



Summer 2020

# ICFEES

The Official Magazine of the International Association of Fire Chiefs



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### Published For: INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

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### Published By: MATRIX GROUP PUBLISHING INC.

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Toll-Free: 866.999.1299  
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# A Year That I Will Not Forget!



**I DO NOT** know where to begin. The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) staff told me I have only 600 words.

All I can say is that it is a year I will not forget as IAFC president. Little did I know, CEO Mark Light would retire two days into my presidency. On top of Mark's retirement, I was faced with trying to coordinate a CEO search; addressing financial issues that we announced to our members in a letter in July 2019; the coronavirus that caused the shutdown of the economy and impacted fire departments and our members not only

economically but also operationally; and, finally, those who attacked firefighters, apparatus, fire stations and memorials during the protests. Somewhere in between, I kicked off my campaign called "If You Don't Feel Well, Don't Make it Your Farewell," as well as responded to myriad other issues that come up during the course of serving as president.

No person is an island during their term as president. Any success that I can brag about during my presidency is the result of those who surrounded me. My thanks go to the chiefs who serve on our board of directors. Each one is professional and serves with distinction with the overreaching goal of serving our Association and the fire service.

I am honored to have served with them. I also want to thank Interim CEO/ Executive Director Rob Brown and many members of the IAFC. Their value and contributions were extremely noticeable and profound during the several months that the coronavirus impacted fire departments when there was difficulty getting personal protective equipment (PPE) and when departments experienced the economic fallout when tax revenues affected budgets. Many worked long hours and weekends to see the needs of our members, and the fire service was met.

My path to becoming president of the IAFC is nothing I ever planned or thought of. The first thought of running for second vice president came several months before I filed for office when I was complaining to someone that I just stepped off IAFC's EMS Section Executive Board as a past chair, and I tried to get on committees and was not accepted. That person told me to forget about getting on a committee and that I should run for second vice president, which would lead me to the presidency. I brushed off their comments. I got more phone calls from that person and others whom that person had called.

Eventually, I decided to run with only one goal in mind: I wanted to make a difference, to serve our association, members, and the fire service. I feel that I have fulfilled my original plan.

In my closing speech after I was sworn in last August, I said, "Over the next year, I will serve and fulfill my role with professionalism and pride. I will adhere to my principles of servant leadership by serving others before self. I will dream unapologetically of the unlimited possibilities for our association, and I will lead with passion." I have no regrets that I achieved all those promises. Thank you! It was an honor to serve our association and membership.

## **FIRE CHIEF GARY LUDWIG**

*IAFC President and Chairman of the Board*

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# Mental Health: Playing with Fire

**W**hen Ed Rush does presentations about mental health in the fire service, he puts a plush elephant at the front of the room. He doesn't say anything about it, instead carrying on with his discussion.

Though it can take a bit of time, eventually someone mentions the elephant in the room — a parallel to how, historically, mental health in the fire service has been a topic everyone knows exists yet isn't willing to discuss. But, thankfully, we're starting to see this change.

Rush, deputy chief for the Elmsford Fire Department and a retired chief from the Hartsdale Fire Department in New York, is on the board of the Volunteer and Combinations Officers Section (VCOS) of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). He's been in the fire service for 44 years and says he's seen a shift of how mental health is viewed. Before, it was a taboo topic, something that wasn't discussed, and therefore wasn't thought to be an issue.

But it was an issue and still is one to address today. About 20-22% of firefighters experience post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), compared to 7-8% of the general public.<sup>1</sup> According to a 2015 study of 1,027 current and retired firefighters, 46.8% of them had thought about suicide, while 19.2% planned for and 15.5% attempted it.<sup>2</sup>

Working in the fire service is a stressful job, which has been even more heightened during the current times of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Individual calls can be traumatic, plus chiefs have an added pressure of managing a team — that's not to mention what's going on at home.

Rush can relate to this. When he started his position as chief, he had a number of stressful and emotional events in his personal life, including close family members passing away. No one knew what he was going through, except for his wife, a good listener who has been his go-to person to talk to. Still, Rush started experiencing severe anxiety — though he didn't know to call it that until after doing a bit of research on his own — and this started to dominate his thought process.

He took the step to reach out for professional help, and it worked. Rush found out what he was going through was a normal reaction to the stress he was experiencing in both his

professional and personal life. Events in our lives can build up to create cumulative stress, filling up our internal "stress jar," as psychologist Dr. Robin Grant-Hall calls it.

The stress jar often starts filling up right from childhood, and, over the years of adulthood, layers and layers of stressful events are added



to it, including traumatic events for some people. If you are a firefighter, it is almost impossible not to add traumatic events to your stress jar because of the nature of the career regarding sensory overload (what is seen, heard and smelled) as well as overwhelming thoughts and feelings.

As the stress jar becomes full, a variety of symptoms often emerge such as irritability, moodiness, sleep problems, low frustration tolerance, anger, depression and anxiety. Grant-Hall, who specializes in trauma and first responders, says she works with people to unload the stress jar, one item at a time.

One way to do this is through eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, which uses what is called bilateral stimulation (eye movements, sound, hand tappers) to open up and stimulate the entire brain at once. While the brain is in this activated state, the “bad” fire calls or other life events are re-organized in the brain in a more adaptive manner and sent to long-term memory. Grant-Hall says EMDR might sound a bit strange, but it works, resulting in an overall feeling of calmness and contentment.

Grant-Hall explains that when you experience unexpected, overwhelming events, there is an actual biochemical brain change or an internal brain injury. You don’t emerge as the same person. For first responders, a low, medium, or high-level call could all result in a traumatic experience. When these memories stick with you, you may have recurring dreams or become triggered by certain sights, smells and calls. When the brain is “stuck” in trauma mode, people often develop PTS or PTSD, but it can be worked through and resolved with trauma therapy such as EMDR.

“I think it’s impossible to be a firefighter and not have some calls that stick with you from across your career,” Grant-Hall says. “If you’re going to go into this job, you have to know it’s going to impact you no matter what. Firefighters need to start taking care of themselves as well as they care for others.”

*“One thing we have discovered is that a lot of the time, my colleagues are not willing to talk about mental health on their own — they need to be asked about it.”*

She says mini debriefs among crews after medium and high-level calls can be helpful to bring down stress levels. It’s also important to figure out the best way for you to unwind, whether that’s exercising, spending time in nature or working on a hobby. She also recommends that people incorporate therapies like EMDR into their life just like yearly physicals. That way, you can clear out your brain before problems arise or worsen.

Chuck Flynn found EMDR helpful in his mental wellness journey. Flynn, who is the chief of Suffield Fire Department and the VCOS chair, experienced cumulative stress from both his personal and work life. This started to show outwardly, though not necessarily at the fire hall. For example, he says he had road rage, getting upset about things that didn’t used to bother him. He also started having dreams of past calls.

“I grew up with the mindset that you take care of yourself internally, that these things shall pass and that you rely on your faith,” Flynn says, adding that he was skeptical of seeing a mental health professional.

Eventually, Flynn did reach out for help. At first, he and his mental health professional had casual conversations and eventually EMDR sessions. Flynn felt the release of some of his pent-up anger.

Today, Flynn doesn’t see a therapist on a regular basis but does still make time to de-stress, like spending time outdoors, listening to the sounds of birds and crickets, being a part of nature. This perhaps is a different image — sitting outside, being one with nature — than what comes to mind when people think of a stereotypical firefighter.

“In the fire service in general, for both males and females, we have this



The advertisement is split into two main sections. On the left, a red background contains white text: "We are here for you." followed by the IAFC logo (a circular emblem with a globe, a fire hydrant, and the text "INTERNATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION" and "ORG. 1971"). Below the logo is the text "Community | Support | Guidance" and "IAFC.org" in yellow. On the right, a black and white photograph shows a firefighter, Chuck Flynn, smiling. He is wearing a white shirt and a dark tie. In the background, a fire station setting is visible with a sign that says "FIRE DEPARTMENT".

egotistical attitude that we're tough guys, that we don't need help," says Jim Cook, deputy chief in the Loudoun County Combined Fire and Rescue System and board member of VCOS. "One thing we have discovered is that a lot of the time, my colleagues are not willing to talk about mental health on their own — they need to be asked about it."

Cook says how important it is to watch out for others on your crew, looking out for signs in changes of behavior. For example, maybe

the life of the party becomes the wallflower. The person who keeps to his or herself becomes the loudest in the room. Someone who never drinks starts inviting you out every night after work. The coworker who is usually calm and collected develops a short fuse.

Basically, what you should be looking for is any change in behavior. Then let the person know you are there to help, offering them resources of where to seek further guidance.

The IAFC's *Yellow Ribbon Report* describes more warning signs and also brings awareness to the fire service's emotional and behavior wellness. The report is available at [www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/vcos-yellow-ribbon-report-under-the-helmet-performing-an-internal-size-up](http://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/vcos-yellow-ribbon-report-under-the-helmet-performing-an-internal-size-up). 🔥

## RESOURCES

For more information on mental wellness in the fire service, seek out the following resources:

- IAFF Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery Center 24-hour toll-free number: 855-900-8437
- National Fallen Firefighter Foundation: [www.FireHero.org](http://www.FireHero.org)
- *Yellow Ribbon Report – Under the Helmet: Performing an Internal Size-Up*: [www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/vcos-yellow-ribbon-report-under-the-helmet-performing-an-internal-size-up](http://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/vcos-yellow-ribbon-report-under-the-helmet-performing-an-internal-size-up)

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# Mental Health is Real: I Am Lucky — Many Are Not

By **Manual Fonseca**, Former Chair of IAFC Human Relations Committee

It's morning time, and I just don't feel good. I thought that sleep would help but it didn't. Prior to all this beginning, life was good. I was happy and work was great. One day, things changed.

The day came, and we had new leadership and new rules. Suddenly, a civil war ensues. Everyone who I thought was my friend was changing. Money, power and position were on the line. Who keeps their job? Who gets promoted?

I start staying in my office and become more vigilant of others. Trust issues ensue. Wait — are you a friend or foe? I begin to take my frustrations home. I am mad and angry and depressed all the time. I call my doctor and am prescribed anti-anxiety medication. Time passes and I find myself needing stronger meds. I see a psychiatrist.

My mind is hurting, and no one sees the signs. Meds are helping, but I am withdrawn. I am not eating. I work but talk to no one. I do not want to participate. When I have to be present, I do not say anything. I'm asked, "Are you okay?" I nod. Looking back, the signs were clear. Why didn't anyone notice?

My daughter finds me on the floor of my bedroom. I wake up in the ICU. My family is all around me. I ask, "Is today Monday?" My brother answers, "No, baby. It's Thursday." What happened to the past three days?

I am taken to a secure hallway where someone is present with me 24 hours a day. I can't even go to the bathroom by myself. This is a special ward. Everyone is here for the same exact reason — attempted suicide. We are the lucky ones. The not-so-lucky ones are in the morgue.

Treatment begins. I tell them my mind was hurting and I felt bad. I wanted the pain to stop. On the other side of the room, the same

sentiments are echoed. Now I am asking questions. Why didn't anyone notice or do anything to help me? Do they not care? The therapist answers yes they care, but the problem is that people thought this was just a phase I was going through and that I would get over it soon.

I talk about the bullying I experienced at work and how it led to my attempted suicide. I continue and talk about family, friends and work. Others open up too, and we all find out fast that we are no different. Same story, again and again.

Ten days later, I am being told to go home and start my new life. I am nervous. I am given meds. They tell me to take what I learned in therapy and apply my coping skills. Nothing else. I am far from cured.

Weeks pass, and therapy is helping. I am no longer as stressed as I was in the beginning. I now know the signs and can immediately seek help from my doctor.

Mental health is real. Look around you and recognize the signs. If you start to notice someone in your shift or department who is withdrawn, they are telling you they are hurting. Don't dismiss the signs. Have them talk to someone with medical expertise. If you

need to, pull them off duty and mandate they talk to a medical expert. Call your employee assistance program and seek advice. Bottom line: tell them you are listening and that you are going to help.

You have to take action before it's too late. Bring in a critical incident stress management (CISM) team and start training your personnel how they can be peer counselors. You can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) or call the crisis line in the biggest city in your area and ask if they can come to talk with your teams. Other options include creating policies and procedures on how to handle personnel who you suspect are in danger of hurting themselves.

Mental health not only affects the individual but also those around them, including colleagues, friends and family. Today, I am far from cured, but I am no longer as stressed as I was in the beginning. I now know the signs and seek immediate help from my doctor when needed. Through the IAFC, am working to help with anti-bullying efforts in the fire and EMS service so others don't suffer as I have.

I am lucky. Too many are not. 🔥

---

*Manuel Fonseca is the former IAFC Human Relations Committee chair and a retired assistant chief of the Nashville Fire Department.*

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# IAFC, Saudi Aramco and Atlanta Fire Take Fellowship to New Heights

By Bill Polen and John Morris, IAFC



*Naif Aladal (second from right) was a firefighter in the IAFC International Fellowship Program Cohort 17.*

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) in concert with Saudi Aramco (SA), a Saudi Arabian multinational petroleum and natural gas company, formed the International Fellowship Program in 2016. This program embeds SA firefighters in leading U.S. fire departments for six months to learn the American fire service culture as well as industry-leading best practices. Since its inception in 2016, more than 17 cohorts, totaling 132 SA firefighters, have successfully graduated the program.

Due to SA's company-wide commitment to workplace safety and fire prevention, the firefighters get minimal operational experience in Saudi Arabia. By 2020, SA intends to be the "world's leading integrated energy and chemicals company," facilitating the sustainable and diversified expansion of the country's economy while enabling a globally competitive and vibrant Saudi energy division. For the Saudi Arabian Fire and rescue Protection Division (SAFRPD), this means diversification of risk and a need to continue challenging its personnel and to grow new leaders from within who can champion the company's — and the country's — modernization process.

The cohorts are comprised of eight firefighters that are placed in

fast-paced, diverse, high call volume fire departments throughout the United States. This challenges the cohort's ability to adapt to a foreign environment while also testing the firefighters' knowledge, skills and abilities.

While these SA firefighters are National Fire Protection Association certified and pro-boarded, upon arrival to the host department, the group has their skills verified by the training academy staff to ensure readiness at the U.S. fire service level of expectation. This includes moving with a purpose, working in teams, confined space self-extrication, self-contained breathing apparatus drills, pulling attack lines, throwing ground ladders, Mayday drills, radio proficiency and communicating in clearly spoken and written English.

After the completion of two to three weeks of skills verifications, the fellows are released to the operations division, where they will ride as fourth or fifth on an engine (never as minimum staffing), heavy rescue and/or truck company. They will report to the shift captain or lieutenant and are expected to imitate (accountability/responsibility) what a firefighter does for the host department.

This verification serves to strengthen their firefighter core competencies, further develop their knowledge, skills

and abilities, adopt the leadership principles of the U.S. fire service model (para-military) and understand and implement the culture and values (second family, second home, brotherhood/sisterhood) of the American fire service.

Valerie V. Jackson, Cohort 17 coordinator and assistant chief of support services for the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department (AFRD), said it took teamwork to make the program a success.

"I quickly found out I was not alone in making this fellowship program a success, from the support of the AFRD executive team, training staff, field personnel, to a special IAFC member, John Morris," Jackson says. "The IAFC staff's exemplary customer service, step-by-step, hands-on involvement and professionalism made this process seamless."

AFRD Captain Michael McLaughlin has trained some of the cohorts and said he was impressed with the firefighters' abilities.

"They worked extremely hard. They came to work ready to train and did not complain at all," McLaughlin says. "The fellowship program reinforced that no matter what fire department we work for, we are all trying to achieve the same goal for our communities: being the best-trained firefighters we can be while saving lives and protecting property."

Though everyone had the same end goal, there were still some challenges and learning moments along the way, for the fellows, the host departments and the IAFC.

"The first challenge was that we did not know what we were getting into," McLaughlin says. "We did not know who these firefighters were or anything about their culture. The first day of training was quiet. Everybody was trying to get comfortable."

He says that as the training went on, the fellows and the training staff started to get to know each other, and



*As part of the International Fellowship Program, Naif Aladal responded to many calls with Atlanta Fire Rescue Department Station 1, one of the busiest in the city.*

the training environment started becoming like any other day at the academy.

“Everybody was training hard, learning, and having a few laughs here and there,” McLaughlin says. “It did not take long to realize that the two of us might come from different cultures, but when it came to the job, the only culture that matter was that of a firefighter.”

The strenuous workload and the constant demands of the high call volume coupled with a 24-hour shift schedule is a significant change for the fellows, who worked either an eight- or 12-hour shift for SAFrPD in Saudi Arabia. However, they have proven to be up to the many challenges and embraced the scheduling demands wholeheartedly.

Hussain Al-Abbas, one of the fellows, says being a part of the program has been a milestone in his career as well as his future development.

“I have learned and experienced many things that changed my views on firefighting and the fire service culture as a whole,” Al-Abbas says. “This program has strengthened my abilities as a firefighter, and I will come back home with a lot of knowledge and experience to share with my colleagues back home.”

One challenge for fellows in particular is the “x-factor,” the immeasurable bounds that SA firefighters fight to thrive in the program. They must be able to be away from their family and their country for six months; manage the strain on mental and physical strength to keep up with the workload; keep up with the 24-hour schedule; and

adapt to the unfamiliarity of a foreign country, its people and professional and personal customs.

The gains from this program are exponential for all involved. The international relationships formed, sharing of fire service knowledge and best practices across continents and lessons learned are genuinely changing the United States and Saudi Arabia’s cultures, both professionally as well as personally.

Since 1873, the IAFC’s mission is to lead, educate and serve. The International Fellowship Program exemplifies all of these values. The future looks even brighter as the program continues to grow, and new global relationships are potentially expanding into other exciting, new programs across a variety of continents. 🔥

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*John W. Morris started working for the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department in 1987, retiring in 2016 as fire captain II. From October 2017 to June 2019, he worked for the IAFC SME Global Services International Fellowship Program. Since June 2019, he has been the program manager for the International Fellowship Program and the International Fire and Rescue Emergency Services Institute.*

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*Bill Polen started with the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department in 1988 and retired in 2018. Since August 2018, he has worked for the IAFC SME Global Services International Fellowship Program and International Fire and Rescue Emergency Services Institute.*

## TESTIMONIAL FROM PROGRAM PARTICIPANT NAIF ALADAL



*Naif Aladal is a fire captain in Saudi Aramco’s fire protection department and took part in the International Fellowship Program in 2019.*

My name is Naif Aladal, and I am a fire captain in Saudi Aramco’s fire protection department. I have been a firefighter with the company for the last eight years. In May 2019, my chief informed me that I would be joining the IAFC International Fellowship Program

Cohort 17, working with the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department (AFRD). As the youngest officer in my department, I was granted the chance to join this exceptional program aimed at developing fire officers’ knowledge and capabilities through exposure to high call volume in some of the United State’s busiest fire departments.

As a Saudi firefighter, I have always dreamed of working as a firefighter in the United States because all of our training material and textbooks at Saudi Aramco are American. Today, I am having the best time of my life, riding along with Atlanta’s bravest at Station 1. On my first day, I responded to more than 21 calls and was lucky to have been placed in one of Atlanta’s busiest fire stations. I was amazed by the call volume and the abilities of the crew during any response.

On August 12, 2019, we responded to a second-floor house fire and were assigned by the incident commander to assume the roles of the ventilation team. Through the roof, we started the vertical ventilation, reducing the heat on the interior crews and improving visibility inside the structure. My captain was very supportive, showing me and guiding me through every step until the incident was terminated.

I was fortunate to attend Fire-Rescue International in 2019 as part of my development plan during my assignment in the United States. At the conference, I attended more than 10 valuable classes, and I was honored to deliver a presentation on Saudi Aramco and the International Fellowship Program to many fire chiefs and high-ranking individuals in the fire service.

At the end of 2019, I presented my capstone project to AFRD’s First Deputy Chief Dr. Byron Kennedy. I look forward to sharing with my home department back at Saudi Aramco all that I have learned and experienced during this assignment. 🔥

# FirstNet Transforms Public Safety Communications for a Safer Tomorrow



Photo courtesy of FirstNet.

By **Brian Crawford**, FirstNet Authority Board Member

**R**ecently I was asked, “As long-term evolution (LTE) technology evolves and makes fire departments more effective and safer through innovative uses of data, video, voice and text applications, what provider is leading in this field?”

The leader in this new wave of communication integration is the only LTE network dedicated to public safety users: FirstNet. This nationwide wireless communications platform is dedicated to America’s first responders and public safety community.

Following 9/11, Congress created the First Responder Network (FirstNet) Authority to ensure public safety agencies had interoperable communications. The FirstNet Authority established a partnership with AT&T to build, deploy, and maintain the FirstNet system on 700 MHz Band 14 spectrum, reserved for public safety by the law. The FirstNet Core and Radio Access Networks guarantee priority and preemption over commercial users in the event of heavy cellular use, like concerts or sporting events. Along with speed and reliability, the network also supports FirstNet ready devices and more than 100 FirstNet certified applications.

As a 30-year fire service veteran and a former city manager, I understand the importance of a fire chief’s responsibility

to thoroughly educate city leadership on these expanded capabilities and to explain the importance of LTE broadband integration during emergencies. And although most city managers do not have a public safety background, there is nothing more important to them than the safety and security of their community.

With the advancements found in today’s handheld LTE smart broadband devices and the in-vehicle routers and Internet of Things (IoT) sensors and devices, it would be hard to argue against giving public safety unprecedented levels of interoperable communications and real-time intelligence. Fortunately, there is an abundance of information available that can assist the chief in these discussions with city leadership.

FirstNet has a fleet of more than 75 deployable assets designed specifically for FirstNet subscribers. These dynamic resources include cells on wheels, satellite cells on light trucks, drones and an aerostat blimp to provide connectivity to first responders when they need it most, like during a hurricane or a wildfire. These rapid response utilities can be delivered in a matter of hours to restore service to impacted areas.

There is no doubt that wireless broadband LTE integration and secure broadband networks and devices used

alongside firefighters’ land mobile radios (LMR) have an impact on the outcome of an incident. The power of combining mission critical LTE with LMR technology on the emergency scene provides a cache of data experiences (such as maps, building plans and reports) and actionable intelligence (such as real time video, telemedicine, social media integration, geospatial technology and Next Generation 911) that can be shared not only within organizations but also across all responding agencies. And FirstNet offers a secure broadband network for these data sharing capabilities.

After just over 18 months of operation, FirstNet now covers more than 99% of the U.S. population. This impressive growth, matched with a public safety user-friendly and supportive industry ecosystem, has resulted in more than 11,000 public safety agencies and organizations subscribed to FirstNet, accounting for over 1.2 million connections nationwide.

I would tell the public safety community that nothing will give you a higher level of confidence than to say, “Yes, we do have the best communications capabilities because you are on FirstNet.” There is no other public safety dedicated broadband network that is public safety’s partner. At the FirstNet Authority, we are transforming the future of public safety communications for a safer tomorrow. 🔥

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*Brian Crawford is a board member for the First Responder Network Authority. He is a 30-year fire service veteran, serving previously as the fire chief in Shreveport, La., and Plano, Tx. Crawford also served as the city manager for Shreveport and is currently a senior vice president and chief administrative officer for Willis-Knighton Health System. He is a Certified Emergency Manager and serves as a member of the Louisiana State Police Commission.*

# The Future of Technology Partners for Public Safety: A Case Study on First Due

By Dan Munsey, San Bernardino County Fire District

**W**hen the fire service leaders look to acquire and adopt new technologies, we need to ensure we lead through the technology we implement — not be led by it. This concept is something I have witnessed again and again as fire agencies implement new technology integration into operations — we all want to have the “shiny new toy,” and we buy it impulsively.

I’ve been lucky over the last few years to spend a lot of time with emerging fire service technology through partnerships with Esri, TEEX, the IAFC, and the California Fire Chiefs Association. These partnerships have led to national presentations on technology integration and to consulting with agencies as they build technology integration plans. If you do not have a technology integration plan, you should; technology deserves strategic implementation! The fire service technology vendors that we need to partner with to achieve this should be thought leaders and innovators in technology. Currently, there are two types of vendors in our space:

## 1. Incumbent Software Vendors

who are focused on compliance and the “do it only because you have to” mentality. Many vendors in this space do not actively listen to our true problems in the field and are built on legacy technology architectures and business models that do not align with the current and future needs of modern public safety agencies.

**2. Newer Entrants** that excel in solving niche problems using cutting-edge technologies, but all too often fall into the “shiny new toy” category and simply do not fit holistically into our operations. As a result, these solutions often do not get used to their full potential, and their value is not realized.

However, there is a third rapidly-emerging vendor that is becoming more



prevalent in the world of public safety technology. These emerging companies:

- Are problem-focused;
- Provide a holistic solution that slips into pre-existing operational workflows;
- Build with modern technology;
- Are focused on customer success; and
- Partner with other technology companies, the fire service, and the public.

While reviewing technology with vendors, agencies, and other stakeholders on the IAFC Technology Council, I have had the opportunity to work closely with many of these types of emerging public safety technology companies that fit this criterion, including Intterra, Tablet Command, Esri, and with First Due. I want to use First Due as a case study in this model. (I am not associated with First Due, nor do I profit in any way from this article; this is just a great company to use as a case-study!)

First Due is a SaaS (Software as a Service) based platform reimagining pre-incident planning (pre-plans) and emergency response by ensuring agencies have the critical data they need on every structure (including commercial and residential occupancies) before, during, and after an incident. By focusing on these categories, let’s dissect how First Due is partnering with the fire service and other public safety agencies.

## PROBLEM FOCUSED

First Due focuses on solving problems, not merely building features that drive compliance. For instance, many of you would agree that pre-incident planning has always been a challenge for agencies across the country. First Due sought to identify the core problem in three parts:

1. We do not have data on buildings we respond to every day — especially to the residential structures that represent the majority of our calls;
2. Collecting and maintaining data is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive; and
3. Even when we do have information on our buildings, we rarely have that information available at the time we need it in a format we can use.

This ultimately leads to less effective decision-making in the field, resulting in increased risk to first responders and the communities they serve. To counter these problems, First Due has reimagined pre-incident planning, how we do it, and the role of technology in making that process easier. Now critical data is provided on every structure in a response area, even residential, and best yet, the system is integrated within existing fire service response workflows.

## PROVIDE A HOLISTIC SOLUTION

Even if we managed to solve a problem (or part of one) effectively, we

could still fail to integrate it into our core operational workflows successfully. The result is an excellent idea with little benefit in the field — a problem that plagues many New Entrants.

First Due recognizes that tackling pre-incident planning from a compliance-driven, data collection focused perspective would not be effective in solving the problem. Pre-incident planning needs to be embedded in the preparation and response framework of an agency and tied directly to the way emergency response personnel think and behave in the field. Critical data is required at the time of response and needs to be consumed quickly and contextually.

This led First Due to not only integrate pre-incident planning effectively into the existing response that software agencies are using today, but also build their own mobile response solution. This strategy allows agencies using First Due to utilize a holistic pre-incident planning and a mobile response platform, rather than a piecemeal solution to a complex problem.

### **BUILD WITH MODERN TECHNOLOGY**

There are very obvious disadvantages that we have all experienced with the traditional software models of the past. On-premise (client-server based) solutions result in considerable up-front costs, higher long-term total cost of ownership, and restrictive versioning inhibiting our ability to adapt as your needs evolve. Ultimately, this creates a disconnect between the needs of your organization and that of the vendor. Simply “hosting” an on-premise version somewhere else (what many refer to as a “fake cloud”) doesn’t solve any of these problems. Customers remain on different versions and do not receive the customer support, upgrades, maintenance, and partner integrations they need, which is only magnified when agencies cannot access their own data.

First Due takes an “always on the latest version” true-cloud based approach focused on hosting, maintaining, and delivering the solution across all facets of the technology stack — meaning you and your IT staff do not need to. Even with cloud

architecture, First Due still provides you with the configurability, integrations, and hands-on control that many enterprise on-premise platforms do, but without the version lock, functional vulnerabilities, and hardware restrictions. Finally, First Due allows agencies to truly “own” their data, providing them with the capability to extract, push, and pull information into other systems as required.

### **FOCUS ON CUSTOMER SUCCESS**

All these successes boil down to one major point — being a true technology partner (not just a vendor or a product). A real partner focuses on the success of agencies using the platform, not only through onboarding but throughout the lifetime of use. Companies that focus on customer success build features and functionality that solve problems faced by these agencies every day, testing and integrating with them in the field with an eye to continual improvement. This means listening, and it means taking action.

First Due adopts this newer approach and carefully listens to customer feedback, building new features that help customers conquer their challenges. The subscription model First Due and other more modern software companies provide keeps them honest with regard to their deliverables and promotes constant value through use — year after year.

### **MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS**

The fire service is being inundated with common operational pictures (COPs). These COPs serve many different functions from agency, and interagency response, incident command system dashboards, and live information feeds for first responders, the public, and elected officials. Our firefighters work with the COPs each shift and rely on them to safely arrive on calls and to provide operational integration on emergency scenes. As emerging technology is introduced, vendors that work to integrate products together into a true Common Operating Platform are at a premium.

All of us have experienced Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems not communicating with our neighbor’s CAD system, our staffing software not populating our incident command operating systems, and our operational

needs not being met at the same time by the multiple technologies that we are rapidly possessing. First Due’s willingness to partner with other technology vendors to integrate its technology into existing operating systems is incredible and why they were highlighted in this article. COPs like Intterra and Tablet Command are used every day by many fire service agencies, and with a push of a button, their systems can be configured to show pre-plan data provided by First Due immediately.

Many data points in our communities are quickly being connected to public service operations. This Internet of Public Safety Things (IoPST) will allow the future fire service to provide for better community risk analysis and reduction and better, safer responses for our responders. The “community connect” feature in First Due allows the residents of the community to help build the pre-plans needed and provide critical occupancy data to the first responders at the time of response. This feature allows the community to partner with the fire service to focus on the pre-event, event, and post-event recovery in true community risk reduction fashion.

As technology evolves within the fire service and the broader public safety space, we need to review every technology decision through this framework. When choosing a technology partner, look for vendors that you can ultimately grow with and will grow with you. As the complexity of serving your community increases, so should the platforms you use to support your operations. Choose technology partners that focus on the problem, think about the solution holistically, deliver using cloud-based future-proof technologies, and concentrate on YOUR success, not just their processes. 🔥

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*Dan Munsey, CFO, is the Fire Chief, San Bernardino County Fire District (California). He is the president of the Operations Section for the California Fire Chiefs Association, and serves as the Chairperson of Data, Communication and IoT on the IAFC Tech Council. You can reach him on the following platforms — LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/dan-munsey](https://www.linkedin.com/in/dan-munsey), and Twitter @SBCFireChief.*

# Legislative Update



By Ken LaSala, IAFIC Director of Government Relations and Policy

**W**ith the onset of the novel coronavirus, the IAFIC Government Relations and Policy department has been focused on helping fire departments obtain the funding and equipment they need to respond to COVID-19 outbreaks in their communities. The IAFIC began its efforts in late February with the establishment of a COVID-19 task force, and we began lobbying the Trump administration and Congress shortly afterwards.

On March 10, Chief Gary Ludwig, the IAFIC president and chairman of the board, met in Washington, D.C., with representatives of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Office of Emergency Medical Services; the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response; and members of the White House staff to discuss the fire and emergency services' needs for an effective COVID-19 response. We focused on ensuring local fire and EMS departments are a priority for receiving personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitizing agents, on the priority list for testing and vaccinations for COVID-19 and notified about shortages of emergency drugs.

In mid-March, Congress began work on the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136), which was meant to support the COVID-19 response and prop up the economy. The bill had a number of provisions designed to help the fire and emergency service.

Among the most notable provisions were:

- \$100 million for the Assistance to Firefighter Grants program for PPE, supplies and reimbursements for the COVID-19 response.
- \$100 billion for the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund to reimburse eligible healthcare providers, including fire departments that transport Medicare and Medicaid patients, for healthcare expenses or lost revenue directly attributable to the coronavirus.
- \$45 billion for the Disaster Relief Fund to reimburse activities such as medical response; procurement of PPE, disinfectants and medical supplies; and resulting overtime and backfill costs. The federal government will cover 75% of these costs.

The CARES Act also included \$150 billion for state and local governments to pay for the COVID-19 response.

The creation of a new Paycheck Protection Program at the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loans could help volunteer fire departments weather the economic effects of the social distancing orders imposed in each state. In addition, the bill allowed fire sprinkler retrofit installations in commercial buildings to qualify for bonus depreciation through 2027 as well as a 15-year depreciation period in perpetuity after 2027.

As layoffs continued and state and local government budgets went into

decline due to the economic downturn, the IAFIC educated Congress and the Trump administration about the needs of local fire and EMS departments. Chief Ludwig met with FEMA Administrator Peter Gaynor, U.S. Fire Administrator Chief G. Keith Bryant, White House staff and representatives of the National Governors Association to discuss problems with the supply line and to plead for local fire departments to be considered priorities for N95 masks, gowns and hand sanitizer.

The IAFIC also began an aggressive campaign to educate Congress about the needs of the fire and emergency service in both responding to COVID-19 and mitigating the effects of the economic downturn. The IAFIC surveyed its members and found that approximately 1,000 firefighters had been laid off in the crisis and projected that an additional 30,000 firefighters could be laid off next year.

We also educated Congress about the effects of the downturn on volunteer fire departments, including the recruitment and retention needs caused by the pandemic. The IAFIC met with the staff of members on committees of jurisdiction, like the House and Senate homeland security and appropriations committees, the staff of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the staff of Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer. (We requested meetings with the staff of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Minority Leader Kevin

McCarthy but they declined to meet with us.)

Chief Ludwig led many of these meetings. He focused on \$5 billion each for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program and the SAFER grant program. He also asked for requirements (like the local cost-share) to the AFG and SAFER programs to be waived and that SAFER funds be used to retain or re-hire firefighters. Also, the IAFC asked Congress to prevent the Federal Communications Commission from auctioning the public safety spectrum in the T-Band (570-412 MHz). The T-Band spectrum played a critical role in helping metropolitan areas coordinate operations during the COVID-19 response.

In addition, we asked that Congress permanently protect all state and local property tax incentives and up to \$600 in other incentives for volunteer fire and EMS personnel from federal taxation. As part of our effort, the IAFC set up a grassroots campaign to help our members contact their senators and representatives in support of AFG and SAFER funding.

On May 15, the House passed the HEROES Act (H.R. 6800) to help state and local governments respond to COVID-19 and deal with the effects of the economic downturn. The \$3 trillion bill included several provisions to help local fire and EMS departments:

- \$500 million for the AFG program;
- \$500 million for the SAFER program;
- 100% federal cost-share for COVID-19 response costs incurred under the Stafford Act;
- Permanent extension of the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (VRIPA), which exempts any property tax benefit and up to \$600 in other state and local benefits from federal taxation;
- First responders are permitted to deduct up to \$500 from their personal income tax for expenditures on training tuition and uniforms;
- For 2020, first responders and "COVID-19 front line employees" may include "supplies" and "equipment" in their deductible

expenses along with tuition and uniforms; and

- Repeal of the requirement to auction public safety spectrum in the T-Band (470-512 MHz).

The IAFC is now working to try to get the Senate to pass these provisions in its future COVID-19 legislation.

The IAFC also is working to ensure that the families of fire and EMS personnel fallen or disabled by COVID-19 receive benefits under the Public Safety Officers' Benefits program. Both the House and Senate have passed bills (H.R. 6509/S. 3607) to ensure that these families are covered, and we are waiting for these bills to be reconciled. 🔥

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*Ken LaSala, IAFC Director of Government Relations and Policy, manages IAFC's department that represents the voice of America's fire service leadership with Congress, the White House and federal agencies. He served as a Congressional staffer from 1997 to 2005.*

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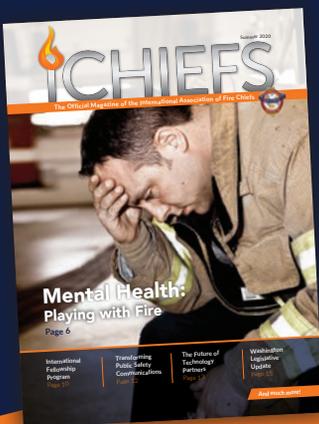


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# IAFC Mission at Work



## LIKE WILDFIRE FUELED

by high winds or a tornado striking out of nowhere, a novel coronavirus earlier this year swept across North America and the rest of the world with reckless abandon. Tens of thousands dead. Many more infected and gravely ill. Everyone was concerned. Before we knew it, COVID-19 upended our

lives professionally, economically and personally. Birthday parties? Dinner and a movie? Ballgames? Happy hour? Vacations? Going to work or school? Nope.

The virus has challenged our society like never before in modern times. The fire and EMS service, to no one's surprise, rose to the challenge. At the IAFC, we were forced to cancel the Wildland-Urban Interface Conference, Symposium in the Spring and the Hazmat Conference. As of this writing, an in-person Fire-Rescue International is in doubt. Most staff have been working remotely since early March after Virginia, where we are headquartered, issued stay-at-home orders. The virus certainly is laying a big hurt on us financially due to lost revenue. But like the industry we serve, the IAFC rose to the challenge.

How did the IAFC respond to the crisis on behalf of our members, partners, staff and the fire/EMS service as a whole? Under the leadership of IAFC President Chief Gary Ludwig and the IAFC Board of Directors, here's how:

- Established a Coronavirus Task Force, chaired by Chief John Sinclair, to monitor the pandemic, provide tools and resources to fire service leaders and to advise the IAFC Board of Directors.
- Created a COVID-19 resources webpage at [www.iafc.org/covid19](http://www.iafc.org/covid19), which includes a Fire Chief's Guide for Coronavirus Planning and Response and literally dozens of timely, vetted resources and critical information from FEMA, DHS, USFA and other authorities.
- Hosted a weekly series of COVID-19 webinars and monthly podcasts with information on what fire chiefs need to know.
- Developed a COVID-19 Fire and EMS Personnel Impact Survey and Dashboard.
- Developed a Fire and EMS Force Protection PPE Survey and Dashboard.
- Created an Economic Task Force, chaired by Chief Steve Pegram, to help fire departments understand what federal dollars they may be eligible for and to navigate the challenging economic times from reduced tax revenue because of the economic shutdown.
- Through an aggressive national media campaign, raised public awareness that health care workers (God bless them) and law enforcement were not the only public

*The virus has challenged our society like never before in modern times.*

servants at high risk both physically and economically performing their duties. We reached millions of readers, television viewers and radio listeners.

- Worked with the North American Fire Training Directors to develop a survey and dashboard to gauge the impact that closing fire and EMS training centers is having on the certification processes for fire and EMS personnel.
- Asked Congress and the White House to support \$5 billion each for the AFG and SAFER programs. The House of Representatives passed legislation (H.R. 6800) that included \$500 million for each program. We are still working on the Senate.
- Teamed with Amazon Business as a strategic supplier for members to purchase vital PPE supplies.
- Partnered with the Western Division and Constellis to make available a Rapid COVID-19 Test Kit and a UV-C Disinfectant for vehicle or station cleaning.

The IAFC's ability to respond quickly and decisively to this pandemic is a direct result of the involvement and commitment of many IAFC members and association staff. That includes IAFC President Chief Gary Ludwig, the IAFC Board of Directors and leaders from across the organization. It also includes the hundreds of members who are supporting each other and sharing information and resources through our online community and their connections.

Additionally, the IAFC's solid reputation and relationship with key federal government agencies and officials allows us to keep you informed on the latest information coming from DC, while also providing a voice for the fire and emergency service in conveying your needs and challenges in responding to this pandemic.

Our mission is to lead, educate and serve. Once again, we did just that.

## ROB BROWN

IAFC Interim CEO and Executive Director

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