current auto technology are front collision warning (FCW), automatic emergency braking (AEB), and side collision through blind spot monitoring (BSM)

systems as well as 360-degree camera systems. These systems are all great and provide a level of safety; however, they do add complex sensors to already complex apparatus.

EMBRACING THE MODERN SHOP

Keeping up with rapidly changing apparatus technology is not about chasing every innovation, although that is the nature of firefighters. It is about building a culture of adaptability, continuous training, and professional curiosity within the repair shop.

The modern fire apparatus shop is no longer just a support function—it is a critical component of operational readiness and firefighter safety. Jurisdictions that invest in training, diagnostics, data analysis, and documentation position themselves to succeed in an increasingly complex environment.

Technology will continue to evolve. Where it is going is totally unpredictable. My question to everyone is, how will AI be integrated into fire apparatus? I am confident it is coming. The shops that evolve and change with it will keep fleets reliable, responders safe, and communities protected. Those that do not will be on a course for challenging times.

GREEN ENERGY AND THE IMPACT ON THE FIRE SERVICE

Four Teslas Catch Fire at MD Dealership

Liz Carey

Four Teslas caught fire at the dealership in Owings Mills on Wednesday afternoon, prompting a response from Baltimore County Fire's hazmat team.

According to fire department spokesperson Cynthia Gee Scott, one Tesla had been brought to the dealership on Wednesday with "some sort of issue," and caught fire around 4:45 p.m. The fire quickly spread to three other cars nearby, Scott said.

Fire officials arrived on scene and extinguished the fire before 6 p.m., Scott said, but remained on scene after to ensure that the cars had cooled down and wouldn't reignite. The fire department's hazmat team, as well as the Maryland Department of the Environment, also responded to the scene, and found that there was no hazardous material from the fire that could pose a threat to the public.

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

Gansevoort Fire Department Car Show

Saturday August 8th, 10am until 2pm, rain date August 9th
1870 Route 32 Gansevoort, NY
Chick BBQ, Raffles, T-Shirt sale, Trophies in several categories
Registration $15, Day of Show $20

Gansevoort Fire Department Breakfast

See you in the fall, September 20th to be exact.

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

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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

School District Partnerships Are an Untapped Tool for Community Risk Reduction Efforts

Jessica Curran

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Building strong relationships between fire departments and school district contacts can open doors for ongoing fire and life safety education beyond annual classroom visits.
- Integrating fire safety topics into school programs can support educational goals and reinforce prevention messages effectively.
- *Fire safety educators can involve students in creating safety messages and projects that extend outreach to families and social networks, increasing community impact.*

For many fire departments, school visits are a familiar part of fire and life safety education. Firefighters arrive in turnout gear, talk about smoke alarms and fire escape plans, answer a few questions, and head back to the station. *While these visits are valuable, limiting school engagement to a single annual presentation can cause departments to overlook one of the most powerful and accessible community risk reduction (CRR) tools available to them: strong partnerships with school districts.*

At the same time, getting into schools can sometimes feel like a feat in itself. Teachers and administrators manage full schedules and competing priorities, which can make adding new programs challenging. Building strong relationships and demonstrating how fire and life safety education can support the goals of the school can make a significant difference. Having trusted points of contact within the district, such as school safety liaisons, communications staff, or public information officers, can help open doors, build trust, and create meaningful connections that extend far beyond a single classroom visit.

Departments that invest time in building relationships within school districts often discover that educators and administrators are some of the strongest allies in expanding community safety efforts.

OUTREACH BEYOND CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM

School districts extend far beyond individual classrooms. They connect students, families, educators, and neighborhoods in ways that allow safety messages to travel throughout the community. When fire departments build meaningful partnerships with school districts, prevention efforts can reach households, influence families, and strengthen safety culture across entire communities.

Maximizing this impact often requires very little additional cost. It simply requires a shift in perspective. When school engagement is viewed not as a single annual presentation but as an ongoing partnership, fire departments can move beyond traditional education and begin integrating prevention strategies that directly support their CRR goals.

Strengthening these partnerships also means looking for opportunities where fire and life safety education can support the work schools are already doing. Teachers operate within structured curriculum requirements, and many safety topics align naturally with those learning objectives. *Discussions about historic fires can support social studies lessons that explore how tragedies led to modern fire codes and safety practices. The science of fire can connect to classroom concepts in chemistry or physics. When safety education reinforces curriculum rather than competing with it, it becomes a resource that supports educators' goals instead of adding to their workload.*

In this way, school districts become more than an audience for safety messages. They become active partners in identifying risks, shaping prevention efforts, and strengthening a community's overall safety culture. When these partnerships function as a true two-way street, everyone benefits. Fire departments gain valuable insight into community needs, while schools receive trusted support, safety resources, and programs that help protect their students, staff, and families.

INVOLVING STUDENTS TO EXPAND YOUR AUDIENCE

Students today engage with information differently than previous generations. While traditional presentations still play an important role, students often respond more strongly when they are actively involved in the learning process. School districts can become active partners in community safety through student-driven safety projects.

Students can participate in creating short public safety announcements related to fire and life safety in their community. Keeping the guidelines simple helps encourage creativity while reinforcing key safety messages. Ask students to include a clear target audience, a safety fact, and a call to action.

Schools can work with departments to determine a prize for the project, or fire departments can partner with local businesses to sponsor incentives that encourage participation.

These projects allow safety messages to travel beyond the classroom, reaching families and social networks that fire departments may not otherwise reach directly.

By researching the topic and producing their own safety messaging, students become participants in the learning process rather than passive listeners. Peer-driven messaging also supports CRR efforts by allowing safety information to reach audiences firefighters may not otherwise interact with directly.

When students help create the message, they are more likely to remember it and share it.

EXPANDING EDUCATION BEYOND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Fire safety education frequently focuses on elementary and preschool students. While those age groups remain important, safety education should not stop there. Departments often find that the academic demands placed on middle and high school students leave little room for additional programming.

Strong relationships with school districts and administrators often reveal opportunities where safety education can support classroom objectives while still meeting the needs of the school. In some communities, state or district safety benchmarks create natural opportunities for collaboration between fire departments and educators.

Older students frequently find themselves making decisions during emergencies, whether assisting younger siblings, preparing meals, or recognizing when someone needs help.

Conversations with middle and high school students often include topics such as when to call 9-1-1, how to clearly describe an emergency to a dispatcher, and the importance of remaining calm while answering questions. Additional discussions may include kitchen safety, lithium-ion battery hazards, and basic CPR awareness.

These interactions also provide an opportunity to introduce students to careers in public safety while demonstrating the broader role firefighters and paramedics play within their communities.

INCLUSIVE FIRE SAFETY EDUCATION

Effective fire and life safety education should reach every member of the community, including students with different learning styles and abilities. For many fire educators, there can be some initial hesitation about how to approach special education classrooms. Concerns about whether safety lessons will be appropriate or meaningful can create uncertainty.

In practice, that uncertainty often fades quickly once departments begin working alongside special education teachers and school staff. What may begin with hesitation frequently becomes one of the most rewarding and valuable partnerships a department can develop.

Educators in special education classrooms bring invaluable insight into how students learn, communicate, and process information. Partnering with these educators allows fire departments to deliver meaningful safety education while also gaining a deeper understanding of how to communicate more effectively with some of the most vulnerable members of their community.

Teachers often help adapt safety lessons for life skills classrooms using visual guides, structured worksheets, and simple emergency scripts. Social stories and guided practice scenarios reinforce important concepts such as what to do during a fire drill, or when to call 9-1-1 and what information to provide to a dispatcher.

Practicing these skills ahead of time builds confidence and helps ensure students feel more prepared if they ever face an emergency. For many students, particularly those who are medically complex, interactions with fire and EMS personnel may occur outside of the classroom during times of stress or crisis. *Building familiarity with firefighters and emergency responders in a supportive learning environment can help reduce fear and make those real-world encounters less overwhelming.*

These partnerships also help fire departments better understand how to support safety education across a person's lifespan. Many students in special education programs continue to rely on structured support systems into adulthood. Early engagement helps ensure that fire and life safety education reach individuals who may remain part of vulnerable populations throughout their lives.

An unexpected benefit of these partnerships is the trust that develops along the way. When schools observe the patience, effort, and support firefighters bring to special education classrooms, relationships strengthen across the entire school community and opportunities for deeper collaboration emerge.

School districts also serve as a valuable bridge between fire departments and the diverse communities they protect. In many areas, schools represent one of the first places where families from different cultural backgrounds interact with local institutions. Through these partnerships, fire departments gain a clearer understanding of the languages spoken in their community and how different cultures view safety practices and emergency services.

Schools provide environments where families feel comfortable asking questions and engaging with firefighters. These interactions offer insight into how safety messages should be shared, whether that involves adapting materials for different languages or recognizing cultural traditions that influence safety behaviors. In some communities, these conversations highlight celebrations or traditions involving fire, fireworks, or cooking practices that carry additional risks, allowing departments to approach safety education in ways that respect culture while promoting safer practices.

FIREFIGHTERS AS MENTORS

School district partnerships also allow firefighters to serve as mentors and positive role models.

When firefighters spend time in classrooms, answer questions, and interact with students, relationships develop that extend far beyond a single presentation. Activities such as reading programs, classroom visits, after-school programs, and school events provide opportunities for firefighters to connect with students in relaxed settings while reinforcing the message that safety and community service go hand in hand. Students begin to view firefighters not only as emergency responders, but also as trusted members of their community.

USING COMMUNITY RISK DATA TO GUIDE EDUCATION

As partnerships with school districts grow stronger, those relationships often expand into deeper collaboration. Schools can become active partners in understanding and addressing community risk. Effective CRR begins with understanding the specific risks within a community, and schools provide valuable opportunities to translate that information into meaningful prevention efforts.

Community Risk Assessments and well-developed CRR plans help departments identify trends, understand hazards, and prioritize prevention strategies. Schools offer a natural environment for turning community risk data into real-world learning opportunities. School districts may also collect valuable information, such as languages spoken and other demographic insights, that can strengthen CRR assessments and planning efforts. When fire departments and school districts share information and perspectives, both gain a clearer understanding of the community and how to better serve it.

Instead of presenting fire safety in general terms, departments can tailor education to address hazards that affect their specific community. In some areas, this may involve emphasizing cooking safety. In others, it may include lithium-ion battery safety, fall prevention for families caring for older relatives, or the importance of calling 9-1-1 early during medical emergencies.

High school classes focused on media, technology, or public safety topics can analyze community risk data. Students review information such as incident types, seasonal patterns, and the calls firefighters respond to most frequently while also examining factors such as community demographics, local economics, building stock, businesses, and how geography can influence safety across their community.

USING THE FIVE E'S

From there, discussions explore what risks students believe affect their community and how those risks could be addressed through plans that tap into the five E’s of CRR: Education, Enforcement, Economic Incentive, Engineering, and Emergency Response.

Student conclusions do not always match those of fire departments, but these differences often create valuable opportunities for discussion. When assumptions differ from the data, conversations naturally shift toward the gap between perceived risk and actual risk. These moments demonstrate the importance of including stakeholder voices in risk conversations and help departments better understand how community members perceive risk and where knowledge gaps may exist.

For example, students sometimes assume structure fires represent the most common emergency response. In reality, data in many communities shows that falls or cooking related incidents make up a much larger portion of calls. These discussions highlight the difference between dramatic but rare events and the everyday hazards responsible for most injuries.

When students analyze information about their own community, the issue becomes personal. The risks are no longer hypothetical. They occur in neighborhoods they recognize and homes similar to their own.

A LOW-COST, HIGH-IMPACT CRR STRATEGY

Community risk reduction is most effective when it becomes part of the culture of an entire community. Fire departments cannot accomplish this alone, and school districts represent one of the most effective partnerships for extending prevention efforts beyond the firehouse.

Departments frequently face challenges when organizing smoke alarm drives, community safety events, or large-scale outreach programs. Limited personnel and time often restrict the number of homes that can be reached.

School district partnerships help address that challenge in creative ways. Many middle and high school students complete community service hours, and safety initiatives provide meaningful opportunities for them to give back to their community. Students assist with community events, organize materials for smoke alarm installation programs, support outreach campaigns, and help distribute safety messaging.

These partnerships expand the reach of prevention programs that directly address risks identified through a department's community risk assessment.

Involvement in these efforts not only strengthens prevention programs but also helps students develop a deeper understanding of community responsibility and public safety.

By working alongside educators, students, and school leadership, fire departments can create networks of safety awareness that reach families, neighborhoods, and future generations. When students understand risk, share safety messages at home, and view firefighters as partners in their community, the impact of prevention grows exponentially.

School districts may not be the only solution for CRR, but they remain one of the most powerful and often overlooked partners in building safer, more informed communities. When fire departments and schools work together, prevention becomes part of the community itself.

TAKE A MOMENT TO SMILE

Knowledge is knowing a tomato is fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad!

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.

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 in!
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.

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..

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This is a service of CAFDA through the effort of Tom Rinaldi who can be reached at tom@rinaldi1.com for comments and content contributions are always welcome.


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