

Spring 2022

CHIEFS

The Official Magazine of the International Association of Fire Chiefs



Taking Care to Prevent Cancer: Early Detection Saves Lives

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Looking at
Leadership
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Matters
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JOHN SCHMIDT
Division Chief of Safety,
Health & Training
Pasco County Fire Rescue



“I hadn’t used my mask in a while. It still looked good. So I put it in there, let it run and pulled it out and it looked like it just came out of the box. I was honestly shocked. I couldn’t believe how dirty it actually was, when I thought it was clean.”

JEFF HIGDON
Firefighter, EMT, DECON Technician
Pasco County Fire Rescue



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4795 Meadow Wood Lane, Suite 100W
Chantilly, VA 20151
Tel: 703.273.0911
www.iafc.org

CEO and Executive Director
Rob Brown

Director of Communications
Steven Ilchishin

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Return all undeliverable addresses to:
5605 Riggins Court, Second Floor
PO Box 41270
Reno, NV 89504
Toll-Free: 866.999.1299
Toll-Free Fax: 866.244.2544
www.matrixgroupinc.net

President & CEO
Jack Andress

Operations Manager
Shoshana Weinberg
sweinberg@matrixgroupinc.net

Senior Publisher
Jessica Potter
publishing@matrixgroupinc.net

Publisher
Julie Welsh

Editor-in-Chief
Shannon Savory
ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net

Senior Editor
Alexandra Kozub
akozub@matrixgroupinc.net

Editor / Social Media Manager
Jenna Collignon

Finance/Administration
Lloyd Weinberg, Nathan Redekop
accounting@matrixgroupinc.net

Director of Circulation & Distribution
Lloyd Weinberg
distribution@matrixgroupinc.net

Sales Manager - Winnipeg
Neil Gottfred

Sales Manager - Hamilton
Jeff Cash

Matrix Group Publishing Inc. Account Executives
Andrew Lee, Brian MacIntyre, Cheryl Klassen, Colleen Bell,
Frank Kenyeres, Jim Hamilton, John Price, Rob Gibson, Sandra
Kirby, Tanina Di Piazza

Advertising Design
James Robinson

Layout & Design
Cody Chomiak

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The Year in Review, The Year Ahead



HELLO FELLOW MEMBERS, partners, colleagues, and friends. It is my distinct honor and pleasure to bring greetings on behalf of the International Association of Fire Chiefs' (IAFC) Board of Directors and staff in this update on the state of the IAFC.

I am happy to report the IAFC had a solid bottom line finish in 2021. This is one of many examples of us overcoming the pandemic. Certainly, like everyone else, COVID-19 hit us hard in the early parts of 2020. In response, your board of directors and staff buckled down and faced the challenges head on. This is due to the dedication of our IAFC Board of Directors, our members engaged in division, section, committee, and task force work, as well as our incredible staff and their continued dedication to our success. Together we have recovered well!

Let me reflect on the last few years. Like the rest of the globe, the IAFC dealt with the effects of the pandemic. From a personal perspective, I have been the fire chief in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada for almost five years; half of my term involved dealing with the effects of the pandemic. These last two years were certainly like "dog years" and just as in the movie *Groundhog Day* – every day repeated over and over. We learned and grew from this experience. I am extremely proud of our team's incredible efforts. You committed to the mission and banded together to identify new practices, controls, and procedures to stay

safe and serve our community. Your ability to deal with the challenges of COVID-19 both professionally and personally speaks volumes.

The IAFC experienced the same obstacles in dealing with COVID-19. Although I am proud to work shoulder to shoulder with our board and our membership on our extraordinary achievements while balancing the many priorities, I wonder what this update would include if the "dog years" of COVID-19 did not happen?

Furthermore, these past two years have been difficult for members who also managed their own local challenges while providing leadership to the IAFC to ensure we continued to achieve our mission to *Lead, Educate and Serve*, even though many conferences and events had to be canceled creating a devastating effect on our revenue streams. Based on the steadfast and exceptional commitment of your board, as well as our members and staff, we are heading into this year with a better year-end financial report than we have had since before the pandemic.

Last year's budget was based on a worst-case scenario without conference revenue, a third stimulus package, or other revenue sources we've historically relied upon. The financial plan included only operational expenses based on the first year of the pandemic's budget and staffing.

New initiatives were also implemented to better match operational expenses with membership fees, partnership programs, grants, conferences, and other revenues. As a result of these changes, we will close 2021 with revenues exceeding expenses by over \$1 million. This extraordinary news could not have been achieved without your Treasurer, Chief Steven Locke, and CEO, Rob Brown keeping their hands on the wheel the last 24

months. Chief Locke will provide more details after we close out the fiscal year, including our audit to finalize and verify the exact year-end figures.

As with any Incident Command situation, the board developed a plan that addressed these past two years. Our strategic priorities were to ensure we remain financially sound, save firefighters' lives, protect staff, and prevent transmission of the virus. We educated members on the virus and advocated for fire service legislation.

Despite local and national issues, we continued to keep the "I" in IAFC by hosting many students through the International Fire and Rescue Emergency Services Institute program. The program educates these first responders on safety and response capabilities and leadership methods. International firefighters were placed in fire departments for six months to learn best practices and experience the North American fire service culture. The program provides an opportunity for host departments to live the values of diversity and learn from the candidates. In today's ever-changing fire and emergency service, this has proven to be vital to improving firefighter safety and fostering a culture of leadership through ownership.

Additional accomplishments include:

- Wildland Fire Programs formed a formal relationship with Airbnb to raise wildfire awareness among the tourism industry. The development and implementation of a focused version of the Ready, Set, Go! Program was implemented as part of a 12-month pilot project with Airbnb.
- The Hazardous Materials Committee and the Fire & Life Safety Section are collaborating with the Propane Educational Council (PERC) to build strong connections

between first responders and the diverse propane industry as well as to develop a propane response certification program.

- The Yellow Ribbon Report was re-released on November 10, with material on issues such as gaslighting, emotional intelligence, compassion fatigue, learned helplessness, resilience, and much more critical information and tools for first responders.

We held many meetings with the new Administration on topics that include Next Gen 911, Z-axis, and enforcement among many other new pieces of legislation. The IAFC is excited to work with the new U.S. Fire Administrator, Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell, a valuable partner in helping the IAFC lead the way to safeguard a reputable and robust fire service for the future.

Other successes of note include:

- I created a Communications Task Force to engage with our stakeholders and identify opportunities to improve public and member communication strategies.
- I also engaged the Fire & Life Safety Section and the Safety, Health and Survival Section in a task force to identify concerns and develop tools to assist firefighters responding to energy storage calls.
- The Coronavirus Task Force continues its work to stay abreast of emerging issues and we are considering a transition to a committee structure to improve situational awareness on emerging diseases in the future.
- Second Vice President, Donna Black, continues to advocate for

Our strategic priorities were to ensure we remain financially sound, save firefighters' lives, protect staff, and prevent transmission of the virus. We educated members on the virus and advocated for fire service legislation.

diversity, equity, and inclusion on our board to ensure we include strategies and move this priority forward in our budget and programs in years to come.

- The Terrorism and Homeland Security Committee hosted a series of webinars on issues such as working with law enforcement and the intelligence community, mass casualty care, and incidents where a fire chief may not be the incident commander but provides significant contributions.
- The board is diligently working on our strategic direction. Randomly selected members provided focus group input. Work sessions for the board and other stakeholders are scheduled in the coming months. This new strategic direction will guide the IAFC's efforts and budgets to ensure we remain relevant and out front.

I hope 2022 brings you personal and professional success. The IAFC continues to be here for you. We work to help all ranks of fire/EMS personnel who strive to achieve their best. We continue to represent emergency responders worldwide; our members are the world's leading experts in fire/EMS.

The IAFC continues to be strong, out front, respected, relevant, leading, and ready to serve our members.

In closing, I take this opportunity to encourage you to check out the digital version of *iCHIEFS* on the IAFC website at www.iafc.org/ichiefs for great features, thought leadership content from IAFC past presidents, subject-matter experts, and experts from across the fire and emergency service.

Thank you and merci,

Fire Chief Ken Stuebing
IAFC President and Board Chair



Taking Care to Prevent Cancer: Early Detection Saves Lives



Deputy Fire Chief Steve Weissman

Being diagnosed with cancer is a deeply scary and uncertain time in one's life. For retired Deputy Fire Chief Steve Weissman, this reality is only too familiar. Diagnosed in 2016 with prostate cancer and now living for six years cancer-free, Weissman has since devoted his career to helping firefighters and their

families get through the tough times of diagnosis and treatment, and to educating fire departments on the risks of being on the job.

Chief Weissman grew up alongside a family entrenched in public safety, so becoming a firefighter was a natural move. "Firefighting always intrigued me," says Weissman, "because I grew up pretty close to a firehouse in

Brooklyn, and my whole family – all my uncles and cousins – were New York City cops. Public safety was always ingrained in me from a young age.”

He has worked for a variety of departments in a variety of roles throughout his career and officially became deputy fire chief for Stafford County (Virginia) in 2007. “It has been a very rewarding career,” says Weissman. “One of my highlights when I was working for Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department was that I became a part of the International Search and Rescue Team, Virginia Task Force 1, where we were able to travel and help folks all across the United States and worldwide.”

DIAGNOSIS: CANCER

“In the fire service, there has been a tremendous increase of cancer diagnoses over the years,” says Weissman. “I do a lot of instructing and talking about this issue to educate people about the dangers of the job because I have firsthand knowledge of how risky it can be.”

During an annual medical examination, tests showed that Weissman’s PSA level was elevated, and had in fact doubled within a year. This led to an early prostate cancer diagnosis. Routine medical examinations are not mandatory at every fire department across the U.S.; however, Weissman believes that they should be.

“Thankfully I worked for the Stafford County Fire Department, which provided routine medical examinations,” says Weissman. “As a result of that routine checkup, doctors were able to catch the cancer early and I believe this saved my life.”

There has been a tremendous increase of cancer diagnoses over time in the fire service; not just in older firefighters. Every year, firefighters younger and younger are being diagnosed.

According to data from the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), cancer caused 66 percent of career firefighter line-of-duty deaths from 2002 to 2019, and the Firefighter Cancer Support

“Cancer is the most dangerous threat to firefighter health and safety today.”

Network (FCSN) states that, “Cancer is the most dangerous threat to firefighter health and safety today.”

FCSN has found that firefighters have a nine percent higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer than the general United States population and have a 14 percent higher risk of dying from cancer as well.¹ Keep in mind that these statistics are mostly paid firefighters – unfortunately, there is very little data specific to cancer in volunteer firefighters.

When Weissman heard about the FCSN from a fellow firefighter when he was undergoing his cancer treatment, he reached out for help. Now, Weissman is the Virginia State Director for the FCSN. “We’re a great organization,” says Weissman. “Firefighters are never the ones to ask for help – we’re the ones who want to help other individuals – so it can be very difficult to accept help ourselves. This is one of the things that we do at the FCSN, we help firefighters get through this extremely difficult time by pairing them with fellow firefighters who have been in a similar situation before.”

The FCSN’s mission is simple: to assist firefighters and EMS providers and their immediate families diagnosed with cancer by providing badge to badge support, training, and guidance. The FCSN provides mentoring, education, and training to departments across the country, all to help those affected by cancer and to try and diminish the disease.

“It’s my life’s work right now to help these firefighters that come to the FCSN for help,” says Weissman. “It’s my belief that when it comes to protecting ourselves as firefighters from toxins and carcinogenic materials, we become complacent, and complacency kills us.”

BEST PRACTICES FOR PREVENTING CANCER

The *Lavender Ribbon Report Update: Best Practices for Preventing Firefighter Cancer* was released by the IAFC/VCOS in September 2021 as an update to their original report released in 2018. In his article featured in the report, titled *What Will Cancer Do to You?*, Fire Chief John M. Buckman III says that in order to solve the rising cancer issue, the fire service has to change its culture.

When firefighters battle a blaze, materials such as ash and smoke linger in the air and cling to their personal protective equipment (PPE). It is vital to remove this contaminated material as soon as possible – leaving any amount of that material on your body in any way, especially when it comes into close contact with your skin, is allowing carcinogenic material to potentially cause you harm.

“Firefighters are exposed to carcinogens every time they respond to a fire, hazardous materials spill, or other event,” continues Buckman. “Still, with all the information provided to today’s firefighters, many have not really bought into the decontamination process – both for their PPE and their skin.”²

Weissman believes that one of the easiest ways to reduce the risk of exposure to carcinogens and toxins is to simply wash down contaminated PPE after exposure on a job. He adds, “We know that doing on-scene decontamination of PPE reduces the majority of carcinogens and toxins that are on us. Soap and water make a tremendous impact in reducing these toxins from our PPE.”

The number one and number two most important practices to prevent and mitigate exposures on the job to carcinogenic materials

is to decontaminate regularly and immediately after a fire, and to go for routine medical check ups. Next is to document any and every exposure to carcinogenic materials, because, "When you're exposed to a chemical that has a cancer-causing agent in it, understanding the latency period – i.e., the time you're exposed to the material to the time you are affected by it – is incredibly important for any kind of claim," says Weissman.

Documenting these exposures is crucial, because for most states, they require the proof of such an exposure for workers' compensation. "Education is extremely important to help combat this issue," continues Weissman. "Health and wellness, nutrition, and having a program in the department to properly train and help firefighters is crucial to keep our firefighters healthy and in the best shape possible. This issue is, unfortunately, not going away any time soon, and it is going to only get worse before it gets better."

Weissman hopes to see fire departments nationwide implement

a better plan when battling cancer, and implores every fire department to implement a cancer awareness program.

"It starts with leadership," continues Weissman. "We always talk about making changes in our organization – often using the glacier in water metaphor where under the surface there is a much larger problem. Leadership has to take ownership that cancer is not going away; it's going to strike every department in the world because of what firefighters are exposed to daily."

January was firefighter cancer awareness month. To commemorate, the FCSN rolled out education programs related to awareness, decontamination, nutrition, and wellness. These resources are free for every organization to use.

"Firefighters are extraordinary folks," says Weissman. "But if they think they're immune to being diagnosed with cancer, they're very wrong. Cancer is going to strike either you or someone you know in the service. It's

inevitable. You must take steps NOW to protect yourself so that you can have a great, healthy career, and enjoy your retirement afterward." 🔥

For more information about cancer in the fire service, please visit <https://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/cancer-prevention-resources>. If you or someone you know is struggling with a cancer diagnosis, please visit <https://firefightercancersupport.org>.

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Let's Talk Leadership

Fire Chief Tom Jenkins



I CHIEFS recently connected with Fire Chief Tom Jenkins to talk everything leadership-related in the fire service. Tom Jenkins was appointed fire chief for the City of Rogers (Arkansas) in 2009 and under Tom's leadership, he is responsible for over 150 career employees in 10 locations and has helped the Rogers Fire Department become accredited by the Center for Public Safety Excellence since 2011, Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services since 2012, and was awarded an Insurance Service Officer Public Protection Classification of one in 2015.

iCHIEFS: AS A YOUNG FIRE CHIEF, WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN WHEN YOU STEPPED INTO THAT ROLE?

Looking back, I felt like I was a kid when I became a fire chief. Whether it's as deputy fire chief or fire chief, I got a good perspective of being a leader when I became a dad. There are fundamentals in parenting and being a leader that are incredibly similar, and that knowledge really helped me become a better leader overall.

There truly is no magic solution to being a good leader or firefighter. They call it "practicing" medicine because you can never perfect it – being a fire chief is much the same. I was ill prepared to appreciate the spectrum of responsibility on my shoulders when I became a chief officer. I often tell newcomers that the bugles we wear on our shoulders are very heavy. It's hard to appreciate exactly how much we do.

Leadership is hard in any organization, especially in a public facing one. The skill I had to hone over the years is to appreciate the blessings that you can get being a fire chief – being able to work with people who really care about making a difference. You must focus on serving the public and taking care of the firefighters on your team, and the rest will follow.

iCHIEFS: WHAT WAS THE BEST LEADERSHIP ADVICE YOU WERE GIVEN BY A MENTOR?

I was once told to not let perfection get in my way. Sometimes you need to just move along and do the work and not get all caught up in perfecting what you're doing. There are so many moving pieces as a fire chief, sometimes all you have to say is,

"Alright, let's just get it done." In all, it makes us more productive.

Another memorable bit of advice that I've received along the way is, "You should accumulate more friends than enemies along the way." When you're in a leadership position, there are so many people you meet and so many things to do, but it's a lonely job.

One more bit of advice is that diplomacy is important. The best decisions are in the gray – black and white decisions, binary decisions, are very rare. The higher up I've gotten, the more I appreciate how grey and minute all the decisions are and I have realized that we should all work to understand different perspectives.

iCHIEFS: WHAT IS YOUR BEST PIECE OF ADVICE TO THOSE STEPPING INTO A LEADERSHIP POSITION?

One of the things you seem to hear a lot as a firefighter is, "I'm just going to get stuff done, I don't care what other people think of me." But to me, I think you *should* worry about these things. Fire chiefs, at any level, should go into those roles wanting to leave a legacy. If you go into the position wanting to make a difference, you're going to make yourself and the organization better.

I don't see this as a selfish thing. It's fantastic for the organization that you have a legacy of fire chiefs who deal with things in a certain way; this sets us up for a win. I would rather work for someone who cares about what others think – it shows that they care in the first place.

iCHIEFS: WHAT ARE THE TOP LEADERSHIP ISSUES AND CONCERNS THAT ARE CHALLENGING FIRE SERVICE LEADERS TODAY?

The biggest one – if you were to survey any fire chief today – is that recruitment/retention is a big deal right now. There just aren't the same amount of people who want to be firefighters these days.

I think we're in a leadership crisis. People within our organizations are avoiding being leaders, rather than rising to the challenge. I'm concerned chief-level positions don't appeal to the generation of workforce that is

currently eligible. While I know there are exceptions to this, holistically it is something that keeps me thinking. If there is a crisis out there right now, it's related to the fact that we must cultivate leaders. We're focusing on people coming into the organization, but we must also recruit the right type of leader for our future.

iCHIEFS: WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE FOR THE FIRE SERVICE?

I think we have a long way to go when speaking about diversity, equity, and inclusivity. We are better than we were five years ago, but it's always going to be something to work on. We require the transformation of an industry that is inherently white and male, and we need to be better at expanding our membership roster and making people feel comfortable sitting around the kitchen table at our fire stations.

I've been chief for almost 13 years now. I feel the change, I hear the conversations, and notice that we're on a different and more positive trajectory. We have to find a way to balance the traditional and the emerging employees, accept that our mission has changed and that we solve so many problems for our communities, and we have to start paying attention to how we work together with our

members, too. I think we all need to put on our thinking hats and think a little bigger than just the confines of our organization, because it's the right thing to do.

iCHIEFS: WHAT IS A CHALLENGE OR ISSUE THAT HAS SHAPED YOUR OUTLOOK OR WAY OF LEADING YOUR TEAMS?

To tag onto the inclusivity topic, in the past couple of years I have made a point to understand those issues better. I didn't understand them as I do today – so I listened to the perspective from female firefighters, for example, such as working a 24- to 48-hour shift as a new mom. When you sit and listen to those around you, you start to realize our industry is set up for people like me and not the ones we claim we want to employ.

I'm not convinced that we're close to the end, but I know we are making progress. Just because I didn't feel like I was the one creating the problem doesn't mean I shouldn't have taken the time to understand the problem, so I'm glad I made that time investment. Today I feel like I can listen and speak intelligently about those issues in a way I simply couldn't have before. I like that I can be in my 13th year as chief and say, "I am doing the job better than I did a year ago," and of course, there is always room for me to do better. 🔥



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Improving the Quality of Care with Body-Worn and In-Car Cameras

By Juliet Goodman and Shaun Ackley, Axon National

As body-worn and in-car cameras have become increasingly standard in municipal law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services (EMS) have begun to see the value of utilizing the cameras for their quality assurance of care. With liability claims bringing significant time expenditure and monetary loss, and patient safety always top of mind, getting the full picture of a course of care is imperative.

While cameras are nothing new in law enforcement, there are still areas of opportunity to discover how they can be most impactful for fire and emergency medical services. Whether worn by first responders or mounted in the transport vehicle, cameras can boost the quality of patient care, enhance real-time awareness, and provide unparalleled training opportunities.

PATIENT SAFETY

The more information available during the course of care, the better outcomes for patients can be achieved. Medical personnel can review footage with body and in-car cameras to determine the best next steps once a patient arrives at the hospital. Cameras serve the purpose of providing doctors and other healthcare providers with more information during medical emergencies.

During a trial with Axon Flex 2 point-of-view cameras, Cypress Creek (Texas) EMS found that using cameras in incidences of cardiac arrest played a role in saving two patients' lives.

After being rushed to local hospitals, neither of the patients experiencing cardiac arrest showed signs of life in the ER. Standard protocol in the circumstances would be to 'call it' and mark the time of death. However, the paramedics reviewed Flex 2 videos

with the ER doctor depicting that the patients had, in fact, been showing significant signs of life on the way to the hospital, which prompted the doctor to make a special call for a cardiologist to come work on the then completely unresponsive patients. Both patients survived.

In an environment where quick decisions are critical, and emergency medical personnel must make the best decision with the information available, camera footage can help make a decision for a patient's care that will result in the best possible outcome.

REAL-TIME AWARENESS

A central tenet of third-generation Axon Body and Fleet in-car cameras is the ability to livestream from the field, or in the case of EMS, the transport vehicle. Livestreaming gives information in real-time about a patient's condition, bridging the

divide between responders in the vehicle and doctors and nurses in the ER and expediting decision-making. Livestreaming goes one step further in providing essential information during an emergency medical situation.

With livestreaming, in the scenario depicted earlier, the ER doctor wouldn't have needed to watch the camera footage once the emergency transport vehicles arrived at the hospital – they would have been able to see the developments unfolding over the high-quality stream and know that the patients had been showing signs of life before arriving. Every moment of saved time counts when it comes to saving a life.

TRAINING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Having a record of patient encounters is beneficial not only in the moment of caring for patients but also for training and continuous improvement later. Cameras offer paramedics the opportunity to improve continually by watching and

learning from past encounters on video. Over 65 percent of people are visual learners, meaning that seeing something firsthand is invaluable in their learning and development of skills. Camera footage gives the critical visuals of what works well and what doesn't, and allows emergency medical personnel to review, practice, and reflect anytime on a repeatable basis.

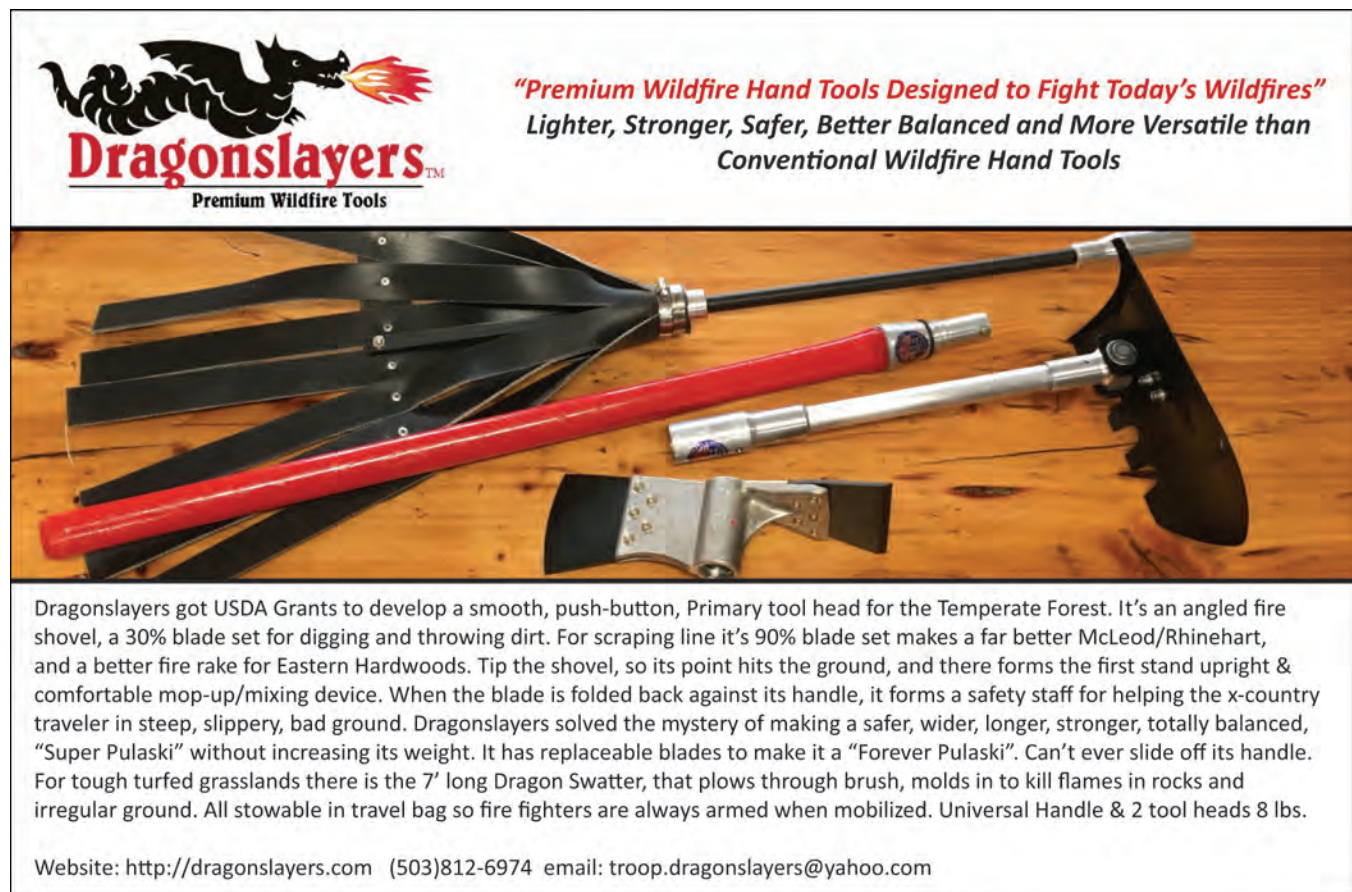
The natural question arises of whether footage can be reused for training purposes in light of the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act* (HIPAA) and privacy considerations. Each Axon camera maintains a robust chain of custody and access for all collected footage, remaining fully compliant with HIPAA. HIPAA affects whether footage can be reused, stored, or shared, not the question of collecting body-worn or in-car camera data in the course of treating or transporting a patient. Since body-worn and in-car camera footage is used to provide healthcare,

compliance with HIPAA is maintained. The footage remains secure and reliable to be used in the future.

CAMERAS IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

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Juliet Goodman and Shaun Ackley are Axon National Account Executives. Juliet Goodman can be contacted at jgoodman@axon.com, and Shaun Ackley at sackley@axon.com. Don't hesitate to contact Axon today to learn more about cameras for Fire & EMS at <https://www.axon.com>.



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Learning to be a Chief Executive or an Administrative Firefighter

By **Frederick L. Kauser**, PhD., Mifflin Township – Division of Fire

Nothing triggers a fire department to action learning better than a calamity that demands their response.

Firefighters exist to act. Fire officers are primed to lead. *Adapt, improvise, and overcome* is a popular fire service mantra. The benefits of learning by ‘going to work’ at a fire are obvious.

Ever notice the shift in morale after a significant fire? Everyone is discussing the actions taken, tactics employed, lessons learned, and of course, what they will do better next time. Some of the deepest organizational learning occurs during and following a challenging fire, EMS, or rescue response.

Fire chiefs are conditioned their entire career to learn from their own

experiences. It has always worked. And yet, for many in our ranks, this response-mode way of activating learning is a disastrous mistake. Chief fire executives may not get the opportunity to practice and learn from their errors. This approach works for advancing hose lines down smoke-charged hallways but not for politically charged executive meetings.

WHY LEARNING MATTERS

Learning is more than just a change in perspective, behavior, or performance. It requires an examination of the how and why we do or do not learn the lessons needed to perform our work. Let’s start with the most vital reason why – because our staff, our bosses, and our communities are counting on us.

It goes without saying that the challenges of responding to the global pandemic – for over two years – are significant. At the same time, our current ranks have never served in such a socially polarizing time. Our firefighters have toggled between fearlessness and helplessness. We did our work during an extraordinary period of national civil and political unrest. We ran out of protective gear. The supply chain stalled. Our firefighters were infected, became ill, and were hospitalized. And tragically, some died. Many agencies were already suffering from inadequate funding, equipment, and staffing levels before the pandemic. We already had a laundry list of challenges. All of this should cause you to reconsider how and why fire officers learn to do their work.

I do not question the resilience or ability of any chief officer to overcome obstacles and guide their organizations through chaos, nor do I question the response we have provided during these unprecedented times. I am concerned that our knowledge gap is increasing in the areas of human and organizational behaviors, process and risk management, economics, and adult learning, to name a few. Educating fire officers in these concepts prepares them to lead effectively. And if we fail, someone else will lead our departments for us.

To complicate matters, the workforce is changing. Psychologist Anthony Klotz, a Texas A&M professor, coined the term 'Great Resignation' to account for the mass resignations happening across the country. He found that workers are recalibrating work-life balance and examining their commitment to the workplace.

Volunteers and applicants are becoming scarcer in the fire service for potentially the same reasons these workers are resigning from companies that do not value their contributions. Workers are more unwilling than ever to work in poorly led and managed organizations. It appears they have choices and are not afraid to exercise them. How well do you understand the human behavior that operates within your fire department?

HOW HUMAN LEARNING WORKS

Our collective fire service record is filled with repeated errors, lost opportunities, and an overall lack of progress when compared to other occupations. We have failed to solve our problems with training, rules, and supervision. Maybe we have a learning problem. Detailing this data is outside the scope of this article, but I would be glad to discuss this over a phone call or cup of coffee.

Let's talk instead about how adults learn to perform work. Adults develop routines and habits to navigate daily life and learning firefighting skills is no different. Most of us will learn using this same process. Firefighters are introduced to core knowledge, practice in safe and controlled environments, and then integrate through experience. This happens under the watchful eye of a mentor or supervisor until competency is confirmed.

When our perspective, behavior, or performance 'changes,' we say that learning has occurred. If the applied skills work for us, we keep doing it. More experiences produce comfort and consistency to the point they become an unconscious habit. In fact, we continue to 'do what we have always done' until it no longer works. A failure opens the door for reactivating these learning processes. This learning pattern has allowed each of us to

navigate the ranks and is very likely the basis of your own learning habits. By now, you should recognize the risks.

We already know that change can be the kryptonite within any fire department. Change is hard, and for a good reason. Learning is a profoundly personal internal experience. Within academia, firefighting is a *high-reliability* job. This term applies to a workforce that performs complex, high-risk work in dynamic and uncontrolled environments. These occupations favor the management of error through the application of 'engineered' work processes. These processes are integrated into systems of firefighting practice reinforced through experience.

Under this model, risk management becomes a function of personal discipline and experience. These are also very personal internal experiences. Operating outside of the processes designed under a high-reliability model is inherently dangerous and generally prohibited. Mastering these processes is the objective for a safe outcome. Mastery comes from experience.

This is exactly why change is difficult to implement in the fire service. No firefighter in their right mind would adjust their personal operating processes outside of their experiences unless there was a good reason. Building a process mindset and practices and then proving it out with experience results in a safe, competent, and confident firefighter and fire officer. This is likely why they won't, or cannot, change and adapt to new ways of thinking or doing. And unfortunately, it's why they will hurt or kill themselves tragically when faced with circumstances that do not match what they have learned through experience. This paradox in how we learn-practice-fail-relearn (reframe) our work applies to chief officers as well.

LEARNING IS CHANGE

For the first time, a newly appointed fire chief will report to a supervisor who isn't from their own ranks. In fact, most of the professionals they will work with have spent their entire careers honing their expertise. The new boss will not understand how



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the fire department works, the culture, operational needs, terminology, or ways of thinking. I propose that many new chiefs are *Subject Matter Novices* (SMN). This gap in understanding is a deficit for the chief and their organization.

The original intent of educating fire officers was to mediate this problem; to develop a common language, practices, and deep understanding of public fire protection so we could work together and alongside others who are not part of our business. The American fire service must recommit to expanding our understanding of our role within the larger societal systems that we operate. Chief fire officers must invest in higher education.

The general purpose of formal education is to accelerate content knowledge, preferably in areas we lack expertise or experience. It's about understanding. The central intention of higher education is *learning how to learn*. A fire officer will experience and learn from nearly every aspect of emergency operations during their career. These experiences are a mind trap that can shape the way we operate in the next rank.

Experience and training are limited and will teach you 'how.' Education accounts for the deeper understanding of 'why.' When you know why, you are better equipped to make sustainable changes in your organization. If you remain trapped in a 'learn from response' mindset and only learn how to solve a problem, you will be limiting yourself to the role of 'administrative firefighter.'

Finally, education is intended to shift your understanding and perspective. Training is intended to shift your performance. An educated fire officer thinks and behaves differently. Like firefighter training, knowledge gained through education should be integrated into practice through experience. Everything a firefighter and fire officer experiences in the job transfers to the next rank. Unfortunately, fuel, heat, and oxygen are no longer the elements that are

working against the fire chief. In our offices, aspects of economics, social and human behavior, politics, communications, policy and laws, and many other factors frame our work and decision making.

If you are the fire administrator for your organization, your prime duty is to educate yourself and your executive staff. I say prime because supporting a culture of learning within your organization may, in fact, be the single most important duty of a fire chief. At its core, learning is the most important

attribute of anyone who works. This is especially true of those who work in high-risk, high-reliability organizations. I urge you to consider the 'how' and 'why' you and your staff learn to do their work. After all, you are your department's chief learning officer. 🧡

Frederick L. Kauser, PhD., is Fire Chief of Mifflin Township – Division of Fire, Gahanna, Ohio. If you'd like to discuss this article, please contact Chief Kauser at 614-471-0542 / kauserf@mifflin-oh.gov.

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Legislative Update



Ken LaSala, IAFC Director of Government Relations and Policy

Welcome to the New Year – Seems Like the Old Year

By **Ken LaSala**, IAFC Director of Government Relations and Policy

Welcome to 2022! While the Biden Administration notched up some notable victories, there still remains a lot to be done. For example, the House and Senate recessed in December without passing the President's signature *Build Back Better Act* (H.R. 5376) with many of his domestic priorities. In addition, Congress could not agree upon total funding for the federal government. So, these bills will be priorities for the first quarter of 2022.

It's important to highlight what was accomplished last year. President Biden signed the *American Rescue Plan Act* (P.L. 117-2), which included \$100 million for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program and \$200 million for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program. The bill also allowed fire and Emergency

Medical Services (EMS) agencies to be reimbursed for treating patients in place. He also signed the infrastructure bill (P.L. 117-58), which authorized the Assistance for Local Emergency Response Training grant program and billions for wildland fire and cybersecurity preparedness. In December, Congress also agreed to raise the debt limit, so the federal government could pay its bills past the November 2022 elections. Finally, Congress and the President agreed on a continuing resolution to keep the federal government open until February 18, 2022.

However, a lot of business was left unfinished. Most importantly, the Democrats in the Senate were unable to reach an agreement to pass the *Build Back Better Act*. The bill originally was \$3.5 trillion but was cut in half in the House to a total of \$1.75 trillion. Lost to the cuts were \$718 million for fire station construction

and renovation, and \$9.5 billion for the nationwide deployment of Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG 9-1-1).

The good news is that the bill includes a starting down payment of \$500 million for NG 9-1-1 deployment. The bill also includes \$95 million for the AFG program to replace firefighting foam and personal protective equipment that has PFAS, \$150 million for the State and Volunteer Fire Assistance programs, and \$65 billion for public housing improvements, including the installation of fire sprinklers and carbon monoxide alarms. President Biden's credibility and part of the Democrats' hopes to retain the House and Senate rely upon this legislation.

In addition, Congress finally must pass the FY 2022 appropriations bills before February 18. The House Appropriations Committee marked up bills for funding homeland security (H.R. 4431) and wildland fire programs

(H.R. 4372) over the summer. While H.R. 4431 was not considered on the House Floor, the annual appropriations for the federal wildland fire programs passed as part of a consolidated appropriations bill (H.R. 4502) on July 29. Meanwhile, the Democrats on the Senate Appropriations Committee released draft appropriations bills in the fall for homeland security and wildland fire programs. See Figure 1 for how the FY 2022 appropriations situation looks.

For the SAFER grant program, the House FY 2022 DHS appropriations bill (H.R. 4431) and the Senate draft bill would allow the FEMA Administrator to waive the following requirements to the SAFER grants:

- The local cost-share.
- The three-year performance period.
- The requirement that SAFER funds not supplant local funds.
- The requirement that the recipient fire department maintain its budget at 80 percent of the average funding over the past three years.
- The FEMA Administrator also would be authorized to allow fire departments to retain and re-hire firefighters as part of the SAFER program.

The bills also would allow the FEMA Administrator to waive the local match requirement and the maintenance of expenditures requirements (preventing a fire department's budget from being reduced to not less than 80 percent of the average amount of such expenditures in the preceding two fiscal years) for the AFG program.

It is expected that the House and Senate finally will pass an omnibus appropriations bill in February.

Congress also took steps to delay some planned cuts to Medicare reimbursement. In January, fire and EMS departments might have seen a six percent cut to their reimbursement due to statutory requirements. In December, Congress passed the Protecting Medicare and American Farmers from Sequester Cuts Act (P.L. 117-71). This law prevents a four percent cut to Medicare reimbursements

in 2022. An additional two percent cut will be canceled from January 1 through March 31. Then it would slowly be phased in with a one percent cut from April 1 through June 30. The full two percent cut to Medicare reimbursement will come into effect on July 1, 2022. The IAFC is asking Congress to pass the Protecting Access to Ground Ambulance Medical Services Act (H.R. 2454/S. 2037), which would prevent the two percent, three percent and 22.6 percent add-on

payments for ambulance transport from expiring at the end of 2022.

The federal agencies also have been busy. The Federal Aviation Administration recently allowed public agencies, like fire departments, to train with Unmanned Aerial Vehicles under their Certificate of Authorization as a public aircraft operation. In addition, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reversed its decision to take public safety spectrum in the 4.9 GHz band and license it to the states.

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The FCC solicited comments about what to do with the 4.9 GHz band in the fall. The IAFC asked the FCC to protect existing public safety licensees in the 4.9 GHz and examine the use of a national band manager to coordinate 5G operations in the band. In addition, selected ground ambulance organizations will have

to start collecting and reporting cost and revenue information to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Ground Ambulance Data Collection System. To find out if your department must participate in this program, please go to the Medicare Ground Ambulance Data Collection System web page.¹

2022 will promise to be a busy year, especially as Congress tries to finish up legislation that carried over from December. To keep engaged on what is happening in Washington, please follow the IAFC's web page (www.iafc.org). In addition, please plan to meet with your members of Congress during the National Fire and Emergency Services Dinner on April 7. We'll keep fighting for you in DC! 🔥

Ken LaSala is the IAFC's Director of Government Relations and Policy.

FIGURE 1: FY 2022 APPROPRIATIONS (IN MILLIONS (\$))

Program	FY 2020 (Enacted)	FY 2021 (Enacted)	FY 2022 (President's Budget)	FY 2022 (H.R. 4431)	FY 2022 (Senate)
AFG	455 ¹	460 ²	370	370	370
SAFER	355	560 ³	370	370	370
USFA	46.844	49.269	53.212	53.212	53.212
UASI	665	705	689.684	705	705
SHSGP	560	610	594.686	610	610
US&R	37.832	37.832	37.832	37.832	37.382
Volunteer Fire Assistance	18	19	19	20	20

1. Includes \$100 million in AFG funding from the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136).
2. Includes \$100 million in AFG funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (P.L. 117-2).
3. Includes \$200 million in SAFER funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (P.L. 117-2)

REFERENCE:

1. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. "Medicare Ground Ambulance Data Collection System." <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/AmbulanceFeeSchedule/Ground-Ambulance-Services-Data-Collection-System>.

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