

COMMONWEALTH

The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, Inc. - October 2025

Chief

VFCA CONTINUES TO BUILD TEAMS **NEW CHAPLAINS SECTION ADDED**



**FIRST THREE PIECES OF EQUIPMENT CONNECTED TO THE SURPLUS
EQUIPMENT PROGRAM HAVE BEEN TRANSFERRED**

'25 VCOA & VFOA HELD AT U OF R

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- CITY OF SUFFOLK • PIERCE ENFORCER PUMPER • Sold by Michael Yancey



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COMMONWEALTH

The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, Inc. - October 2025

Chief

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VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

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Commonwealth Chief is published quarterly for the members of the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (VFCA). Comments about the articles should be sent to the editor. Statements and opinions expressed by paid advertisements do not necessarily reflect those of the Commonwealth Chief or VFCA. Publication of advertisements does not imply endorsements by VFCA of the products or statements. The Association reserves the right to accept, reject or edit articles and to place advertising where layout space is available. Commonwealth Chief is published in January, April, July and October. Deadline for articles, ads, graphics and other information for publication is on the 1st day of the previous month. Submit high-resolution text and graphics to the VFCA by email to editor@vfca.us. For information call (888) 818-0983.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Kevin Good
2025 VFCA President
Ft. Belvoir Fire Department

We are quickly putting summer months in our rear view and focusing on our fall opportunities to come together and connect the dots through your VFCA.

Congratulations to all Virginia Chief Officer Academy and Virginia Fire Officer Academy graduates who recently walked across the beautiful stage at the University of Richmond. A week away from your family, your firehouses, and day-to-day responsibilities is challenging but you all excelled. Be Proud. These graduations mark another great accomplishment that advances your leadership techniques, personal accountability, and validates your personal commitment to fostering the cultural changes required for continuous improvement within fire and emergency services.

It is my pleasure to share with you a few of the key activities over the last quarter that keep our focus on being the trusted voice of Virginia's Fire & Emergency Services. Attending the PTSD Awareness Proclamation signing by Governor Youngkin was an honorable recognition but ultimately it was a venue that brought together leaders from various agencies together with one interest- "Taking Care of People." This opportunity to meet with non-profit organizations, law enforcement, medical professionals, fire & EMS leaders, 9-1-1 operators, and governmental officials was meaningful and purposeful by getting all the right people in the room. Mental health is not a deficit, not a stigma, not something we will ignore and overlook. We don't fight fires alone and we don't want anyone to fight these mental health fires alone. Be an advocate for yourself and others.... see something, say something goes for our brothers and sisters too.

Executive Director Eudailey, 1st VP Duck, Executive Board Member VP Fox, and I attended the Virginia Fire Services Council's Stakeholder Summit in August, where we met with eleven major Fire and EMS Stakeholder organizations from across the Commonwealth of Virginia to discuss specific legislative needs and identify the key issues concerning all organizations. The consensus of the eleven major Virginia fire and EMS Stakeholder organizations will be published in a booklet in October with our collective priorities for 2025. I ask each of you to review the booklet when released and promote these with your local constituents to ensure they fully understand the impact on your locality, your organization, and you as a public safety servant.

Immediate Past President Cooper and I met with the new Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Marcus R. Anderson and Deputy Secretary of PSHS Sonny Daniels concerning the ongoing needs of Virginia's Fire Service and our legislative initiatives. Progress continues from the Secretary's office to support and advocate for Virginia's public safety teams, and it was very clear that the Governor's commitment to us has not changed.

The VFCA surplus equipment program is actively connecting localities with serviceable life apparatus and equipment—Shout out to these localities who have recently been able to support other communities!

- King George Fire & Rescue provided an Engine to Stickelyville VFD in Lee County

- Fredericksburg Fire Department provided an Engine to the Town of Wise in Southwest Virginia
- Rockbridge County Fire & Rescue provided an Ambulance to the Clintwood Volunteer Rescue Squad in Dickerson County

There are so many people in the VFCA and across Virginia that I would like to thank publicly but I would like to bring specific attention to the Women of Fire & EMS Section's President Laura Arrington, Treasurer Diana Foley, and the team of teams that has supported them in their goal to host the 1st Annual VFCA Women of Fire & EMS Professional Development Conference. The Section's goal to directly support their members is becoming a reality and their leadership, dedication, and selfless service is what made this opportunity for all of Virginia - each of you are appreciated.

LET'S GO VIRGINIA!

Which VFCA event will you take advantage of before the year ends? We are working hard to provide you the opportunities you are seeking to lead, educate, and serve!

- VFCA's 1st Annual Women of Fire & EMS Section's Professional Development Conference in Martinsville-September 26-28th
- 11th Annual James City County Golf Tournament-October 3rd
- Administrative Professionals Retreat in Stafford-October 9-10th
- FED/MIL Summit in Williamsburg-October 31st
- VFCA Virtual Membership Meeting-November 7th
- Company Officer Section Summit-Albermarle-November 13-14th
- Community Risk Reduction / Life Safety Section Summit-Spotsylvania-November 14th

I hope to see as many of you as possible over these next few months. If you would like me or a member of your VFCA board to come to your Department, Community, or Region, please do not hesitate to let me know. Finally, the entire Board of Directors will come together for our annual retreat in October and if you have a suggestion that you would like submitted for discussion in our strategic planning season, please let me know at kevin.n.good.civ@army.mil.

"Connect the Dots" with me and this great organization.

Never forget to Celebrate the Wins and Smile!

FIRST THREE PIECES OF EQUIPMENT CONNECTED TO THE SURPLUS EQUIPMENT PROGRAM HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED



The first piece of equipment connected to the Surplus Equipment Program has been transferred and is in its new home with Stickleyville VFD in Duffield VA.



Just days later, members of the Fredericksburg Fire Department met members of the Wise Fire Department in Lexington, VA to donate a 2005 Pierce Engine to assist operations in Wise.

Big shout out to Fairview Beach VFD and King George Fire and Rescue for their generosity! This connection was made through the VFCA vehicle donation request and the City of Fredericksburg was honored to assist our fire department family members in Southwest Virginia

Big shout out to Fairview Beach VFD and King George Fire and Rescue for their generosity!

The VFCA in cooperation with the VSFA has undertaken a program to connect small rural fire departments with extremely limited funding to Fire Departments who are strongly resourced and supported by a more robust fiscal structure to share serviceable emergency vehicles and related equipment. Many small rural departments are operating on budgets that most larger departments could not imagine. The goal of this program is to allow Fire Departments in Virginia to help each other. While it would be easy to turn the page and say "that's not my problem" or "why doesn't the state provide more funding" or "they should just fundraise more", the Departments that we are talking about supporting are doing everything they can to literally just keep the lights on and do not have a population base capable of giving more than they already are. These organizations are trying to provide service in ambulances and fire apparatus from the 1980's. Think about that. It is in that spirit we request organizations that are getting ready to retire apparatus from service to consider supporting these organizations. Under typical circumstances, surplus apparatus might be sold on the open market for scrap metal, bringing an extremely small return to the jurisdiction.

Here is the ask: if you have a serviceable piece of fire equipment or ambulance that is available for donation, please consider contacting the Executive Director of the VFCA Chris Eudailey who will facilitate the donation to a worthy organization. Chris can be reached via email at: ceudailey@vfca.us or via cell phone at 540-809-9397. Please leave a message if you get his VM.

Here is a list of our current needs:

- Two (2) Ambulances for Volunteer Rescue Squads in Virginia
- One (1) Tankers / Engine Tanker with a tank capacity of 1500-3000 gallons
- One (1) Mini Pump / Engine
- One (1) Command Vehicle (Chief's Vehicle)

Again, the vehicles considered for donation should be capable of providing front-line service now. As they are going to rural communities the demands placed upon them may be far less than your jurisdiction, which could extend their life by many years.

Items Available to Departments below on a first come first serve basis

We also have some turnout gear of various sizes that is 10 years old but in great shape - the POC for this gear is DC Adam Jones and he can be reached at - a.jones@manassasparkva.gov

In addition, we have 4250 feet of 2.5 inch hose that is being replaced - if a department is interested in this hose the POC is Battalion Chief Fletcher Fulgram - ffulgham@vbgov.com

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request and for helping fellow responders in Virginia. If you have any questions about the program, feel free to contact Chris.

The first donation of an EMS unit

On July 31, 2025, members of the Clintwood Volunteer Rescue Squad in Dickenson County picked up the 2004 Ford ambulance donated by Rockbridge County Fire-Rescue through the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association Surplus Equipment Program.

Attached a photo of Nathan Mullins from the Squad and Deputy Chief Brad Zollman at the time of the transfer.

Thank you for your efforts in bringing our organizations together.



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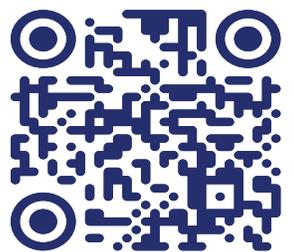
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Request A Demo



VIRGINIA CHIEF OFFICER ACADEMY

2025



June 27th, 2025 was a special day in the lives of 30 Chief Officers and perspective Chief Officers from all over the Commonwealth as they became the newest graduates of the Virginia Chief Officer Academy. They joined an elite club that has just over 250 graduates of this program since its inception in 2016.

The Virginia Chief Officer Academy accepts students from all corners and backgrounds to include volunteer and career Chief Officers from departments serving rural and suburban settings, cities and federal installations. The curriculum design of the Virginia Chief Officer Academy is to take the knowledge these current and perspective Chiefs have and enhance it to fully prepare them for the job both on and off the fireground. There is a diverse array of speakers that are brought in to accomplish this goal. These speakers come from all walks of life in public service to include current and former Chief Officers, City Managers and a Chief of Staff for two Governors.

The Class of 2025 was a special group that was chosen from one of our largest applicant pools in recent memory. These graduates are shown in the spreadsheet in the next column.

The VCOA is a week-long residential leadership course sponsored by the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association and held on the campus of the University of Richmond. It's a week packed full of lectures, practical exercises, networking, fitness, and team building. The students have the honor of gaining insight from some of the fire service's most influential professionals into their leadership challenges and personal rise as public safety leaders.

2025 VCOA Instructional Staff

Why People Disagree, The Process of Ethical Decision Making – Assistant Chief Travis Preau (Loudon County)

Building a Comprehensive Mental Health Program – Chris Platania, Suzanne Herndon, Meade Whitaker (Albemarle County)

Followership in Leadership, The Hidden Skill Set – Deputy Chief Amy Valdez (Virginia Beach)

Thinking Beyond the Horizon: Data Informed Decisions in Emergency Services – Deputy Chief Amy Valdez (Virginia Beach)

Planning and Process Improvement: Getting the Most Out of Your Resources – Deputy Chief Amy Valdez (Virginia Beach)

21st Century Leadership – Deputy Chief Tim McKay (Chesterfield)

How to Manage the City Manager – Bob Stripling (former City Manager of Colonial Beach, Blacksburg & Staunton and former Assistant City Manager of Charlottesville)

The 4 Fs – Chief Jason Irby (Spotsylvania County Fire & EMS)

Crisis Management – Bill Leighty (Chief of Staff for Governors Mark Warner & Tim Kaine)

Reimagined Hiring – Assistant Chief (retired) JR Hall, Richmond Fire Department)

Fire Chief's Roundtable – Chief Matt Tobia (Harrisonburg) & Chief Loy Senter (Chesterfield)

Battalion 1	
Stephen Plaster	Henrico Co. Division of Fire
Christian Ruleman	Augusta Co. Fire & Rescue
Caleb Sherwood	Winchester Fire & Rescue
Jeffrey Wallace	Powhatan Co. Fire & Rescue
Raymond Willet	Suffolk Dept. of Fire & Rescue

Battalion 2	
Matthew Burnette	Salem Fire & EMS Department
Derek Holland	Chesapeake Fire Department
Jodi McChesney	Bedford Co. Fire & Rescue
Benjamin Swinson	Henrico Co. Division of Fire
William Taylor	King George Fire, Rescue & Emer. Services

Battalion 3	
Donald Blake	Dinwittie Co. Fire & EMS
Graham Lathrop	Chesterfield Fire & EMS
Michael Moomey	Roanoke Fire-EMS
Brandon Oliver	Co. of Warren Dept. of Fire & Rescue Services
Jason Rodman	Hampton Div. of Fire & Rescue

Battalion 4	
Austin Cucciardo	Co. of Warren Dept. of Fire & Rescue Services
John Garner	Chesterfield Fire & EMS
Brian Heinsman	James City Co. Fire Dept.
Ken Naccarato	Albemarle Co. Fire - Rescue
Levin Turner	Portsmouth Fire, Rescue, & Emer. Services

Battalion 5	
Ryan Keating	James City Co. Fire Dept.
Jonathan Rodgers	Botetourt C. Dept. of Fire & EMS
Matthew Sacra	Roanoke Co. Fire & Rescue
Ryan Sandy	Amherst Co. Fire & EMS
William Spindle	Richmond Fire & Emer. Services

Battalion 6	
Jennifer Collins	Lynchburg Fire Dept.
Thomas Desper	Harrisonburg Fire Department
John Luck	Louisa Co. Dept. of Fire & EMS
Reginald Rivera	York Co. Dept. of Fire & Life Safety
Wesley Sheler	Fredericksburg Fire Dept.



**A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL WHO SUPPORTED
THE VIRGINIA FIRE OFFICER ACADEMY AND THE
VIRGINIA CHIEF OFFICER ACADEMY.**

**Virginia Fire Chiefs Association
Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation
Virginia Department of Fire Programs**

2025 VFOA GRADUATES 40 NEW STUDENTS

The 18th annual Virginia Fire Officer Academy (VFOA) was held June 22-27, 2025, on the beautiful campus of the University of Richmond. Living up to its age-old tradition, the academy was a huge success, graduating 40 students.

The VFOA would not be possible without the support of the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association and many other sponsors including the Virginia Department of Fire Programs and Atlantic Emergency Solutions.

A week-long residential academy, the VFOA is both challenging and rewarding to our students. We would like to thank the many instructors dedicated to delivering a curriculum determined to instill in the future leaders of the fire service the tools necessary to provide "Safety Through Leadership". At the culmination of the academy, our students, armed with their new-found knowledge, navigate through role-playing scenarios designed to put their skills to the test. Our instructors include:

Signature Team Building

Mr. Art Jackson (Eagles Nest Performance Management)
Mr. Randy Keirn (Fully Involved Consulting, Inc.)
Deputy Fire Chief Tim McKay (Chesterfield Fire & EMS)
Ms. Kerry Henderson (Bedford Fire-EMS)
Mr. Kenny Mitchell (Operation Yellow Tape)
Jeffrey Phillips and Chris Poff (The Company Officer's Role for Cancer in the Fire Service)

The VFOA would like to recognize and congratulate the 2025-2 graduating class, representing 40 fire departments across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Audrey Baise, Chesterfield Fire and EMS
Joel Bradley Harrisonburg Fire Department
Norman Brooks Jr., Spotsylvania Fire and Rescue
Pametrick (Pete) Bryant, Henrico Fire Department
Nicholas Burmood, Langley AFB Fire Department
Michael Carrier, Bristol VA Fire Department
Wayne Clevert, Henrico County Fire Department
Brandon Corbi, Louisa County Department of Fire & EMS
Nicholas Daniels, Fort Walker Fire and Emergency Services
Jalil Davis, Richmond Fire Department
Zachary Dove, King George Co, Dept. of Fire, Rescue & Emergency Services
Ambrose Ezeigbo, Roanoke Fire-EMS
James Fabiano, Louisa County Fire & EMS
Charles Floyd, Albemarle County Fire & Rescue
Christopher Gardner, Jr., Spotsylvania County Fire, Rescue and Emergency Management
Bradley Goodbar, Staunton Fire and Rescue Department
Christopher Hagler, Hanover Fire EMS Department
Joshua Hartzler, Winchester Fire & Rescue
David Harvey, Wytheville Fire & Rescue Department
Shania Inge, Petersburg Fire Rescue and Emergency Services
Julie Jennings, Henrico, County Division of Fire
Phillip Jewell, King and Queen County Emergency Services
Kyle Johnson, Roanoke County Fire and Rescue
Kayla Jones, Botetourt Fire & EMS
Andrew Lev Dahl, Warren County Fire & Rescue
Bruce Lewis, Chesterfield Fire and EMS
Fred Littlejohn, III, Suffolk Fire & Rescue
Clinton Mays, Charlottesville Fire Department

Eric McDonnel, Fredericksburg Fire Department
Kyle McNamee, City of Williamsburg Fire Department
Kayla Misner, Winchester Fire and Rescue Department
Bradford Mutter Jr., Chesapeake Fire Department
Mason Norman, Spotsylvania County Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Management
Brett Powers, Langley AFB Fire Department
Tyler Scheck, York County Department of Fire and Life Safety
James Slater, Roanoke County Fire and Rescue
Edward Sonifrank, Warrenton Training Center Fire Department/Salem Volunteer Fire and Rescue
Hailey Tretick, City of Manassas Park Fire and Rescue Department
Joseph Weeks, Jr., Arlington County Fire Department
Rachel Yost, Fauquier County Fire and Rescue

We would also like to thank the dedicated staff members who volunteer countless hours behind the scenes ensuring the success of the academy. They are:

Incident Commander – Ryan Passera, King George Fire, Rescue & Emergency Services
Deputy Incident Commander – Rachel Winter, Chesterfield Fire & EMS
Deputy Incident Commander – Daniel Myers, Henrico County Division of Fire
PIO – Blake Roberson, Chesapeake Fire Department
Safety Officer – Paul Polivka, Hanover Fire & EMS
VFOA Liaison – Bill Donati, Powhatan County Fire & Rescue
Operations Section Chief – Willie West, Henrico County Division of Fire
Operations Deputy Chief – Chris Poff, Roanoke County Fire and Rescue
Operations Staff- Jeffrey Phipps Jr., Hanover County Fire-EMS
Curriculum Section Chief – Ashley Fontaine, James City County Fire
Curriculum Deputy Chief – Cody Lewis, Fort Pickett Fire & Rescue
Curriculum Staff – Anthony Conant, Henrico County Division of Fire
Logistics Section Chief – Stacey Wills, Roanoke Fire-EMS
Logistics Deputy Chief – Jason Focht, Roanoke Fire-EMS
Logistics Staff – Kaleb Schatz, Roanoke County Fire and Rescue
Planning Section Chief – Mark Seeterlin, James City County Fire Department
Planning Deputy Chief – Kris Emond, Camp Peary Fire and Rescue
Finance Section Chief – Meche Jones, Chesterfield Fire & EMS
Technology Section Chief – Daniel Oursler, Spotsylvania Fire, Rescue & Emergency Management





Following a productive morning with Randy, the members have transitioned to the second half of the day, focusing on refining their leadership skills, communication techniques, and most significantly, conflict resolution strategies using Randy's Crossfire method.

We are excited to have our students spend the day with Art Jackson, a renowned motivational speaker and executive coach. Art, a graduate of the United States Military Academy, brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table, having worked with the Department of Homeland Security, the Central Intelligence Agency and authored three leadership books. We are confident that his expertise and approach will last with our students for years to come.



One comment reads: "Art will teach you things you didn't even know about yourself. One of the best speakers you will have all week".

Monday Evening



Following a very successful morning with Art Jackson, students had the opportunity to hear Battalion Chief Kerry Henderson discuss "Authentic Leadership - Being Genuine Is Harder Than It Sounds". Chief Henderson works in James City County and is co-host of "The Heat of Command Podcast".

The VFOA takes great pleasure in having our students meet with with Chief Tim McKay, a seasoned fire service veteran with 33 years of experience and currently serving as Deputy Chief of Chesterfield County Fire and EMS, he presented his esteemed program, 'Tough Talking - The Art of the Difficult Conversation'. This interactive lecture utilizes case studies and real-world examples to engage and challenge our members, fostering growth in leadership and communication skills.

Tuesday



We were very pleased to welcome back Randy Keirn as this year's Tuesday speaker. He is a renowned Chief Officer, instructor, author, and community educator, who has dedicated his life to imparting leadership skills in every aspect of his professional and personal life.

Day 4 – PT



The members were afforded the opportunity to participate in a more relaxed PT session this morning and engage in our annual relay race against the staff. Great job by all!



The Virginia Fire Officer Academy is proud to welcome back Kenny Mitchell for the morning session. He is the founder of Operation Yellow Tape, and today he will be sharing his invaluable program with our academy. With 20 years of experience in the fire service, Kenny offered a unique perspective on mental health, drawing from his personal struggles to help first responders understand that they are not alone and that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. This program will significantly enhance our members' awareness and ability to recognize and address mental health issues in the fire service.



After two days of very intense and realistic role-playing exercises conducted by talented actors from the fire service, our members have showcased their ability to apply the skills and knowledge gained throughout the week to resolve complex issues and conflicts in a realistic and effective manner.

When this concept was first introduced to the Academy in the mid-2000s. It was new to officer training, and so realistic that we had to watch the rotation to ensure there was no interaction between the students and role players. Emotions ran high sometimes.



This week is all about unlocking your potential, developing leadership skills, and transforming areas of weakness into strengths through mental and physical growth. By fostering a culture of hard work, trust, and open communication, our members were empowered to push beyond their limits and conquer our signature high ropes course tonight. Great job tonight 25-2.



The eve of graduation had finally arrived, and it was a truly breathtaking night at the University of Richmond



This group is the cornerstone of the Virginia Fire Officer Academy, having devoted the past 10 months to collaboratively crafting an unparalleled experience for our recent graduates. Their tireless efforts and commitment, often executed behind the scenes, are distinctly evident throughout the academy.

Congratulations to the 2025-2 staff on your exceptional dedication, and sincere appreciation to this year's Incident Commander, Ryan Passera, for your expert guidance and leadership.



It is with great honor that we present the members graduating from the Virginia Fire Officer Academy. Over the the six days, they have dedicated themselves to rigorous training and development, demonstrating remarkable growth both individually and as a cohesive team. Their commitment and hard work are truly commendable, and we look forward to celebrating your achievements as you walk across the stage today.

THE WAY IT SHOULD BE DONE



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MEET THE CHIEF



Getting to Know Mike Bryant.

Getting to know Michael D. Bryant. In this issue we will meet one of the many fire chiefs who will be spotlighted in Commonwealth Chief this year. Here we take a look at Michael Bryant, Chief of Poquoson Fire & Rescue.

CC: Describe your tenure in the fire service...

MB: I have been involved in the fire service with the City of Poquoson for 45 years.

CC: Please describe your career journey...

MB: I began my service with the Poquoson Volunteer Fire Company & Rescue Squad in 1978 while still in high school. In 1981, I started my career with the Poquoson Fire & Rescue Department as a Firefighter. Promoted to Captain/Training Officer in 2001, Deputy Chief/Emergency Management Coordinator in 2008, and Fire Chief in 2023.

CC: Please describe your Form of Government...

MB: The City of Poquoson operates under a City Council-City Manager form of government.

CC: Describe the sources of Funding for Your Organization...

MB: The primary source of funding for the Fire Department is through the budget Process allocated each fiscal year through the City Council. The department also receives funding through various grants that are awarded each year. EMS Recovery, Aid-to Locality, and LEMPG are just a few.

CC: What population does your department serve...

MB: 12,854 based on the 2024 census

CC: How many square miles do you cover...

MB: 78 square miles total. 15.4 land and 62.9 water

CC: Describe the department composition...

MB: In 1941, the Messick Fire Department was founded by 18 men with donated money to get started. Today, the City of Poquoson Fire & Rescue is a combination department. We have two stations and three shifts, each with 11 staff members. Our Fire Administration is located in the Public Safety Building, consisting of the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief, and Office Manager.

CC: Describe the department equipment...

MB: Department equipment consists of 1 tower (expected delivery in August 2025), 4 medic units (this includes 1 new medic received, 3 engines, 1 special operations vehicle, 1 command vehicle, 2 administrative vehicles (Fire Chief-Dep Chief), 1 support vehicle, 1 air boat, and 1 marine vessel.

CC: Describe your call summary...

MB: Fire & EMS 2,357 Commercial Inspections 382 Our call volume is increasing, and I do expect these numbers to continue to grow.

CC: What is the most challenging issue or issues facing your department today?

MB: Increasing staffing levels (recruiting and retention). We have found ourselves sending more folks to the academy. Hiring certified applicants has diminished due to pay (ALS). Apparatus costs are rising, which puts a hardship on local budgets.

CC: How would you describe your management style?

MB: My management style would be more transformational, where I inspire, motivate, and empower staff to achieve more than they thought was possible. Creating positive change, developing individuals, employee motivation, morale, and job satisfaction are a big part of being a leader and the overall success of the department. Promoting professional development is essential for building a capable, future-ready workforce.

CC: Does your department have a formal, long-range strategic plan?

MB: We are currently working on a strategic plan consisting of equipment and PPE replacement, additional staffing, and positions.

CC: How have current economic times impacted your department?

MB: The City of Poquoson has been very supportive with positions and apparatus. Like most jurisdictions, we have to continue to watch the economy. The City of Poquoson is a small City with mostly a residential

tax base. In past years, it was necessary to watch the budget. I am seeing some improvement as the economy improves. It is important to prepare and be smart about spending.

CC: Are you doing things differently today because of the economy?

MB: Pursuing grants and being successful helps with the strain on a budget. We strive to submit as many as possible when available.

CC: What challenges do you see facing the fire service today?

MB: We are no different than any other department in the region. We all seem to be drawing applicants from the same pool of people. Now, it has become necessary for all jurisdictions to be more competitive with salaries and benefits. As a small department in a smaller locality, we can offer a better quality of life even though call volumes across the Commonwealth are on the increase.

CC: What do you look for in a new recruit?

MB: I believe it is very important that recruits have a strong work ethic, the ability to work with a team, and an eagerness to learn. Also, the recruit must be able to adapt, evolve, and embrace change. Today, most jurisdictions have to put applicants through the fire academy to train them as basic Firefighter/EMT-A's or higher. This training takes time and money to complete, and at the end, you want a well-rounded member of your department.

CC: How do you view training?

MB: Training has always been a top priority with me. As a past Training Officer for the department, I view training paramount to the overall success of the department and the cornerstone of operational excellence. Having a good training program promotes discipline, unity, confidence, and strengthens teamwork for everyone. Well-trained personnel reduce liability, prevent injuries, and build public trust. Higher education can also be factored, but it is very hard to replace experience.

CC: Do you have a close working relationship with neighboring departments?

MB: The City of Poquoson is a small City that relies on our mutual aid departments. I guess you can say we rely on each other. The City of Poquoson borders on York County and the City of Hampton. As a region, we all help one another, and it is fantastic when multiple jurisdictions can come together and help each other every day.

CC: What's in the future for the fire service as you see it?

MB: Today's fire service is always changing due to shifts in technology, hazards, expectations, and workforce dynamics. Protecting life, property, and the environment remains unchanged; how that mission is carried out is always transforming. Like most departments, we are all experiencing an increase in call volume, dealing with EVs, and technology. We will have to be more proactive in community risk reduction, recruitment, and retention. Succession planning and leadership priorities are essential for the future. Budgets and costs, particularly having to purchase apparatus and medic units, have become more expensive, and there have been no signs of improvement.

CC: How has being a member of the VFCA helped you become a better chief/leader?

MB: The VFCA offers a great networking system; the conferences and training provided are invaluable to us all.

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- Governor's Award for Excellence in Virginia's Fire Services Training
- Governor's Award for Outstanding Fire Department Response
- Governor's Virginia Firefighter of the Year
- Governor's Virginia Fire Chief Officer of the Year

VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

Training & Education Preview





VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

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Can Confidence

February 16, 2026

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Human Performance

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Truck Fundamentals School

February 17-18, 2026



Company Officer School

February 17-18, 2026

Chief Officer School

February 17-18, 2026



Engine Operations School

February 17-18, 2026

Mayday Command

February 19, 2026

**No River Banks Left:
Swiftwater Rescue Mastery**

February 19, 2026

Rural Water Supply

February 19, 2026



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FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO
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VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

Virginia Fire Marshal Academy
Recertification Courses



Photography (1031/1033)

February 16, 2026 - 0800-1200

Legal Update (1031/1033)

February 16, 2026 - 1300-1700

Inspector & Investigator Safety (1031/1033)

February 17, 2026 - 0800-1200

Food Truck Inspections (1031)

February 17, 2026 - 1300-1700

Use of Force/Control Tactics (1033)

February 18, 2026 - 0800-1700

State Fire Marshals Office Update (1031/1033)

February 19, 2026 - 0800-1000

Interview & Interrogation (1031/1033)

February 19, 2026 - 1000-1200

Ignitable Liquids Detection K9 Assisting the Fire Investigation (1033)

February 19, 2026 - 1300-1700



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VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

Monday, February 16, 2026



Jarrold Sergi

No-Nonsense Leadership: A Realistic Approach for the Company Officer



Nick Peppard

Rescue Operations for the Engine Company



Cedric Patterson

AI Policy in the Fire Department



Kirsten Martin

Forged in Fire:
Building Firefighter Resilience Through Emotional Intelligence



Keith Besley

Leadership on the Spectrum



Christina Owens

Emergency Childbirth



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VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

Tuesday, February 17, 2026



Brian Smith

Leading The Primary Search



Joshua Goyet

From Tradition to Transformation:
Leading Change in the Firehouse



Matthew Tobia

You Do Not Want to Promote!



Christopher Harris Jett

Musical Notes of Leadership



Tarsha Robinson

Little People Big World



Fred M. Rafilson, Ph.D.

Mindful Hiring in Fire & EMS:
Enhancing Recruitment with Psychological Evaluations



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VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

Wednesday, February 18, 2026



Ashley Boersig

Prehospital Stroke Care



Dr. Denis Onieal

The Future of the Fire and Emergency Services



Steve Prziborowski

Tips for Successfully Transitioning from
Firefighter or Engineer to Company Officer



Jonah Smith

Nozzle Operations and Victims: A Real Life Hat Dance



Kelley Rumsey

The Virginia Trauma System:
Case Scenarios of the System in Action



Robby Dawson

The Fire and Life Safety Ecosystem is Under Attack:
Impacts and Implications for the Fire Service



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VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

Thursday, February 19, 2026



Rob Backer

The Art of Reading Smoke



Michael Barakey

The Critical Decision Maker:
Say No to Blue Card: How About a Hybrid Approach?



Randy Keirn

From Fireground to Front Office:
How Fire Officers Can Leverage AI Today



Chaplain Bob Enright

Fire & Rescue Response Chaplaincy



Shawn Fields

Introduction to Mechanical Ventilation



Lynn Lewis

Navigating The Stigma of Suicide Loss - S.T.I.N.G. It!



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VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

Friday, February 20, 2026



Joseph R. Polenzani

In The Heat of the Moment:
The Art and Science of Decision-Making



Megan Vaughan

STEMI Metrics: Interpreting Performance Outcomes



Timothy McKay

Influencing Organizational Culture Through Leadership



Nicholas Higgins

The 5-Tool Firefighter:
Five Attributes to a Well-Rounded Firefighter



Jesalyn Moore

Help on the Horizon: Building Mental Wellness Support
When You Don't Have a Clinician (Yet)



Kevin Pannell

Mission Ready:
All-Hazards Project Management for Public Safety Leaders



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WWW.VFCA.US



VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

Saturday, February 21, 2026



Matthew Tobia & Timothy McKay

Unplugged Round II: Perspectives on the Fire Service...
Ask Anything - No Holds Barred!



Jennifer Bragiel

Leveraging Social Media for Retention, Recruitment and Education



Zachary Hottel

It's a Different World:
Leaders in the Volunteer Fire Service



Zach Bruhn

Utilizing Modern Fire Research to
Maximize Fire Attack & Occupant Survivability



Tamara Moss

All Choked Up:
Handling Strangulation Injuries in the Pre-Hospital Setting



Allen Baldwin

Protecting Our History



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VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

EMS Training

The 2026 VFRC offers the ability for a Virginia EMT-Basic to receive all required recertification hours at the conference. Review the requirements below and check out the conference website at www.vfca.us to build your path to recertification.

BLS Certified | Recertified

NCCR Areas		Prior to October 1, 2023		On or after October 1, 2023	
		A EMR	B EMT	A EMR	B EMT
11	Airway, Respiration and Ventilation	1.0	1.5	1.5	4.0
12	Cardiovascular	2.5	6.0	2.0	5.0
13	Trauma	0.5	1.5	1.0	3.0
14	Medical	3.0	6.0	2.5	6.0
15	Operations	1.0	5.0	1.0	2.0
TOTAL NCCR HOURS		8	20	8*	20*
LCCR/ICCR HOURS		8	20	8	20
TOTAL HOURS		16	40	16	40

ALS Certified | Recertified

NCCR Areas		Prior to October 1, 2023			On or after October 1, 2023		
		C AEMT	I Intermediate	E Paramedic	C AEMT	I Intermediate	E Paramedic
16	Airway, Respiration and Ventilation	2.5	3.5	3.5	5.0	5.5	6.0
17	Cardiovascular	7.0	7.5	8.5	6.0	6.5	7.0
18	Trauma	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.5	5.0
19	Medical	7.5	7.5	8.5	7.0	7.5	8.0
20	Operations	5.0	6.5	6.5	3.0	4.0	4.0
TOTAL NCCR HOURS		25	28	30	25*	28	30*
LCCR/ICCR HOURS		25	28	30	25	28	30
TOTAL HOURS		50	55	60	50	55	60



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Controller, Nozzle



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Copperhead Monitor 3" 150 lb
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VIRGINIA FIRE RESCUE CONFERENCE

February 16-21, 2026

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REGISTRATION OPENS NOVEMBER 1, 2025
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Congratulations to New Kent County Fire-Rescue
Completion of their New Fire Station #6 (Bottoms Bridge)



NFPA 'FATAL FIREFIGHTER INJURIES IN THE U.S.' REPORT SHOWS 62 ON-DUTY DEATHS IN 2024, A 31 PERCENT DECREASE OVER 2023

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) released its "Fatal Firefighter Injuries in the U.S. in 2024" report, which showed a total of 62 on-duty U.S. firefighter fatalities in 2024. This number reflects a 31 percent decrease over the 90 on-duty firefighter fatalities reported in 2023 and tied for the fourth fewest fatalities since 1977, when the annual study began. Eleven of the fatalities were due to heart attacks or medical conditions within 24 hours of duty and the remaining 51 deaths occurred while firefighters were on duty.

Of the 51 on-duty firefighter deaths in 2024, 19 were volunteer firefighters and 26 were career firefighters, with eight volunteer and three career firefighter fatalities occurring within 24 hours of duty. The non-municipal firefighters included two state forestry service firefighters, one federal forestry service firefighter, two state contractor employees, and one industrial firefighter.

Firefighters ages 40 to 49 experienced the highest number of fatalities, accounting for nearly one-third of the total (20 deaths), while 13 of the firefighter fatalities were among the ages of 50 to 59. Eleven of the firefighter fatalities were among those aged 70 years or older.

According to the report, overexertion or strain injuries continues to represent the leading cause of firefighter deaths with 40 fatal injuries (65 percent) in 2024. This share of the total is unusually high due to the inclusion of 11 fatalities that occurred within 24 hours of duty, which were not included in the study prior to 2022. All but 10 of the deaths in this category were fatal heart attacks, representing the leading medical cause of fatal firefighter injuries and accounting for nearly half of the deaths (30 deaths, 48 percent).

"Although the downward trend in the annual number of fatal firefighter injuries is an encouraging indication that injury prevention efforts through the years have been successful, there is a clear need for continuing attention to firefighter safety and health," said Richard Campbell, a senior research analyst at NFPA and the lead author of the report. "To this end, sudden cardiac deaths remain a critical concern."

Traumatic injuries accounted for approximately one-third of the deaths (18 deaths, 32 percent) and six firefighter fatalities were due to unspecified medical symptoms, while two firefighters suffered fatal aneurysms or embolisms and two died as a result of heat stroke. One firefighter each died due to thermal burns, electrocution, gunshot wounds, and drowning.

One-third of the fatal injuries were sustained while firefighters were operating at fires or explosions (20 deaths, 32 percent), followed by injuries that occurred while engaged in training duties or at non-fire incidents, each with 11 deaths (18 percent). Injuries sustained while firefighters were engaged in normal station activities accounted for 10 fatalities (16 percent), and six firefighters sustained fatal injuries while responding to or returning from incidents (10 percent). Injuries during inspections, emergency medical services, and other assignments each resulted in one firefighter fatality.

"Advances in firefighting practices and procedures, communications and equipment, training programs, and education have all helped to improve safety and health outcomes for the firefighting community through the years," said Jay Petrillo, research analyst at NFPA who co-authored the report with Campbell. "Still, the unique variety of hazards encountered by firefighters across their multiple types of duties poses an ongoing challenge for comprehensive injury prevention."

Campbell says that meeting this challenge will require a vested commitment from a range of actors within and outside the fire service.

This firefighter fatal injuries study is made possible by the cooperation and assistance of the United States fire service, CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the United States Fire Administration, the Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Land Management of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

For this release and other announcements about NFPA initiatives, research and resources, please visit the NFPA press room.

NEW CHAPLAIN'S SECTION CREATED BY THE VFCA BOD



At their August 19th BOD meeting, a new VFCA Chaplain's Section was created. The new Section previously functioned as a Committee for several years prior to gaining Section status. As the group grew over several years they now have enough members to function as a Section according to the VFCA Bylaws. The group has been lead by Chaplain Jeffrey Smith of the Spotsylvania County FD. Instead of carrying the title of Committee Chair, he will now serve as President of the new Section.

In talking with Jeff, he said that "the chaplain's are very pleased to be designated as a Section of the VFCA and are looking forward to working with departments across the Commonwealth to bring folks together and help get the word out as to what they can do to support Virginia's fire service."

A more in-depth article will appear in the January edition of Commonwealth Chief.



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FREIGHTLINER M2-106 CHASSIS | SEATS FIVE
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3000 GALLON TANKER

JOB# 42774, 42775



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SEATS SIX | 1500 GPM | 510 HP | 152" BODY

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JOB# 43300, 43301



SABER CHASSIS | 70" CAB | LOW HOSEBED | LAP DOORS
SEATS SIX | 1500 GPM | 510 HP | 145" BODY

750 GALLON PUMPER

JOB# 43302, 43303



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SEATS SIX | TAK-4 IND. FRONT SUSPENSION

BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND GROWING TOGETHER: VFCA ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS

Mandy Waybright, President, APS
The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (VFCA) Administrative



Professionals Section held its quarterly meeting on Friday, August 15th, hosted by the Hampton Division of Fire and Rescue.

Quarterly meetings provide an opportunity for administrative professionals from across the Commonwealth to connect, share resources, and discuss ways to strengthen support within the fire service. Each session focuses on collaboration, professional development, and exploring tools that can help administrative teams better serve their departments and communities.

The group was welcomed to Hampton by Chief Jason Monk and Assistant Chief, Operations Section Chief Edward Cantwell. Followed by a business meeting where we discussed changes to the section Bylaws, and upcoming events. Immediately after a presentation was given to the group from Jamine Blow, CARES Team Crisis Counselor and Paramedic Elaine Lee who discussed the CARES program with the group. Master Medic Firefighter Ryan Chard provided the group with a tour of Station 3 which was slated to open 3 days later.

Looking ahead, the Section is excited to host its Annual Administrative Professionals Retreat on October 9th and 10th in Stafford, Virginia. This retreat is open to all administrative professionals in fire and emergency services and will offer training, networking, and professional development opportunities. You do not have to be a VFCA member to join us at this event. Registration is currently open, for more information please contact Mandy Waybright at Mandy.Waybright@harrisonburgva.gov or call 540-481-0670.

The Administrative Professionals Section continues to grow and serves as a vital part of the VFCA by fostering networking, leadership development, and mentorship opportunities for those in administrative roles. If you know an

administrative professional in the fire service who would benefit from being part of this supportive and growing group, please reach out to Mandy Waybright for more information on how to get involved or to attend an upcoming event.

Upcoming Events:

- *Annual Retreat in Stafford October 9th and 10th
- *James City Golf Tournament October 3rd
- *Quarterly Meeting in Fredericksburg December 11th
- *3rd Annual Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation Charity Shoot May 29, 2026





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- **SMELL** for the distinctive, rotten-egg odor associated with natural gas. Natural gas is colorless and odorless, so we add a chemical odorant called mercaptan for easy detection of a suspected natural gas leak. This odorant has a distinctive "rotten egg" type odor. You should act any time you detect even a small amount of this odor in the air. Be aware that "odorant fade," while uncommon, can occur. Odorant fade occurs when a physical or chemical process causes the level of odorant in the gas to be reduced. This can happen in both existing gas pipe and new installations.

Note: Be aware that "odorant fade," while uncommon, can occur. Odorant fade occurs when a physical or chemical process causes the level of odorant in the gas to be reduced. This can happen in both existing gas pipe and new installations. Be aware that some individuals may not be able to detect the smell of the natural gas odorant because they have a diminished sense of smell, because the scent is being masked by other odors in the area or because the odorant has diminished so that it is not detectable. Some gas lines, due to their unique function, may not have odor at all.

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Even though natural gas pipeline incidents are uncommon, it is still important to be prepared by knowing the signs of a potential problem.

You should take the following action any time you detect any of the signs of a pipeline leak:

- **DO NOT** try to identify the source to stop the leak yourself.
- **AVOID** using any sources of ignition, such as cell phones, cigarettes, matches, flashlights, electronic devices, motorized vehicles, light switches or landlines, as natural gas can ignite from a spark or open flame, possibly causing a fire or explosion. Natural gas is non-toxic, lighter than air and displaces oxygen. In severe cases, if not used properly, natural gas can also lead to asphyxiation.
- **CALL** Virginia Natural Gas immediately at our 24-hour emergency response line 800.552.7473 with the location and type of emergency.
- **SECURE** the area by establishing a safety zone around the incident and control access. You may need to reroute traffic and evacuate area homes and businesses.

How we respond

Once we are notified of the emergency, we will immediately dispatch trained personnel to the site, keeping you informed of our progress. We will take all necessary actions to correct the problem. We will work together to ensure our community is safe.

Prevention – the best defense against leaks

Emergency officials and first responders do their part daily to prevent natural gas leaks by keeping the following safety tips in mind:

Understand that natural gas is lighter than air and displaces oxygen. Although natural gas is non-toxic, in extreme cases of oxygen displacement, it may lead to asphyxiation. Natural gas has a risk of ignition near a spark or open flame.

- Know where the pipelines are in your jurisdiction. If you notice any missing or damaged pipeline markers, contact Virginia Natural Gas at **1.877.572.3342** so they can be replaced.
- Virginia law requires all underground utilities be marked before any type of digging or excavation. Be on the lookout for any suspicious activity or unauthorized digging. If the excavator has not notified the state of their intent to dig, they must stop all activity immediately. The excavator is required to present a valid dig ticket number when requested by first responders. Also, no one, including homeowners, should be digging, ditching, drilling, leveling or plowing without having first contacted our state's One-Call number (**811**) to locate underground utilities.
- Remember, pipeline markers, like the sample pictured, indicate only the general area of the pipeline and not the exact location or depth. Pipeline markers may not be present in all areas.
- Information about transmission pipelines operating in your community is available through the National Pipeline Mapping System (NPMS) and online at: npms.phmsa.dot.gov.



 Virginia Natural Gas



Online Survey

Please take a moment to complete a survey about natural gas safety and you by scanning the QR code or visiting surveymonkey.com/r/FV2MQPB to help us make sure we are keeping our communities safe.

15TH ANNUAL VIRGINIA FIRE CHIEFS FOUNDATION/ SPOTSYLVANIA GOLF TOURNAMENT

The Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation held its 15th Annual Tournament on Friday June 13th at Lee's Hill Golf Club. This year's event attracted 124 registered golfers with 121 in attendance. The top two teams of the tournament this year were as follows: 1st Place Flight A team included Jerry Brown, Sidney Jenkins, Eddie Bailey and Larry Nicholson and 1st Place in Flight B team consisted of Scott Brooks, Nathan Johnson, Vince Melton and Denver Bomham. The winner of the longest drive for men was Jerry Brown and the winner for the longest drive for women was Jessica Cole. The winner of the closest to the pin was Zak Payne. The winner of the putting contest was J.W. McGhee.

The level of support this year from the sponsors and donors was good, but was slightly below the 2024 event numbers overall. The VFCF BOT would like to publicly acknowledge the following the following Sponsors:

Diamond Title Sponsors

Dick Singer
Atlantic Emergency Solutions
AT&T
BREG Environmental
Morning Pride
Knights of Pythias

Silver Title Sponsor

DALY Computers

Bronze Title Sponsors

L3Harris
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Gold Sponsors

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Dominion Energy
Deuce Jewell
Henrico Firefighter Foundation

Golf Cart Sponsors

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Mary Finnigan – In Memory of Sidra K. Seeley
Ray Olson, LLC
The Baldwin Family
Kirk Pickert
Loudoun Construction, LLC
Manassas Park Professional Firefighters

Donations

Darley Company
Coca-Cola Bottling Company
VFIS
Mike Colb
Chesterfield Insurers
John Caussin

Between the generous sponsors, donors and the golfers that participated the VFCF raised just over \$37K that will be used to help support the Robert E. White Scholarship Program, Virginia Fire Officers Academy and the Virginia Chief Officers Academy and to help support the new LODD/Occupational Cancer Program established by the VFCF. To date, the scholarship program has awarded 420 scholarships that total approximately \$400K.

I would like to publicly thank the planning team that consisted of Dick Singer, Deuce Jewell, Charles Sterne and Steve Cooper. Planning for this event started in December 2024. The planning team meet multiple times in advance of the event to provide updates and this along with brainstorming that took place help ensure a successful tournament. I also want to acknowledge the tremendous support provided by members of the Administrative Professionals Section – their hard work and support allowed the attendees to get checked in efficiently and the whole process was very smooth!!!

The 16th Annual VFCF/Spotsylvania Golf Tournament will be held on June 5, 2026 back at Lee's Hill Golf Club. We hope to see you there!!!



Getting registered



Photo credits: Kevin Good & Chris Eudailey

The 16th Annual VFCF/Spotsylvania Golf Tournament will be held on June 5, 2026 back at Lee's Hill Golf Club. We hope to see you there!!!



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3M™ Scott™ Air-Pak™ XD SCBA

Rooted in tradition. Designed for the future.

Built with the proven “wireframe” SCBA backframe and pneumatics platform, the 3M™ Scott™ Air-Pak™ XD SCBA focuses on today’s firefighter who requires an extreme duty SCBA, while maintaining cleanability, comfort and connectivity.

1 Removable Harness

Allows for cleaning and decontamination to help with exposure reduction efforts

2 Pressure Reducer Cover

Enables the SCBA to be machine-washed in automated SCBA washers.*

3 3M™ Scotchlite™ Reflective Material

Helps enable enhanced visibility of the SCBA when operating in low-light conditions, improving safety and accountability on the fireground.

4 Naturally Articulating Waist Pad

Promotes greater range of motion to the user, while transferring weight to the hips for a more balanced load.

5 New Electronics

Maintain an ergonomic console design, while offering extended range and greater resistance to Radio Frequency (RF) interference (when configured with SEMS 3.0).



*Instructions on use of automated SCBA washers should be consulted prior to washing.



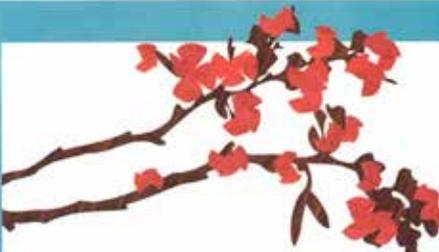
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SAVE THE DATE



SAVE THE DATE

2025 VFCA ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS RETREAT

OCTOBER 9-10, 2025
STAFFORD COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT
1225 COURTHOUSE ROAD, STAFFORD, VA 22554

MORE INFORMATION TO FOLLOW



2025 VFCA FEDERAL MILITARY SUMMIT

OCT. 31ST: 0800 - 1530 Hours

Williamsburg Fire Dept/2nd Fl. Training Ctr.
440 N. Boundary St. Williamsburg, VA 23185

PARKING: 412 N. Boundary St.

Cost: \$10.00 (Lunch Included)

Featured Presentations

 **"They Didn't Teach That in Officer Class"**
"Navigating OWCP"
Chief Randy Feltner
Naval District Washington Fire Dept.

 **"The Summer of '63: The Battle of Gettysburg Command"**
Chief Allen Baldwin
York County Dept. of Fire & Life Safety

Scan to Register →

WWW.VFCA.US
info@vfca.us



Company Officer Retreat



November 13-14, 2025

East Rivanna VFC

MORE INFO TO FOLLOW – VFCA.us

Alert Summit

November 14, 2025

Germanna Community College
10000 Germanna Point Drive
Fredericksburg, VA 22408

0800 - 1700



MORE INFO TO FOLLOW – VFCA.us



dering of Hampton's new Fire Station 3 that was dedicated the afternoon of 7/10/25.



Vice President Kevin Duck and Hampton Fire Chief Jason Monk shown at the Dedication and Un-Coupling Ceremony of the new Hampton Fire Station 3.

Photo: Bill Smith



Instead of a ribbon cutting, they had two sections of fire hose that they disconnected. The new station was dedicated in honor and remembrance of former Battalion Chief Lee Webb and the long-time Chief and mentor Lee Moore of the Wythe Fire Company.



VFCA BOARD SELECTION TOUCHSTONES

Once again it's time to think about board seats and several committee positions that will come up for election and/or appointment in 2026. With that in mind, the board is announcing a call for candidates. Any VFCA member in good standing (i.e., one who is current on dues) is eligible to apply for a committee or board-level position or nominate a fellow VFCA member to serve the organization in this capacity. If possible, board members should have previous committee level work prior to being nominated for a Board position. The term of service is one year following the installation in February 2026.

WE NEED YOU!

Current board members may declare their candidacy as well, and each will go through the same review process as other candidates.

To help ensure that the most qualified candidates attain these positions, the executive officer's and board has developed the following list of criteria to guide the nominating committee in selecting the board slate. Those VFCA members wishing to serve on the board or a committee should review the following traits before declaring their candidacy.

Attributes & Characteristics

- Understands, and is committed to, the VFCA and its organizational strategies
- Has experience with other organizations
- Has demonstrated an ability in and commitment to teamwork
- Has demonstrated a willingness to make tough decisions
- Can focus on projects and tasks
- Possesses a broad understanding of current membership needs, the industries with whom we interact, and the customers we serve
- Has effective interpersonal and communications skills
- Demonstrates leadership skills
- Can commit to full participation on the board in terms of preparation, board meetings, and committee assignments
- Has a flexible schedule that allows for annual commitment of approximately 10-15 days for meetings and travel, plus research, e-mail communication, phone calls, and writing articles for Commonwealth Chief magazine, their division or other work as necessary
- Has the consistent e-mail and web access needed to support communication, board/committee work, and research
- Has the ability to bring one new sponsor to the VFCA annually

Knowledge & Understanding

- Demonstrates a knowledge of the goals and objectives of the organization
- Has specific experience necessary to the success of the organization at the time of the nomination
- Understands organizational structure and planning methods
- Knows the contemporary options for governing organizations
- Understands the contemporary issues facing VFCA

Diversity

- Brings diversity to the organization as it relates to such things as geography, experience in the VFCA, types of members, and the fire/rescue service environment
- Contributes fresh perspectives and new ideas
- Signals to current and potential members a commitment to openness and inclusiveness
- Attracts potential members who might be from traditionally underrepresented groups

The nominating committee (appointed by President Kevin Good) will review all candidate nominations, narrow the field, and interview finalists. The nominating committee members will have diverse backgrounds and come from all across Virginia. They will possess a wealth of experience as it relates to this task.

The committee will select a slate of individuals that will be presented to the Board of Directors for approval at the December 2025 meeting. At that point, Board members will have an opportunity to participate in the election process by accepting or rejecting the slate. An option will also exist to withhold acceptance of one or more candidates on the slate.

Successful candidates will take their positions on the board following the Installation of Officer's Ceremony in February 2026.

All interested parties should contact the VFCA Executive Director, Chris Eudailey no later than November 1, 2025.

You may reach him by phone at (540) 809-9397 or executivedirector@vfca.us

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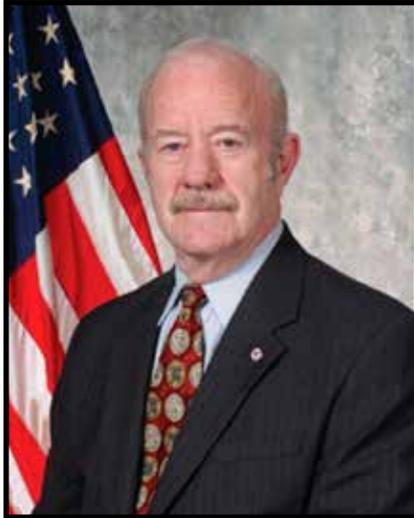
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Glenn A. Gaines

Leadership Legacy Award

In 2015, the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association established the Glenn A. Gaines Leadership Legacy Award. This award is designed to recognize an individual on an annual basis who exemplifies the ability, character and dedication to excellence and displays leadership attributes portrayed by Fire Chief Glenn A. Gaines.

Eligibility Criteria:

- Any current career or volunteer firefighter up to and including a chief officer within the Commonwealth of Virginia is eligible to compete for this award.

Nomination Criteria: Nominate individuals for their significant achievements or contributions to the fire service in the following areas:

- Accomplishments (in mentoring and professional development)
- Initiative (including helping others beyond their own agency through mentoring and professional development, including advocacy)
- Technical Competence (including serving as an instructor)
- Demonstrated leadership and mentoring ability
- The inclusive dates for the Glenn A. Gaines Leadership Legacy Award are January 1st through December 15th of each calendar year.

Selection Process: Nominate individuals for their significant achievements or contributions to the fire service in the following areas:

- The VFCA President and Board of Directors will serve as the selection committee and will make their decision by January 31st..
- The VFCA President will review and tally the results and announce the winner during the annual Virginia Fire Rescue Conference that is held each February in Virginia Beach, VA. The individual selected should be in attendance at the conference.

HOW TO APPLY:

Visit www.vfca.us for application information. **Uploaded documents should not exceed 750 words. Nomination packages that do not meet requirements will be rejected.**

The application period is September 1st — December 1st each year.

Questions: ceudailey@vfca.us



**7th Annual
VFCF Fire Chiefs 5K Run/Walk and
Fun Run**

March 14, 2026

**Colonial Williamsburg – Duke
of Gloucester Street**



A 5k run and 1 mile fun run through the historic Colonial Williamsburg. Starting at Bruton Parish Church and passing the Historic Capitol and Governor’s Palace. You will loop through the City of Williamsburg Municipal Center, past the Williamsburg Fire Station before returning to Colonial Williamsburg to finish on Duke of Gloucester Street.

Schedule

- Packet Pick-up /Registration ➤ 6:45 am
- 1 mile Fun Run ➤ 7:30 am
- 5k Run ➤ 8:00 am
- Awards ➤ 9:15am

Entry Fee:

- Early Registration ends 1/1/26 \$30
- Late Registration ends 3/7/26 \$35
- Race Day \$40
- Registration Fun Run with Shirt \$8
- Fun Run Free

Online Registration:

<https://runsignup.com/Race/VA/Williamsburg/VirginiaFireChiefsFoundation5k>

❖ **AWARDS Top 3 overall Male and Female**

Age groups: 19 and Under, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65 -69, 70 & Over

T-Shirts: Guaranteed to the early registered runners only! All others on a first come, first served basis.

Race Director: Donald Booth – 757-810-7538 (donald.booth@djginc.com)

Finish line results provided by the Colonial Road Runners! **All race proceeds benefit the Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation**, providing Leadership training and scholarships to Virginia’s front line officers, fire fighters, and their families.



Registration Form

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Email Address _____

Male _____ Female _____ Event: (circle one) 5K Run 5K Walk Fun Run

Age on Race Day _____ Birthdate _____

Emergency Contact _____ Contact Phone _____

T-Shirt Size – Adult Small _____ Adult Medium _____ Adult Large _____ Adult XL _____
– Child Large _____

Entry Fee (Check One)

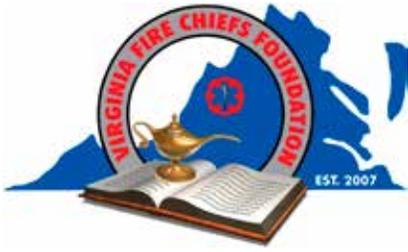
Early Registration - \$30 _____ Late Registration (after 1/1) - \$35 _____ Day of Race - \$40

Make checks payable to: **Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation**

Release and Wavier (Please read and sign)

I know that running/walking is a potentially hazardous activity. I should not enter and run/walk unless I am medically able and properly trained. I know that, although police protection might be provided, there could be traffic on the course route; therefore, I assume the risk of running/walking in traffic. I also assume any other risks associated with running/walking this event including, but not limited to, falls, contact with other participants, and the effects of weather and conditions on the road. I understand I am solely responsible for my own safety while traveling to or from or participating in this event. Knowing these facts and in consideration of your acceptance of my entry, I hereby for myself, my heirs, executors, administrators, or anyone else who might sue on my behalf covenant not to sue, and waive, release, and discharge the sponsors or contributors to this event, any race officials, volunteers, the city, police and fire agencies, their representatives, successors or assignees from any and all claims of liability for death, personal injury, or property damage of any kind or nature whatsoever arising out of, or in the course of my participation. This release form and waiver extends to all claims of every kind and nature whatsoever, foreseen and unforeseen, known and unknown. The undersign further grants full permission to use any photographs, video tapes, motion pictures, recordings, or another record of this event for any purpose. Minors will be accepted with parent's signature. I certify that I have read this wavier and release and fully understand its significance.

Signature _____



Robert E. White Memorial Scholarship

The Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation offers annual scholarships for continuing education. The scholarship program was established in 2002 in memory of Mr. Robert E. White, a citizen of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The objective of the scholarship program is to assist individuals desiring to further their academic education through a variety of opportunities such as college classes, National Fire Academy classes, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association events (such as the Virginia Fire & Rescue Conference), certificate programs, trade schools and other fire and EMS classes or conferences. Individual scholarship awards may range from \$250 to \$2,500 and can be utilized for any direct expenses such as registration, tuition, books, meals, lodging or transportation.

Eligibility Criteria

- Active fire/EMS service personnel in Virginia (Volunteer or Career).
- Spouses or dependents of active fire/EMS service personnel in Virginia (Volunteer or Career).
- VFCA Membership (individual and/or Chief) is required for consideration.
- Applicants must be pursuing a degree that will benefit Public Safety field.
- Provide proof of enrollment with scholarship application.
- Non-profit organizations (such as fire departments, etc...) are eligible to apply.
- Programs/Degrees eligible for consideration include the following: VFRC, VFOA, VA Fire Chiefs Academy, and trade schools, Associate, Bachelor and Master Degree Programs.

Selection Criteria

- Complete scholarship application and submit by annual deadline. (December 1st)
- Written Statement – Please attach your statement to application and it should include your background, educational goals, why you believe this educational opportunity will be useful to you and why you are applying for financial assistance. **Failure to complete this portion of the process and fully address the items listed will result in your application being disqualified.** For organizational applications, please include a description of the organization, how the educational program will benefit the organization and why financial assistance is necessary. These statements will serve as a criterion for the selection and should be typewritten using 12 point aerial font, double spaced and no more than three pages in length. **Failure to complete this portion of the process and fully address the items listed will result in your application being disqualified.**

Application Information

- Applications will be accepted between September 1 and December 1 annually.
- Successful applicants will be notified by January 1 of awards.
- Scholarship awardees will be invited to Annual VFR Conference to be recognized and presented their scholarship. **Attendance is not mandatory.**
- Awards may vary in amounts up to \$2500.

HOW TO APPLY:

Visit www.vfca.us for application information.

The application period is September 1st — December 1st each year. Successful applicants will be notified by January 1st. Verification of attendance will be required.

COULD YOUR DEPARTMENT BENEFIT FROM A STATEWIDE AWARD AND \$500? NOMINATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICES IN FIRE SERVICE HEALTH AND SAFETY AWARDS

Health, safety and wellness within fire departments are top priorities throughout the Commonwealth and across the nation. In Virginia, most departments have developed extensive policies, practices and/or procedures to address this important issue and to ensure the health, safety and wellness of their members. We all know that before we can care for the public, we must ensure that our personnel are trained, equipped, conditioned and capable of effectively performing the functions for which the public expects from us. This means having fit personnel who know how to operate safely and who practice safety, health and wellness 24/7. It means departments having those necessary guidelines, policies, procedures and/or practices in place so that our members know what is expected and it means ensuring that these expectations are followed from an individual perspective, from a crew/team/company/ unit/ station/shift perspective and from an overall departmental perspective. There are many excellent examples/models of health and safety practices that have been implemented by departments of all kinds (volunteer, combination and career) in the Commonwealth. Why not have your department nominated and recognized as an award-winning agency that is committed to the health, safety and wellness of the overall department and, in particular, its members.

Each year, the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association – Health and Safety Committee coordinates a “Best Practices in Health and Safety” awards program through the Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation. This program seeks to recognize programs from volunteer, combination and career fire departments in the Commonwealth of Virginia annually during the VFCA Virginia Fire Rescue Conference in February. Three awards are given, one in each category (volunteer department, combination department and career department). Winning departments receive a \$500 contribution from the Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation. Wouldn't it be nice for your department to receive \$500 to support its operations in some way? Probably more importantly, this would be a fantastic message to send to your members that their organization has been recognized for programs that show your commitment to health, safety and wellness.

Nominations are currently being accepted in each of the three categories (volunteer, combination and career) between now and December 1. This year the VFCA/VFCF is utilizing an on-line submittal process which is available on the VFCA web site at www.vfca.us and by selecting the tab titled “VFCF Health and Safety Awards Submission.” It is desired that nominations be submitted on-line, however for those unable to do so a form has been included with this publication. All nominations/ submittals (electronic and printed/mailed) must be received on or before **December 1, 2025**. Programs/practices etc. implemented within the current and two prior years (**2025, 2024 and 2023**) will be considered.

Recognition for the latest awards will occur at the **2026** VFCA Virginia Fire Rescue Conference in February at the Virginia Beach Convention Center.

VIRGINIA FIRE CHIEFS FOUNDATION BEST PRACTICES IN FIRE SERVICE HEALTH AND SAFETY AWARD NOMINATIONS

The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association and the Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation is pleased to announce the annual “Virginia Fire Chiefs Best Practices in Fire Service Health and Safety Awards.” The VFCA and the VFCF are committed to fostering health and safety within the various fire departments throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. This award program was created to further recognize the health and safety efforts of Virginia fire departments. The awards are intended to acknowledge creative, comprehensive and/or significant accomplishments and programs that provide for the health, safety and welfare of our fire service members. Each year the VFCA/VFCF will honor formally established fire departments within the Commonwealth of Virginia, in each of the following three categories: volunteer fire department, career fire department and combination fire department. The Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation Best Practices in Fire Service Health and Safety Awards recipients will be announced and honored at the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association's--Virginia Fire Rescue Conference in February 2026. Award winning departments will be presented with an award and the VFCF will make a \$500 contribution to each winning department. Information about this program is available on the VFCA website at www.vfca.us

Nomination Information

Nominations (electronic or by mail) for the upcoming “Virginia Fire Chiefs Best Practices in Fire Service Health and Safety Award” program must be received on or before **December 1, 2025**:

On-line electronic submittal of nominations is **preferred** and the appropriate information can be found on the VFCA web site at www.vfca.us and by selecting the tab titled “VFCF Health and Safety Award Submissions.”

For those departments unable to submit an on-line nomination the attached form can be used and mailed to:

Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 699
Blackstone, Virginia 23824

Questions may be referred to Chris Eudailey, VFCA Executive Director, email executivedirector@vfca.us

Criteria

Any fire department within the Commonwealth of Virginia that has established creative, comprehensive and/or significant accomplishments/programs that provide for the health, safety and welfare of their members. Program must be in place/operational at time of nomination and must have been implemented within the last three years.

ELIGIBILITY

Must be a formally established fire department within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

One award will be presented in each of the following categories:

- Volunteer Fire Department
- Career Fire Department
- Combination Fire Department

SELECTION PROCESS

Once all packages are received, an award Selection Committee will review the nomination packages and forward their recommendation to the VFCA President and Executive Director.

AWARDS PRESENTATION

The Virginia Fire Chiefs Foundation Best Practices in Fire Service Health and Safety Awards recipients will be announced and honored at the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association's--Virginia Fire Rescue Conference in February 2021. Recipients will receive the award and a \$500 contribution to the department.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

The following five items must be addressed in a number-by-number format:

- 1) Brief Abstract of Accomplishment/Program: Brief executive summary the accomplishment/program.
- 2) Brief Description of Fire Department Nominated: Provide a brief overview of the nominated fire department.
- 3) Description of Accomplishment/Program: Describe the accomplishment/program being nominated, including its objectives and clientele being served.
- 4) The Results/Success of the Program: Provide a description of the results and success of the accomplishment/program in meetings its objectives (provide examples and measurements where possible).
- 5) Worthiness of Award: Provide brief justification for why this accomplishment/program should receive this award.



VIRGINIA FIRE CHIEFS FOUNDATION BEST PRACTICES IN FIRE SERVICE HEALTH AND SAFETY AWARDS APPLICATION/NOMINATION FORM



Name of Fire Department _____ Date _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Fire Chief _____

Check One Volunteer Career Combination

Nomination Submitted By: _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Accomplishment/Program Information

Accomplishment/Program Title:

Implementation Year _____

Supporting documentation must be attached to this application/nomination form.

COPY FORM AS NEEDED

FB-94 Pumper

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- Allison 3000 EVS transmission
- Jake Brake
- Hale Qmax 1500 GPM pump
- Lowered crosslays
- Four 2-½" discharges
(One DS, One OS, Two DS rear)
- One 1-½" front bumper discharge
- One 3" - 5" OS LDH discharge
- Two 1-¾" preconnects
- One 3" deck gun plumbing
- Front suction
- 172" aluminum rescue body
- 1000 gallon L-shaped poly tank
- Three hosebed dividers
- Ladder package: 24', 14', & 10'
- Painted AMDOR roll-up doors
- Whelen LED NFPA lighting & siren package
- Federal Q2B siren
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- WHELEN M9 SERIES LED EMERGENCY LIGHTING
- PER4MAX® SEAT BELTS
- CREWGUARD™ BODY
- WHISPERQUIET™ INSULATION PACKAGE
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BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING SKILLS, AND LEADING BOLDLY

Battalion Chief Laura Arrington, President of Women of Fire & EMS Section of VFCA

The First Annual Women of Fire & EMS Professional Development Conference

Virginia Fire Chiefs Association's, Women in Fire & EMS Section, is proud to announce that it has teamed up with Martinsville Fire & EMS to hold the First Annual Women of Fire & EMS Professional Development Conference, taking place September 26-28, 2025 in Martinsville, Virginia. The groundbreaking event is designed to empower, educate, and connect women in fire and EMS across the Commonwealth and beyond.

A Conference with Purpose

With the theme "Break Barriers, Build Skills, and Lead Boldly," this inaugural gathering provides a dedicated platform for women in fire and EMS to strengthen their professional capabilities while celebrating leadership, teamwork, service, and networking. The program combines various hands-on-training (HOT) classes, EMS classes (CEU's), and a leadership class (CEU)- offering something valuable for both seasoned professionals and those early in their careers. Although this program is being ran by the Womens Fire & EMS section, this program is open to all Fire and EMS professionals, at any career level, at no cost.

Training Highlights

Hot Classes

- Air Track Management with Instructors Dwayne Robertson (Martinsville Fire & EMS), John Taylor (Retired Abbey Fire, UK), Logan Peters (Martinsville Fire & EMS), & Landon Hill (Martinsville Fire & EMS).
- Extrication with Instructor Eddie Chitwood (Retired Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department) and John Foutze (Franklin County Department of Public Safety) & Genesis Rep Michael Goyer
- Forcible Entry with Instructor Joseph Smallwood (Martinsville Fire & EMS), & Adam Wood (Henry County Department of Public Safety)
- Fireground Tactics (VES) with Instructor Eric Dillon (Martinsville Fire & EMS)

EMS Classes

- Pediatric Assessment for EMS with Instructors Bryan Byrd & Tanya Trevilian (Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital)
- Pre-Hospital STEMI with Instructor Dr. Bhogal (SOVAH Martinsville)
- Penetrating Trauma with Instructors Ottilia Lewis & Afton Jamerson
- Documentation (Trauma Registry) with Instructor Caitlyn Mitchell (Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital)
- Air Life Presentations: Airway and Ventilation & Capnography/Cardiology with Instructors Gary Ayers and Bryan Ferguson (Airlife/Air Methods)

Leadership Class

- Pushing for Success with Instructor Deputy Chief Marci Stone (Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department)

Meet Some of the Instructors

John Taylor, Retired 26 year officer with Abbey Fire, UK, Author of Smoke Burns, and developer of Air Track Management Curriculum. John Taylor, author of Smoke Burns and developer of **Air Track Management (ATM)**, has transformed the way firefighters understand fire behavior. His work emphasizes that "smoke burns" and that managing airflow—the air track—is as critical as water application in controlling a fire. Drawing on international research and years of service, Taylor created ATM to give firefighters practical, physics-based tools for safer and more effective operations. His book and training continue to shape modern firefighting tactics worldwide.

Lieutenant Adam Wood, Henry County Public Safety, FF/Medic, Martinsville Fire & EMS With more than eight years of career service and five years as a volunteer, Lt. Adam Wood is passionate about ensuring firefighters and EMS providers gain both the knowledge and hands-on training necessary to succeed. A long-time enthusiast of forcible and respectful entry, he thrives on teaching techniques that allow first responders to operate with confidence. Hearing success stories from students who applied his lessons in real-world incidents drives his commitment to training.

Joey Smallwood, FF/Medic with Martinsville Fire & EMS Starting his career as a volunteer at just 17, Joey Smallwood has grown into a highly skilled and respected firefighter. His journey from volunteer to professional has been marked by learning from seasoned mentors and continuously honing his craft across the state. Guided by his personal motto, "one fluid motion," Smallwood focuses on achieving efficiency and effectiveness in every aspect of firefighting. His dedication to lifelong learning and skill mastery makes him an invaluable instructor for this course.

Marci Stone, Deputy Fire Chief, Roanoke Fire and EMS Deputy Chief Marci Stone of Roanoke Fire-EMS has built a career defined by leadership, resilience, and service. Beginning as one of the department's first female firefighter/paramedics, she rose through the ranks while balancing challenges both on and off the job. With extensive experience in operations, emergency preparedness, and executive leadership, she has guided departments through critical incidents and continues to shape policy and training that strengthen Virginia's fire service. A graduate of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program and an advocate for advancing women in fire and EMS, Stone exemplifies professionalism and commitment to community safety.

Virginia Fire Chiefs Association and the Womens Fire and EMS section will continue to release bios on their social media platforms, so stay tuned for more information.

Why This Matters

The Women of Fire & EMS Professional Development Conference marked a historic step forward for Virginia's fire service community. By creating a space for mentorship, networking and skill-building, the VFCA invested in the growth and success of women across the fire and EMS professions. This event was not just about training – it was about building a stronger, more inclusive future for the fire service. VFCA looks forward to bringing more opportunities for the future of fire and EMS professionals in the Commonwealth.

Preparing for Your Transition to NERIS



The National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) is a next-generation, cloud-based platform designed to modernize how fire departments nationwide collect, analyze, and report incident data. NERIS offers real-time intelligence, mobile-first design, and enhanced cybersecurity.

NERIS is replacing the legacy NFIRS system. NFIRS will stop accepting new incident reports after 2025 and sunset in January 2026 making the transition essential for accurate reporting. While historical data remains accessible for download until January 31, 2026.

Departments across Virginia should begin onboarding to NERIS in September 2025 as part of FEMA Region 3. NERIS reporting will also be required to qualify for the Aid to Localities (ATL) Grant from VDFP starting in June 2026. Additional information will be released as the policy is still under development by the Virginia Fire Services Board.

VDFP has developed a landing page with General NERIS/Onboarding Information which can be accessed [here](#)

Any questions can be sent via email to Communityrisk@vdfp.virginia.gov or phone – 804-249-1982.

2025 MEMORIAL SERVICE TO BE HELD

The Annual VFCA Memorial Service for those we have lost during 2025 will be held once again during the 2026 Virginia Fire Rescue Conference held in Virginia Beach on February 18, 2026. If your department has lost a member during 2025, you are asked to pass that information on to us. On-line electronic submittal of nominations is preferred and the appropriate information can be found on the VFCA web site at www.vfca.us. For those departments unable to submit an on-line nomination, the attached form can be used and mailed to:

Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 699
Blackstone, Virginia 23824

Questions may be referred to Chris Eudailey, VFCA Executive Director, email executivedirector@vfca.us

MEMORIAL INFORMATION SHEET

Name of Deceased _____

Fire Department Name: _____

Date of Death: _____

Cause of Death (if available): _____

Fire Department Contact Person: _____

Fire Department Address: _____

Fire Department Telephone Number: _____

Submitted By: _____ Telephone Number: _____



AMBULANCES



Prince William County Fire & Rescue

Congrats on your recent purchase of six Braun Chief XL
Ford F-550 4X4 Diesel Type I Ambulances!



Credit: Andrew Sanders Photograph



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- ▶ **Fuel** Gas
- ▶ **Box** 1,000 lb
- ▶ **Towing** 2,500 lb



RANGER XD 1500

- ▶ **Available in** Standard Cab or Crew Cab
- ▶ **Seats** 3-6
- ▶ **HVAC Models** Available
- ▶ **Payload** Up to 2,150 lb
- ▶ **Engine** 4-Stroke DOHC 1500 cc
- ▶ **110 HP**
- ▶ **Fuel** Gas
- ▶ **Box** 1,500 lb
- ▶ **Towing** 3,500 lb



RANGER XP KINETIC

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- ▶ **Seats** 3
- ▶ **Payload** Up to 1,500 lb
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- ▶ **110 HP**
- ▶ **Box** 1,250 lb
- ▶ **Towing** 2,500 lb

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- ▶ Waterax Versax 8hp pump with electric start
- ▶ Electric Hannay Reel, 75' Hose
- ▶ 2.5 gal foam



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FIRE & RESCUE SKID

- ▶ Folding convertible rescue litter
- ▶ 60 gal or 75 gal copoly water tank
- ▶ Waterax Versax 9hp or 6hp pump
- ▶ Manual Hannay Reel, 75' Hose (Electric available)
- ▶ 2.5 gal foam available
- ▶ Draft hose kit available

Fire Safe College Housing



What you need to look for.

Here are some good questions for college students and parents to ask before moving into a dormitory or signing an apartment lease.

- ✔ Are there working smoke alarms in each bedroom, outside of sleeping areas, and on each level of the building?
- ✔ Are there at least two ways out of each room and the building?
- ✔ Do the upper levels of the building have at least two sets of stairs inside and/or a fire escape?
- ✔ Are there exit signs in the hallways to show the way out?
- ✔ Are there enough electrical outlets for all appliances, computers, printers and electronics — without using an extension cord?
- ✔ Has the building's heating system been inspected recently (in the last year)?
- ✔ Does the building have a sprinkler system?
- ✔ Does the building have a fire alarm system?
- ✔ Does the sprinkler or fire alarm system send a signal to the local fire department and/or campus security?
- ✔ Is the building address clearly posted so emergency services can find it quickly if they need to?



For more information and free resources, visit
www.usfa.fema.gov



HIRING FOR RESILIENCE AND INTEGRITY: WHY PRE-HIRE PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS BELONG IN EVERY FIRE/EMS AGENCY

Fred M. Rafilson, Ph.D.

Fire and EMS chiefs make some of the most consequential hiring decisions in public service. Technical skills and physical fitness are necessary, but not sufficient: our people must also demonstrate sound judgment under pressure, prosocial motivation, integrity, and the capacity to cope with repeated exposure to trauma.

A structured, job-relevant pre-hire psychological evaluation is one of the most efficient ways to reduce preventable risk, improve retention, and align your workforce with your community's expectations. While the fire service already embraces **NFPA 1582 medical standards** and the **IAFF/IAFC Wellness-Fitness Initiative (WFI)**, a pre-employment psychological screen complements these frameworks by focusing on suitability for duty at the moment of hire.

The Fire/EMS Risk Profile: What the Science Says (and Doesn't)

Evidence shows elevated behavioral-health burden in fire/EMS compared with the general population, but estimates vary widely by study design and sample. Systematic reviews place **probable PTSD** among firefighters at approximately 12% on average (with individual studies ranging from ~2–57%) and **depressive symptoms** around ~19%. Among paramedics, pooled **12-month PTSD prevalence** is reported near 20%.

While prevalence estimates vary, the key takeaway is clear: exposure risk is high, and proactive screening and support are prudent steps to safeguard personnel.

Suicide risk in first responders also remains a serious concern; federal and nonprofit reviews point to **elevated suicide risk** relative to the general workforce, though precise relative-risk estimates differ across datasets. These findings should be treated as a **call to action**—implementing layered supports like **pre-hire suitability screening, annual behavioral-health evaluations, peer support programs, and readily accessible treatment options.**

Where Pre-Hire Psych Fits Beside NFPA and WFI

NFPA 1582 (2022+) now requires **annual behavioral-health screening** as part of the occupational medical evaluation, including validated measures for PTSD, depression, suicidality, and substance use. That annual screening is critical—but it occurs **after** hiring.

Adding a **pre-employment psychological suitability evaluation** ensures candidates begin their careers with the temperament and coping resources needed for this demanding work. When combined with annual screenings and

wellness programs, agencies create a robust, multilayered risk-management approach.

Similarly, the **IAFF/IAFC Wellness-Fitness Initiative** underscores the need for ongoing behavioral-health evaluations throughout a firefighter's career—another reason to align hiring with principles of **early identification and proactive support.**

Virginia Context

Many Virginia jurisdictions already incorporate psychological evaluations into firefighter and medic hiring processes while adhering to **NFPA 1582** medical standards. For example:

- **City of Alexandria** explicitly requires psychological evaluations for firefighter candidates.
- **Arlington County** integrates NFPA 1582 standards into hiring and wellness processes.
- **Virginia EMS** regulations set agency-wide personnel standards but leave pre-hire psychological screening requirements to local jurisdictions.

This creates an opportunity for Virginia fire and EMS agencies to adopt **consistent, evidence-based evaluation programs** statewide.

What a Fire/EMS-Focused Psychological Evaluation Should—and Shouldn't—Do

A public-safety psychological evaluation is **not** a clinical treatment assessment and not a diagnostic exploration. It is a **job-suitability evaluation** anchored to the agency's job analysis and essential functions, designed to estimate the likelihood that a candidate can perform safely, ethically, and reliably.

For fire and EMS, evaluations focus on attributes like:

- Judgment under ambiguity
- Teamwork in high-stakes environments
- Stress resilience and frustration tolerance
- Prosocial motivation and impulse control
- Conscientiousness and attention to safety

This approach prioritizes **job-relevant competencies** rather than clinical labels, helping leaders make clear, defensible hiring decisions.

Elements of a Defensible, Fire/EMS-Specific Program

1. Job Analysis and Localization

Start with essential tasks—fire suppression, EMS response, rescue operations, incident command—and translate these into behavioral criteria tied directly to safe performance.

2. Validated Assessment Battery

Use tools with demonstrated reliability and validity in public-safety selection. Include broadband personality measures, integrity assessments, and targeted stress-tolerance indices.

3. Structured, Job-Focused Interview

A psychologist-led interview integrates testing data with observed behaviors and history, focusing on patterns predictive of safe performance in high-reliability teams.

4. Clear, Actionable Reporting

Deliver concise, defensible recommendations tied directly to essential job functions and provide consultation to HR and command staff as needed.

5. Standardization and Documentation

Ensure consistent administration, scoring, and reporting to strengthen legal defensibility and build trust among candidates and leadership.

6. Integration with NFPA 1582 and WFI

Pre-hire psychological evaluations complement—not replace—annual screenings, wellness programs, and peer-support networks.

Why Many Departments Now Use Online Evaluations

Modern, web-enabled assessments have made implementation more efficient and candidate-friendly. Fire and EMS agencies benefit from:

- **Improved access** for rural and urban departments alike
- **Standardized administration** and auditable scoring
- **Real-time analytics** to identify risk trends
- **Positive candidate experience**, especially among younger, digital-native cohorts

This hybrid approach—combining validated testing with structured interviews—provides the rigor departments need while minimizing hiring delays.

Implementation Guide for Virginia Fire/EMS Leaders

- **Define your scope:** Clarify whether evaluations will apply to firefighters, medics, or both.
- **Select qualified evaluators:** Choose psychologists experienced in public-safety selection and familiar with NFPA 1582/WFI.
- **Codify procedures:** Establish clear testing protocols, reporting templates, and retention policies.
- **Coordinate with NFPA 1582:** Ensure pre-hire evaluations and annual screenings complement one another.
- **Communicate openly with candidates:** Explain goals, processes, and privacy protections to foster trust.
- **Measure outcomes:** Link evaluation results to probation completion, retention, and behavioral indicators.

Frequently Asked Concerns

“Is there a national standard?”

Unlike law enforcement POST frameworks, the fire service lacks a single, nationally mandated standard. Agencies are encouraged to develop locally relevant programs anchored in validated tools and behavioral job criteria.

“Won’t annual NFPA 1582 screening cover this?”

No. NFPA 1582’s behavioral-health screenings are ongoing and clinical. Pre-hire evaluations focus on suitability for duty at time of hire, making them a complementary layer of risk management.

“Do Virginia agencies already use psych evals?”

Yes. Several localities—including Alexandria and Arlington—require psychological evaluations. However, practices are not yet standardized statewide, leaving room

for alignment on best practices.

The Bottom Line

Hiring well is wellness. A rigorous, job-relevant psychological evaluation—integrated with NFPA 1582 and the IAFF/IAFC Wellness-Fitness Initiative—helps ensure that the people we welcome into our stations protect our communities and each other, not just with technical skill, but also with judgment, resilience, and integrity.

Done right, pre-hire psychological evaluations increase fairness, reduce organizational risk, and promote long, healthy careers in Virginia’s fire and EMS service.

About NTN’s National Pre-Hire Psychological Evaluation Program

National Testing Network (NTN) offers a **comprehensive, evidence-based pre-hire psychological evaluation program** tailored for **fire and EMS agencies nationwide**. Our process integrates job-specific analyses, validated assessments, and structured interviews to deliver clear, defensible recommendations fully aligned with **NFPA 1582**, the **IAFF/IAFC Wellness-Fitness Initiative**, and Virginia agency requirements.

NTN’s program helps Virginia agencies hire candidates who are not only technically qualified but also **psychologically prepared** for the demands of the job. Whether your department is establishing a program for the first time or improving an existing one, NTN provides scalable solutions and seamless integration into your current hiring systems.

For more information or to discuss implementing psychological evaluations for your agency, contact the author:

Fred M. Rafilson, Ph.D.

Vice President

National Testing Network

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ON THE MOVE & ODDS AND ENDS

VFCA Past President Vance Cooper retired after 35 years of public service with the Virginia Beach Fire Department as the Deputy Fire Chief. President Good and 2nd VP Stone presented Chief Cooper with VFCA Life Membership at his retirement ceremony on August 28, 2025. Pictured below is Retired Deputy Chief Cooper with current and past VFCA Board of Directors and staff. Congratulations!

Photo: Kevin Good



York County Fire Chief steps down after 50 years of service

York County Fire Chief Stephen P. Kopczynski has officially retired from the Department of Fire and Life Safety after serving for over 50 years in the department, 36.5 years as chief.

Kopczynski began his career as a firefighter in 1974, before becoming fire chief in 1988. According to the department, Kopczynski has developed many programs to prevent emergencies as well as improve the health, safety, and wellness of department personnel.

He was also key in establishing a fire and rescue command school, now known as the Hampton Roads Fire Officer Academy, as well as the Peninsula Regional Live Fire Training Facility.

Steve was recently awarded LIFE MEMBERSHIP in the VFCA and plans to remain active with a Virginia Fire Chiefs Association,

Effective July 1, Allen W. Baldwin will succeed Chief Kopczynski as Fire Chief.

Albemarle County fire chief to retire after decades of service

Albemarle County Fire Rescue Chief Dan Eggleston has announced his retirement, effective October 24, 2025. His decision will conclude a distinguished career with more than 40 years of service in the fire profession, including 23 years leading the Albemarle County Department of Fire Rescue (ACFR).

During Eggleston's tenure, Albemarle County Fire Rescue has constructed four new fire stations, hired more than 200 career firefighters and entered into multiple international partnerships. Albemarle County will begin the recruitment process for a successor in the coming weeks

VA Association of Hazardous Materials Response Specialists Steve Grainer passes

We are sad to announce that Steve Grainer, our PSA Community Director and Morning Host here at WIGO Country, passed away June 26th. Steve was a valued member of our team for over eight years. On Wednesday, June 11th, Steve was admitted to St. Mary's Hospital in Richmond, where he was diagnosed with Glioblastoma, an aggressive, malignant brain tumor.

After his retirement from a career in Emergency Services, Steve had returned to radio, a skill he had learned and loved at his college radio station WMRA (JMU) in Harrisonburg. During his tenure with Two Rivers Communications, he worked on live remote broadcasts, music events, and managing our community calendar events feature. His absence is felt among all of us and we will not forget him or his contribution to our stations and broadcasting.

William Jesse "Bill" Thrift Jr.

William "Bill" Jesse Thrift, Jr. departed this life Monday, July 7, 2025. He is predeceased by his parents, Emma and Jesse, and brother Charles. He is survived by his wife of 56 years, Jessie Foster Thrift, daughter Leslie Thrift Jackson and son-in-law, David, his sister Katherine Milby, niece Angela Landes and great nephew Austin Landes. Along with his nurse, Amy Parker Kelly, who took amazing care of him the last year of his life.

Bill was born September 28, 1943 in Richmond, VA and grew up in Remlik. He attended Middlesex County Public Schools. After graduating he served two years of active duty in the U.S. Army and four years in the Reserves. Upon returning he worked for Norton Food Company for 16 years. He then worked as a foreman at Pitts Lumber Company for 36 years.

Most know him as fire chief of the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department and served as such for 34 years. He joined at 18 years old in 1962 and remained a member until his passing. Bill spent countless hours serving his community and one of his greatest accomplishments was helping grow the MVFD to what it is today. He was one of the original members of the Middlesex County Emergency Services Committee and had a pivotal role in bringing 9-1-1 services to the county.

He was a member of the Urbanna Masonic Lodge No. 83 and served as Worshipful Master from 1989-90 and in 2015. Bill served as the District Deputy Grand Master of the 11th Masonic District from 2003-2004. He was also the treasurer of the Urbanna Masonic Lodge for several years.

Bill served on the Urbanna Town Council for 16 years. He had the honor of being the Grand Marshal of the 1999 Urbanna Oyster Festival. Bill was an avid NASCAR fan, enjoyed playing golf and cruising through Urbanna on his golf cart.

A funeral service was held at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, July 14, 2025, at New Hope United Methodist Church, 2489 E. Lewis B Puller Memorial Highway, Saluda.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made in his name to the Middlesex

RIP Chief's...

MANDATORY ONLINE ELECTRIC VEHICLE AND LITHIUM-ION BATTERY FIRE SAFETY AWARENESS COURSE DEADLINE NEARING



The Electric Vehicle and Lithium-Ion Battery Fire Safety Awareness course has now been released.

HB2451 directed VDFP to develop this training and mandates every person engaged in firefighting activities, including volunteer firefighters, to complete the training program by December 1, 2025. Please encourage all personnel to complete the training as soon as possible.

This course is mandatory and must be completed individually. Everyone engaged in firefighting activities must complete this curriculum individually through Cornerstone. The training cannot be completed in groups.

While departments can link to the training in their Learning Management System, Cornerstone OnDemand is the system that will be used to track completions. No other learning management system will be consulted for this data. VDFP can provide a roster of completion from Cornerstone OnDemand upon request.

If any student has trouble logging in to CSOD, they should NOT attempt to create another CSOD account – this will create a problem for them in the future when they try to take another VDFP course. They should try to reset their password and if they are still having trouble accessing the system, they can contact their respective Division Office for assistance.

VFCA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October

1 - 3	Annual Retreat/BOD Meeting 0900 Hours	Harrisonburg
3	11th Annual VFCE/JCC Golf 0800	JCC/Kiskiack
9 & 10	Administrative Professionals Retreat 0800	Stafford

31	Federal/Military Summit 0800 Hours	Williamsburg Fire
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November

13-14	Company Officers Summit 0800 Hours	East Rivanna VFC
18	Executive Officers Meeting 1000 Hours	Virtual

December

16	VFCA Full Board Meeting 1000 Hours	Glen Allen - VDFP
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TENTATIVE 2026 DATES

January

21	Executive Officers Meeting 1000 Hours	Virtual
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February

16-21	Virginia Fire Rescue Conference	VA Beach
18	VFCA Full Board Meeting 1300 hours	VA Beach
18	Fire Board 1000 Hours	VA Beach

VFCA ANNOUNCES NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH LEXIPOL

The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association is proud to announce our new partnership with Lexipol, a trusted leader in public safety policy, training, wellness, and grant services.

Through this partnership, VFCA members receive an exclusive 10% discount on Lexipol's fire service solutions, including:

- Policy Management
- Online Learning
- Wellness App for First Responders
- Grant Assistance

Lexipol's tools help fire departments operate more safely and effectively while staying aligned with best practices.

For more information about the available solutions and discount, please [CLICK HERE](#) to view PDF.



ADVANCING THE FIRE SERVICE TOGETHER: THE SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS WELCOMES VIRGINIA'S FIRE SERVICE LEADERS

Chief Jay Cullinan, President, Southeastern Association of Fire Chiefs

As the fire service continues to evolve in complexity and challenge, regional collaboration and leadership are more critical than ever. The Southeastern Association of Fire Chiefs (SEAFc), a division of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), stands as a vital connection point for senior fire service leaders across the southeastern United States. I am honored to have served as a past-president of the VFCA, and now to serve as the current President of the SEAFc, I'm writing today to highlight our role, our priorities, and how fire service professionals from the Commonwealth of Virginia can get involved and benefit from this growing network.

Who We Are

The SEAFc represents twelve states and territories: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. We bring together career, combination, and volunteer fire chiefs and officers to share best practices, influence regional and national policy, and strengthen the fire service through leadership development and collaboration.

As one of the most active divisions of the IAFC, the SEAFc is committed to supporting its members through advocacy, education, networking opportunities, and resource sharing. We work closely with each state fire chiefs association to ensure we are aligned on regional priorities and equipped to tackle both emerging challenges and long-standing issues in our communities.

Our Mission and Strategic Focus

The SEAFc's mission is to "provide leadership to career, combination, and volunteer chief fire officers, managers of emergency service organizations, and future leaders by providing education, information, services, and representation to advance the fire and emergency service."

In the year ahead, our work will be guided by three central areas of focus:

1. Increasing Member Return on Investment

We will ensure that every SEAFc member experiences meaningful value by enhancing access to practical resources, timely information, and collaborative opportunities that directly support their departments and professional growth.

2. Advancing Leadership Development and Refinement

We are committed to delivering relevant and forward-thinking leadership education—designed to develop emerging leaders and refine the skills of seasoned executives—so our members are better prepared to meet today's challenges and lead with excellence.

3. Expanding Member Engagement and Inclusivity

We will broaden our outreach and engagement efforts to meet the diverse needs of our membership, ensuring all voices are heard, connections are strengthened,

and support is available regardless of geography, department size, or role.

We are developing plans to support these priorities through expanded regional training, virtual offerings, collaborative partnerships, and intentional efforts to better connect with our members across the Southeast.

Why Virginia's Involvement Matters

Virginia's fire service has long been a leader in innovation, training, and professional standards. Your voice is critical to ensuring our region's fire service remains strong, unified, and forward-thinking. Through the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (VFCA), many of you already play an important role at the state level. The SEAFc offers a way to extend that impact—across borders, across systems, and across specialties.

Participation in SEAFc connects Virginia's leaders with counterparts across the Southeast who are navigating similar challenges—from staffing and recruitment to community risk reduction and incident management. It's a powerful venue to share ideas, learn from others, and shape the future of our profession.

Virginia has a strong presence in the SEAFc, and we would love to see that grow. This year, along with myself as the President, Virginia is also represented in the SEAFc's leadership by our 1st Vice-President Allen Baldwin (York), and your Virginia Director, Matt Fox (Fredericksburg). Whether you're a chief officer looking to expand your network, a mid-level officer seeking mentorship and training, or an up-and-coming leader looking to contribute—SEAFc has a place for you.

Save the Date: SEAFc Conference – Savannah, GA June 2–4, 2026

One of the best opportunities to engage with the SEAFc is through our annual leadership conference. I'm thrilled to announce that the 2026 SEAFc Leadership Conference will be held in conjunction with the Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs' Conference June 2–4, 2026, in beautiful Savannah, Georgia.

This event brings together fire service leaders from across the Southeast for three days of training, networking, and inspiration. Attendees will benefit from nationally recognized speakers, vendor showcases with cutting-edge technology and apparatus, and the invaluable opportunity to build relationships with peers who understand the demands and rewards of leading in today's fire service.

Get Involved

To learn more about the SEAFc and how to get involved:

- Visit our website: www.seafc.org
- Follow us on social media
- Reach out to your Virginia SEAFc representatives or contact me directly

As we move toward the 2026 conference and beyond, I invite you to bring your leadership, experience, and ideas to the table. Together, we can strengthen not just our departments, but the fire service across the Southeast.



WE'VE LOST LAUGHTER IN THE FIREHOUSE. IT'S TIME TO ADMIT WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE DOING.

Stephanie White

This article originally was published in Fire Engineering. It is being reprinted with permission.

Photo by Tim Olk. (olke.smuqmu.com)



Walk into any firehouse these days and it's always a gamble what the atmosphere may be. A silent crew around the kitchen table, a dayroom full of laughter, noses buried in their phones in silence on the bay sofas.

There's a myriad of factors that have led us to shift away from camaraderie in the firehouse, but today we're going to tackle just one: the loss of laughter.

- **The Firehouse Kitchen Table: The Importance of the Morning Meeting**
- **Halton: Anti-Social Media vs. The Table**
- **Seven Trust Busters That Damage Your Team**

Somewhere along the way we started to become afraid of joking. After watching a buddy or two get in trouble for a joke that someone took offense to, it's kind of a no-brainer that some firefighters became wary of making jokes in mixed company. I wince every time a woman I don't know walks into the kitchen and I feel the need to stop joking...and I'm a woman.

It's become part of our culture that it is better not to joke around than to accidentally offend someone and get smacked by a stack of paperwork. Add in the mind-numbing online harassment training we must suffer through every year and it's sometimes just easier to stay quiet.

It turns out the joke is on us. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) came out with a report that admitted that firehouses might not have been so far off the mark with how we handle in-house problems in the first place.

A [2016 EEOC report](#) stated that "Training Must Change. Much of the training done over the last 30 years has not worked as a prevention tool—it's been too focused on simply avoiding legal liability. We believe effective training can reduce workplace harassment, and recognize that ineffective training can be unhelpful

or even counterproductive. However, even effective training cannot occur in a vacuum—it must be part of a holistic culture of non-harassment that starts at the top. Similarly, one size does not fit all: Training is most effective when tailored to the specific workforce and workplace, and to different cohorts of employees. Finally, when trained correctly, middle-managers and first-line supervisors in particular can be an employer's most valuable resource in preventing and stopping harassment."

Multiple studies have shown that the most effective way to handle problems is at the lowest level, that is, the kitchen table. When we create an environment where we can call out someone for going too far or have the space to apologize for a joke that landed wrong, we create a culture that's more likely to not ostracize someone. It's what we've often done, and somewhere along the way we became afraid of it. As it turns out, research says it's still the best way.

An article titled "[30 years of harassment training hasn't fixed a thing. Here's what leaders should do instead](#)" points out: "When there's a lack of inclusion, that means there are weak social connections between employees, creating more potential for employee misunderstandings and conflict. The weak social connections also mean there's less tolerance in the face of misunderstandings and a propensity to assume bad intent rather than just think of a situation as a simple misunderstanding."

Translation: weak social connections make us more likely to be offended by one another. So how do we build strong social connections? Well, one place to start is the kitchen table. Laughter is a key tool in social bonding between people, and it also allows people to feel safe in their environment.

Joking at the kitchen table isn't just a fun thing to do. It brings down the levels of stress hormones in your body and helps to bring down your "fight or flight" response. Sophie Scott, director of the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience at University College London, told CNBC in an interview that laughter also helps to reduce the level of adrenaline and cortisol in the body, which are known as the anxiety and stress hormones.

"You get an increased uptake of endorphins when you've been laughing and those are the body's natural painkillers," she added.

Importantly, Scott said, humans seem to use endorphins as a bonding mechanism. She explained that people tend to do things that are associated with the release of endorphins, like laughing, with other people, so these activities are actually "reinforcing your sense of being affiliated with those people."

At the end of the day laughter is an essential tool for our health and bonding capabilities. Don't take my word for it: science said so.

We've also been training people how to handle harassment incorrectly for the past 30 years and have instead been ostracizing people. Bring laughter back to the firehouse. Bring back a model of training that involves handling problems at the lowest level when possible instead of shooting any offense off to the highest level. Allow people to apologize for their mistakes. If we truly take accountability for the atmosphere in our own firehouse we create a space where people can live—and laugh—for 24+ hours.

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Stephanie White is a 19-year veteran of the fire service, and has spent the past 17 years as a professional firefighter/paramedic in a metropolitan fire department. Throughout her career, she has been actively involved in firefighter health and safety as a personal trainer, cancer awareness educator, and a trained mental health peer.

More recently Stephanie re-worded and posted her thoughts on Facebook.

Walk into a firehouse now and it feels... off.

Quiet table. Eyes glued to phones. Maybe a fake chuckle or two. But that loud, gut-level firehouse laugh that echoes into the bay? Gone.

We did that.

We made people scared to joke.

We let write ups and hurt feelings and HR videos turn us into a room full of eggshells. We stopped saying what we really thought because it was safer to say nothing at all.

And here's the cruel part:

It didn't even work...figures

The EEOC (the feds who make these rules) even admitted it:

Thirty years of harassment training hasn't fixed a thing. Why? Because it never built culture. It just built paperwork, mistrust, and took our ability to hash out problems away from us.

We already knew what worked.

We've always known.

Handle it at the table, or on the back ramp.

When a joke crosses a line, call it out. When you screw up, own it and apologize. Then move on. That's how you keep people part of the crew instead of pushing them out. Taking away peoples chance to apologize, talk things through, and work a problem out? Maybe we just found the first problem with why leaders are struggling. We've created a culture of just watch out for number 1.

We got scared. We let fear of investigations replace accountability.

And that fear? It broke our bonds.

You can feel it. Weak connections make everything worse. More misunderstandings, more resentment, more people assuming bad intent. And the calls? They don't exactly go well in the middle of all that.

Wanna fix it?

Start laughing again. Hold each other accountable when something stupid is said.

Laughter isn't just fun; it's medicine.

It drops cortisol and adrenaline. It spikes endorphins - your body's own painkillers. It's how humans build trust. Trust is kind of necessary for what we do.

We've been teaching the wrong lessons for decades.

We taught people to shut up instead of step up. We stopped owning the atmosphere in our own house because we saw too many guys hit with paperwork before they ever got the chance to clear up a misunderstanding.

Enough.

We don't need another video. We don't need another policy.

We need to bring back the damn kitchen table.

Call each other out when you need to, but don't kill the humor that keeps us human.

NEW RESEARCH UNCOVERS GENE IMPACTS OF PFAS EXPOSURE IN FIREFIGHTER

A new paper provides evidence of how PFAS, often called "forever chemicals," correspond to epigenetic changes that can lead to cancers, neurological disorders and autoimmune conditions. Researchers at the University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health found that certain kinds of long-lasting chemicals firefighters are exposed to may affect the activity of genes linked to cancer and other diseases. The findings appear in the journal *Environmental Research*.

The study is among the first to connect common industrial chemicals called PFAS – per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances – to changes in microRNAs, or miRNAs, which are molecules that act as guardrails to help control gene expression.

PFAS are found in a wide range of products, including upholstery, insulation, electronics, cleaning products, fabrics, non-stick cookware – and firefighting foam and gear. Firefighters can be at higher risk for certain cancers, and exposure to toxic chemicals may be one reason why.

"Firefighters tend to have higher PFAS levels due to their occupational exposures," said first author Melissa Furlong, PhD, an assistant professor of environmental health sciences at the Zuckerman College of Public Health and a member of both the University of Arizona Cancer Center and the Center for Firefighter Health Collaborative Research. "Gene activity can be affected by changes in the environment. We wanted to see the imprint of PFAS exposure on miRNAs and evaluate which ones might be associated with diseases."

The scientists analyzed blood samples from 303 firefighters from six locations across the U.S. to measure levels of nine PFAS and corresponding miRNA activity. Changes in miRNAs can play roles in a range of different diseases, including cancers and neurological disorders.

They found that blood levels of certain PFAS in this group of firefighters were associated with changes in specific miRNA activity. The latter were connected to disease pathways for several cancers, neurological disorders and autoimmune conditions.

GOV. GLENN YOUNGKIN ANNOUNCED DEPLOYMENT OF VIRGINIA SWIFT WATER RESCUE TEAMS TO HELP WITH TEXAS FLOOD RESPONSE

In response to the catastrophic flooding impacting portions of the State of Texas, Governor Glenn Youngkin announced in early July the deployment of two Virginia Type III Swift Water Rescue Teams to assist in the ongoing recovery efforts. The teams, hailing from Bristol and Virginia Beach, deployed to Texas.

Eight members of the Virginia Beach Fire Department's Swift Water Rescue Team, VA-2, and additional members of Bristol VA Team 4 deployed on Sunday, 7/6/25 to assist with ongoing flood response operations.

"Our hearts go out to the families and communities in Texas who have been devastated by these historic floods," **said Governor Glenn Youngkin.** "We stand in solidarity with the people of Texas, and we are committed to offering any and all support requested during this critical time."

The teams are equipped with specialized equipment and technical rescue gear necessary to navigate treacherous floodwaters. They will work closely with local and state agencies to help search impacted areas. This deployment is at the request of the Texas Division of Emergency Management through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). EMAC is a mutual aid system that allows states to provide assistance and resources to each other during emergencies and disasters. Additional information on the EMAC process can be found at emacweb.org.

At this time both Teams are back in Virginia after being deployed in Texas for nearly three weeks.

The teams reunited with family and friends during a homecoming on 7/22.

The teams conducted extensive operations, including water and shoreline searches in very challenging terrain.

"We were assigned to the Missouri FEMA Task Force, and we were basically put in charge of all the water when we were there," said VBFD Captain McQuarrie

"We spent the 18 days, kind of working our way across roughly 20 miles of river, searching debris piles and assisting ground crews traversing dogs across the river to small islands and to assess piles and try to help find people who have been lost in the flood."

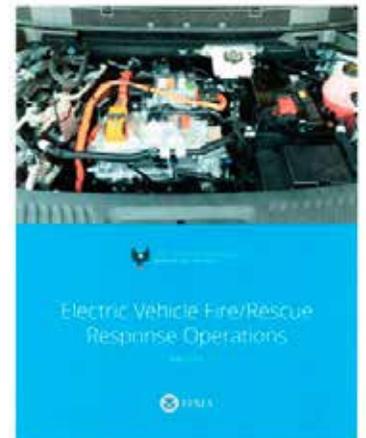


Bristol Virginia Task Force 4

Photo: Bristol FD

Welcome home all!

USFA ELECTRIC VEHICLE FIRE/ RESCUE RESPONSE OPERATIONS MANUAL



The U.S Fire Administration has recently released an Electric Vehicle Fire/Rescue Response and Operations Manual. To access manual go to: [electric-vehicle-fire-rescue-response-operations-pdf](https://www.usfa.fema.gov/electric-vehicle-fire-rescue-response-operations-pdf)

As a reminder, the VDFP Electric Vehicle and Lithium Ion Battery Safety and Awareness course needs to be completed by December 2025.



Update for the team: 7/22/25

Photo: VBFD

U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATION URGENT SAFETY ADVISORY ON HAZARDS INVOLVING FIRE BLANKETS FOR ELECTRIC VEHICLE FIRE SUPPRESSION

The USFA and IAFF strongly advises fire service members NOT to deploy an fire blanket for suppression efforts when responding to an EV fire



Electric vehicle (EV) fires have presented unique suppression challenges to the fire service. Anecdotal information describes these fires as burning hotter and for longer periods than gasoline-powered cars, with an additional threat of reignition that can last for months. In response to these challenges, numerous products claim to improve suppression efforts involving EVs. Many of these claims have not been substantiated through independent scientific testing. Appropriate product standards have not yet been updated to address these products, and in some cases, new standards have yet to be proposed or developed.

The Fire Protection Research Foundation (FPRF), the research affiliate of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and the Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI), part of UL Research Institutes, issued a notice about the potential explosion risk when fire blankets are used during electric vehicle (EV) fire suppression efforts with battery involvement.

- During experiments, EV fire blankets were used to suppress an EV fire with battery involvement. The deployment of a fire blanket eliminated flaming by denying oxygen to the vehicle and the battery fire.
- The blanket eliminated the flaming, but battery thermal runaway propagation continued, resulting in the continued release and accumulation of flammable battery gases into the volume under the blanket.
- In some experiments, the accumulation of flammable gases under the blankets presented an explosion risk to firefighters operating near the vehicle.
- Reintroducing air into an oxygen-depleted accumulation of unburned flammable battery gases can increase the risk of an explosion.

First responders should take the explosion hazard into consideration in their operating procedures and tactics when using fire blankets, especially for fire incidents involving the release of flammable gases.

These findings became apparent during separate research experiments conducted by both organizations.

NFPA's FPRF has conducted research to improve the safety of firefighters responding to EV fires and incidents by assessing the fire service's current firefighting tactics and tools. Assessment of EV Firefighting Techniques and the Impact on Stranded Energy, a research project funded by the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, will be presented at the NFPA Conference and Expo with a report to follow in the fall.

FSRI is also conducting research to improve understanding of hazards related to EV battery fires and to enable the development of firefighting tactics for effective EV fire control. Recent experiments for the Fire Safety of Batteries and Electric Vehicles research project were conducted to evaluate the capability of standard hose stream application, water application with an under-vehicle nozzle, and an EV fire blanket to suppress and establish control of a burning EV with confirmed battery pack fire involvement. Analysis of the video and data from FSRI experiments is underway and will be addressed in detail in FSRI's forthcoming EV research report, which will be available at fsri.org

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