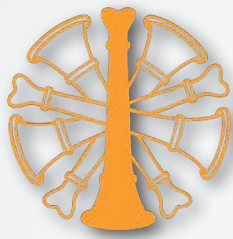


Spring 2026



CHIEFS

The Official Magazine of the International Association of Fire Chiefs



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Page 09

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Program Expansion
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And much more!



CHIEFS

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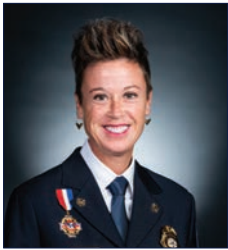
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On the Cover: This issue's main cover image features the City of Boulder's new Fire Rescue, Station #3, a state-of-the-art fire station that was designed to improve response coverage to a rapidly growing community. Learn more from the architects, Davis Partnership Architects, at <https://davispartnership.com/projects/city-of-boulder-fire-station-3>. Photo by Animish Kudalkar. The inset historic photo from 1985 shows a fire truck from Hahn Fire Apparatus, also known as Hahn Motors.



Spring Fever... Comin' In Hot!

A new beginning does not mean leaving our traditions behind. It means building upon them to prepare the next generation to lead, educate, and serve.

Every new season brings in challenges and opportunities. This is true for our fire and emergency services.

New recruits, promotions, a change of organizational leadership — new can be exciting if you allow it to be.

A new beginning does not mean leaving our traditions behind. It means building upon them to prepare the next generation to lead, educate, and serve. It means adapting to new ideas, new processes and, perhaps, new people.

We have great expectations for our organization as we continue to move forward and upward. Collectively, our members represent the very best of fire and EMS leadership. As we turn the page and begin another chapter, we look

forward to welcoming a new CEO, strengthening our infrastructure, and returning to a position of prominence and influence in the global fire service.

This new chapter is about growth, relevancy, and speed. Our profession changes fast, and we need to catch up. It is about focused change that challenges us and helps shape a stronger future for our members and our communities. Together, we need to move forward, focused, united, and ready.

Thank you for your leadership, your dedication, and your trust in the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). The work ahead is important, and I am honored to lead it alongside you.

Fire Chief Trisha Wolford
IAFC President & Board Chair

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The Trajectory of the American Fire Service:



By Jon Nevin,
PhD, Deputy Fire Chief

The fire service holds a celebrated place in American communities. Whether staffed by volunteers, career personnel, or a combination, the United States has placed a unique level of reverence on these public servants. Half a century ago, *America Burning*, a landmark federal report on the severity of the nation's fire problem, was released, and a call for action was delivered. In response, the fire service evolved into the modern institution familiar to Americans today, primarily focused on saving lives and property from fire.

As fire prevention measures began to take hold, the proportion of fire

calls started to decline. In its place was a widening of the scope to which the fire department began to respond. The fire service today is vastly different from 50 years ago, in terms of demands, costs, and outputs. How far have we shifted from the implied original objective of preserving and protecting life and property? Perhaps more importantly, where do current fire service leaders see us going?

A CALL TO ACTION

America Burning called out a fatal indifference to fire safety that had taken hold amongst citizens in the early 1970s; there were 12,000 fire-related deaths and

Where Have We Come From and Where Are We Going?

over 300,000 injuries occurring annually. Adjusted for inflation, there was an estimated \$20.53 billion in property loss and another \$86.70 billion in associated direct and indirect costs being incurred annually. The report called for, and successfully achieved, a major decrease in these figures, the birth of modern fire prevention, and the development of the United States Fire Administration. This inflection point in the fire service was not occurring in a vacuum, either. A similar shift was occurring with the advent of modern EMS, and the development and proliferation of the 911 system.

When the value of the fire service is evaluated, there are certain areas with undeniable return in value, while others are somewhat more difficult to identify. In general, these can be identified as those that are tied to fire prevention versus those that are tied to operational responses. The advent of the modern fire prevention movement, including fire code enforcement, inspections, and public education, has undeniably left its mark. Fifty years after the *America Burning* report, fire-related deaths per capita have dropped by 81.6%, and fire-related injuries per capita have fallen by 97.4%. Further, fires reported per capita have decreased by half.

What hasn't improved much is the cost of fire loss nationally. Adjusted for inflation and population growth, the estimated cost of fire loss has only decreased by 8.4%, despite the number of fires diminishing by half. Whether this is due to construction costs, fires burning hotter and faster, or response times lengthening, the question could be asked: Have we been successful in addressing the segment of the mission tasked with preserving property?

BEYOND THE FIRE

During these same five decades, EMS calls have risen by nearly 500%,

a trend that won't surprise anyone in the fire service. However, that is only one aspect of the overall change. The more significant, and often overlooked, transformation is in the growth of calls that fall into the "other" category, including false alarms.

These two categories have seen a 700%+ growth in calls for service. These incidents, which can range from lift assists to non-emergency public service calls, have caused a huge draw on the system. The most important impact of these "other" calls for service is not the actual response itself, but the coverage gap that it causes thousands of times a day in communities across the United States. It is that gap in coverage that directly impacts the ability of the fire service to stand ready for its primary mission of responding to critical life and property-threatening emergencies.

The fire service's "can-do" attitude and desire to maintain an existential necessity has created the opportunity for substantial mission creep from the original objectives of only protecting life and property. Negative results of this may include the growth of firefighter mental health issues, financial challenges, and recruiting difficulties. Further, with the major role that the fire service now plays in prehospital emergency medicine, we also find ourselves entangled in an overwhelmed and often dysfunctional healthcare system.

AT A CROSSROADS

All of this begs the question, where are we going? The answer to this question is inevitably guided by today's current fire service leaders. A recent survey of 88 current fire service leaders evaluated their perspectives on this topic. Of the respondents, the mean tenure in the fire service was 26.3 years, and 80% of the respondents were either fire chiefs or second in command of their

organization. Seventy-three percent were from career organizations, and they represented organizations of all sizes, including 10 metropolitan agencies, 29 serving populations between 75,000 and 500,000, and the remainder serving agencies with populations under 75,000.

The results of the survey showed the wide variety in different organizations and the communities they serve. When asked whether the respondents believed the fire service had shifted from its initial purpose of protecting life and property on a scale of 0 to 10 (0 meaning no, and 10 meaning yes), the most common answer was 0 (19%), as shown in Figure 1. However, the next most common answer was 7. Interestingly, those who had been in the fire service longer tended to answer more to the negative of whether we have drifted from our initial mission of protecting life and property.

Respondents did show a bias towards believing that there had been a decrease in operational "readiness" for critical calls, due to the increase in call volume, as shown in Figure 2. Somewhat contrastingly, respondents strongly supported the "all-hazards" concept that the fire service has evolved into. More than half of respondents answered 8, 9, or 10 on the 0 to 10 scale (10 meaning yes). They overwhelmingly were against the opposite model in place in much of the rest of the developed world, where the fire service has a very narrow scope of what it provides. When asked whether it was the fire service's responsibility to respond to low-acuity/non-emergency calls, there was no sense of agreement; those responding from larger departments generally responded that they did not believe it was the fire service's responsibility.

When asked about the number one change they would make to the fire service if they were able to, the

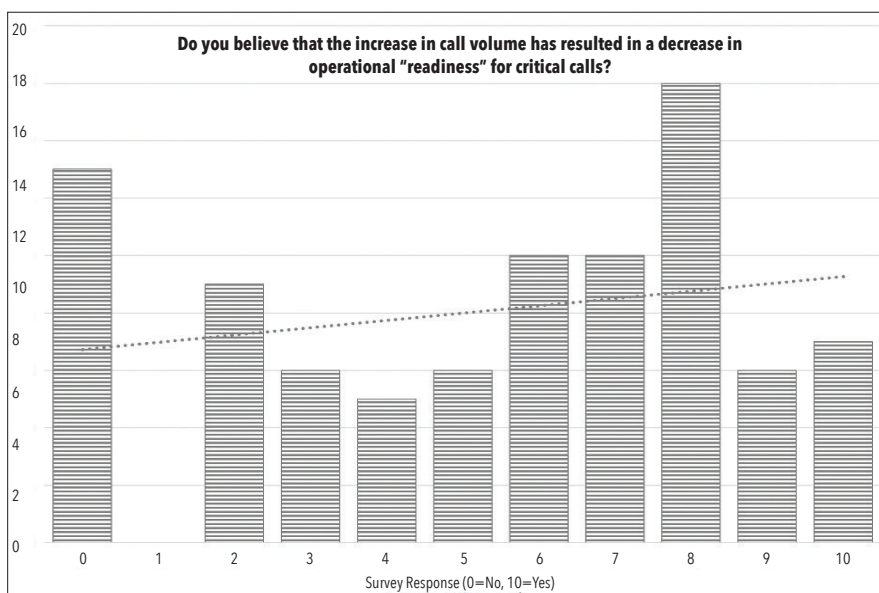
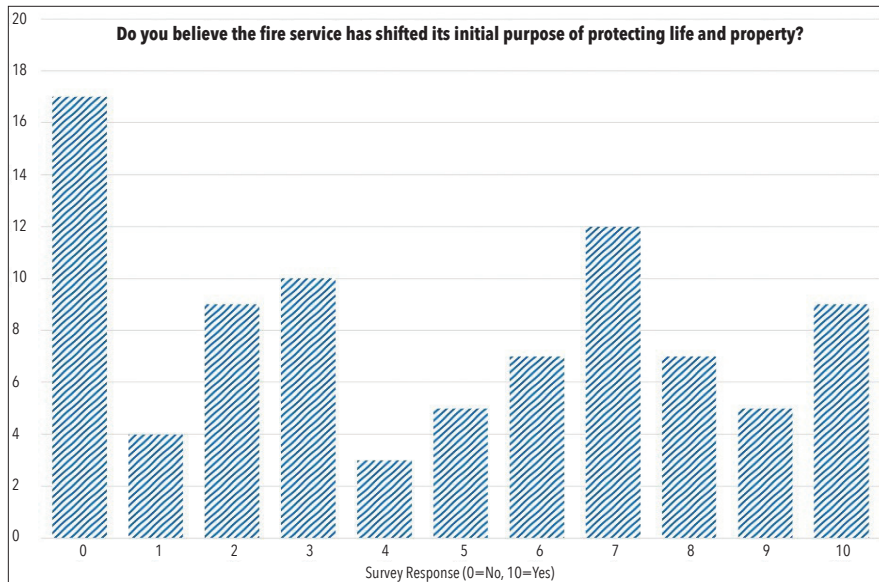


Figure 1 (top) and Figure 2 show results from a recent survey of 88 fire service leaders.

most common answer was to stop or alter non-emergency responses. The next most common answer was the development of a separate entity for alternative EMS delivery, to integrate community paramedicine and social interventions, without burdening the response capabilities of the fire service. Respondents voiced that financial imitations and political pressure were the primary reasons that have prevented them from making these changes in their own organizations.

Comments that accompanied the surveys were broad and varied, including:

- “We need to be the hub of community service.”

- “The perceived change (to our primary mission) is detrimental to our mission of protecting lives and property; however, with more education...both tactical and leadership abilities can be enhanced, and fulfilling the all-hazards model can become less of a burden on an organization.”
- “The American fire service stands at a crossroads. Tradition has carried us far, but transformation will carry us further. Our mission must evolve beyond fire suppression — it has to include leadership development, mental wellness, and community engagement as core competencies... I believe the fire service can lead the way in

restoring public trust, strengthening communities, and inspiring the next generation to serve.”

The results of the survey were as varied as the organizations represented by the respondents, and the adage held true, that “If you’ve seen one fire department, you’ve seen one fire department.”

However, there were some identifiable trends that provided discussion on the sustainability of the current trajectory of the American fire service. The need to devise and implement an evolution to what role the fire service plays in EMS, as well as low-acuity calls for service, was repeatedly mentioned.

One of the largest obstacles to any large-scale solution is the dichotomy that the ability to produce a scalable answer generally needs to first occur at the local level. But it is exactly that adaptive change at the local level that has been so elusive for municipal governments to implement. This results in a stalemate when looking to the other end of the spectrum, with a regional or federal directive to drive this, as the American fire service has largely operated in silos, driven by local needs.

Perhaps one of the highlights of the survey findings was to hear from current fire service leaders that the fire service has maintained a consistent mission throughout the years, regardless of whether the mission may have broadened over time. Ultimately, as the mission-driven profession and the service-focused professionals that we are, we will continue to find solutions to support our original mission of protecting life and property. 🔥

The survey and its findings were undertaken as part of the capstone research project from the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy.

Jon Nevin, Ph.D., currently serves as a Deputy Fire Chief for a Southern California fire department and is also an adjunct instructor for the National Fire Academy. He is a graduate of the Executive Leadership Program at the University of Southern California and is graduating from the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Officer program in April of 2026.

Faster, Smarter Procurement for Fire-Rescue Leaders:

A Practical 10-Step Guide

Sourcewell 

By Sourcewell

Fire-rescue leaders juggle urgent operational needs with rigorous procurement rules. One proven way to deliver on both is to use competitively solicited cooperative contracts stewarded by a government entity.

Sourcewell is such an entity. It is a Minnesota service cooperative established by statute as a local unit of government, authorized to solicit, evaluate, and award contracts that agencies across the United States and Canada can use. As a hub for government-to-government solutions, Sourcewell support 50,000+ government agencies annually to purchase a wide variety of products and services through more than 900 competitively awarded contracts (with more than 200 of these contracts specific to public safety), covering everything from office supplies to fire apparatus, accessible to government, education, and many non-profit organizations.

For fire chiefs, city managers, and procurement officials who need to move fast without compromising compliance or transparency, here is a 10-step, education-first process you can apply immediately.

STEP 1: CONFIRM YOUR AGENCY'S ELIGIBILITY

Access to Sourcewell by fire/EMS agencies is broad and free. Government entities, education institutions, and many nonprofits can register at no cost and no obligation to purchase.



To confirm whether your agency is already registered, use the Participating Agency Lookup to find your agency and account number (www.sourcewell-mn.gov/lookup).

STEP 2: MAP YOUR NEED TO AN AWARDED CONTRACT

Translate your requirement (for example, Type 1 pumper, station alerting, turnout gear) into a contract search.

Search by category or supplier to find awarded contracts covering:

- Fire apparatus;
- PPE and uniforms;
- Training and simulation;
- Communications and alerting;
- Software and technology;
- And many more.

Each contract listing includes the contract number, scope, terms, and documentation to simplify due diligence. You can search awarded contracts online (www.sourcewell-mn.gov/contract-search).

STEP 3: VALIDATE COMPLIANCE (DOCUMENT ONCE, REUSE OFTEN)

Sourcewell competitively solicits and awards contracts under

Minnesota law and publishes comprehensive procurement records. That said, your agency must confirm that a chosen contract meets your state, county, city, and internal procurement requirements and — when grants are involved — any funding-specific rules.

Note: Sourcewell is a local unit of government under Minnesota state statute and competitively solicits and awards contracts. Purchasing agencies are responsible for performing due diligence and ensuring compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, as well as specific funding requirements, in consultation with their legal counsel.

STEP 4: ENGAGE YOUR LOCAL DEALER/DISTRIBUTOR OR MANUFACTURER REP

Many of Sourcewell's public safety contracts are fulfilled through local dealers/distributors or other authorized representatives. This enables, for example:

- Apparatus and vehicle specification development;
- PPE fitting and sizing;

- System installation (communications technologies, software, alerting); and
- Ongoing service and warranty support.

STEP 5: BUILD A DEFENSIBLE PROCUREMENT FILE

Create a standardized procurement packet that can be reused, such as

- Sourcewell master agreement (contract number, term, scope);
- Supplier quote referencing the Sourcewell contract;

- Needs statement, specifications, and approvals; or
- Compliance exhibits (statute references, grant clauses if applicable). These documents are readily available on Sourcewell’s website and significantly reduce effort on future procurements.

STEP 6: COMPARE AWARDED OPTIONS FOR BEST OVERALL VALUE

When multiple suppliers are awarded within a category, you may request contract-based quotes to

compare configurations, delivery timelines, warranty and service, and lifecycle cost and value

This preserves competition and choice while maintaining a clear audit trail.

STEP 7: REFERENCE THE CONTRACT AT PURCHASE

When your governing body authorizes the purchase, ensure the Sourcewell contract number appears on the PO and award memo. This anchors your file to the competitive record for future audits.

STEP 8: PLAN DELIVERY, INTEGRATION, AND TRAINING

Coordinate with your dealer/distributor and internal teams as applicable on:

- Lead times and production schedules;
- Installation/delivery;
- Acceptance testing;
- System integration; and
- Training for operators and administrators.

STEP 9: CAPTURE OUTCOMES (TIME, EFFICIENCY, COST)

Track procurement days saved, avoided bid costs, and relevant price advantages from contract pricing. These metrics support after-action reviews and demonstrate stewardship to councils, supervisors, boards of directors, and the community.

STEP 10: INSTITUTIONALIZE THE WORKFLOW

- Adopt a simple decision gate:
1. Check for an existing competitively awarded cooperative contract.
 2. If a suitable contract exists, use it.
 3. If not, proceed with your own solicitation or monitor upcoming cooperative bids.

This approach shortens purchasing timelines and optimizes staff efficiency while maintaining compliance and transparency. 🔥

Learn more at www.sourcewell-mn.gov/public-safety/fire-rescue, or contact their team directly with questions via phone 877-585-9706 or email at service@sourcewell-mn.gov.

Community Risk Reduction: Literacy for Chief Officers



Landon Churchill,
Harris County ESD No. 7



Karen Berard-Reed,
M.Ed., National Fire Protection
Association

By Landon A. Churchill and Karen Berard-Reed

Modern emergency services agencies face an ongoing cascade of exciting innovations. Chief officers are challenged to sift through the noise and distinguish between industry trends that deserve attention and those that will become yesterday's faded buzzword. Community Risk Reduction (CRR) has been knocking at the doors of fire departments for well over a decade and has integrated with varying levels of success throughout many public safety agencies.

Positioned as a tool to boost impact of interventions, protect first responders, and

drive efficient community safety initiatives, one might wonder why adoption of strategic CRR has been slow.

WHY CRR STILL STRUGGLES FOR FULL ADOPTION

In many spaces, CRR sits as a specialized, siloed program where it should be positioned as an essential skill for leaders in emergency services. A shift is evident. CRR is embedded throughout the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program and is now a major technical competency in the Center for Public Safety Excellence's Chief Fire Officer

Continued on page 12

DRYGEARFAST

INDEPENDENT TESTING SHOWS THAT
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* Testing performed by Firehouse Labs, a division of Firehouse magazine. Ram Air Gear Dryer earned the Firehouse Labs Seal of Approval.



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Ram Air Gear Dryer TG-6H

The TG-6H heated bunker gear dryer holds as many as 12 pieces of gear, 6 helmets and 18 accessories



Firehouse Labs conducted a third-party, independent field test of the Ram Air Gear drying technology. The company is firefighter-owned and boasts a wide range of products that are engineered to help to dry PPE. Although several models were available, it was decided to test the company's midrange model, the TG-6H, which is a heated bunker gear dryer that's designed to hold as many as 12 pieces of gear, 6 helmets and 18 accessories.

The company stands by its marketing phrase, "Dry Gear Fast," which our independent analysis supported.

The Review

Over the period of two days, Firehouse Labs thoroughly tested and documented the performance of the TG-6H.

Accounting for variables, including ambient air temperature and humidity, the testing was conducted

under field-level conditions. The gear that was selected for the testing was purposefully chosen to provide a representation of various manufacturers, designs, materials and features. As a control, two sets of identical gear (only slightly varied in size) were in the test group, with one being subjected to a hang-dry option to identify the ambient air-drying capability.

To measure the effectiveness of the dryer, turnout gear weight was measured prior to washing (dry), post-washing (wet) and after it was on the gear dryer for one hour. Even if the gear felt dry, it wasn't considered dry until it was back to its starting weight.

It's important to note that at no time during the test did the evaluator register a temperature that was hotter than the maximum 105 degrees Fahrenheit that was established by *NFPA 1851: Standard on Selection, Care, and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting*.

The Results

Testing revealed that 90 percent of the time, the gear was dry within one hour. Outliers to the one-hour result included gear that had thick leather knee pads, integrated belts, large solid areas of reflective material, or inner pocket liners that used moisture-barrier material, essentially trapping moisture between two non-permeable surfaces.

In all but one test, the gear that wasn't back to its starting weight felt dry to the touch, particularly in areas that are prone to holding water, such as the underarm or groin areas of the gear. This is an impressive result considering that the average amount of water in the wet gear was nearly half a liter.

The inner liner of the gear held more water than the outer shells. However, the various pockets, patches, built-in padding in the elbows and knees, and folds in the fabric of the outer shells proved to be the last areas to dry. Areas, such as the neck shroud, could expedite drying with minor adjustments throughout the drying process; however, these adjustments were minimal and didn't disrupt the drying process.

When questioned about variables that could affect drying time, Ram Air Gear representatives mentioned ambient air temperatures, humidity levels and many of the gear manufacturing variables that were discovered during testing. Overall, the results were consistent and proved that the gear dryer would "Dry Gear Fast."

The Product

The Ram Air Gear product line was designed to maximize airflow to each piece of gear on the system. Opening accessory drying ports didn't reduce the airflow to other areas, and it was noted that there was more than enough airflow to fully inflate any gloves that were placed on the dryer. The controls were easy to understand and had built-in safeguards to prevent user errors that might damage firefighter turnout gear.

The design of this dryer combines impressive airflow volume and consistency, specifically engineered with firefighters' needs in mind. Each unit is sized to fit through a standard doorway and comes equipped with casters, which makes it easy to move without requiring an expensive installation.

Backed by a five-year warranty, this product has proven it can walk the walk, proudly earning the Firehouse Labs Seal of Approval.



At no time during testing was a temperature that was hotter than 105 degrees Fahrenheit registered. That temperature was established as the maximum permissible by *NFPA 1851: Standard on Selection, Care, and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting*.

Many fire service leaders confuse education with CRR to the extent that many educators' job titles have been changed to Community Risk Reduction Specialists, often without a change in function.

credential. Agency command staff hold the keys to full CRR integration. Chief officers should be able to talk the talk *and* walk the walk of Community Risk Reduction. They must possess and display high levels of CRR literacy.

Four competencies provide the foundation for CRR literacy and empower chief officers to elevate this strategy within their agencies and across their communities: Conceptual Clarity, Risk Assessment, Data Application, and Advocacy. While each competency is critical, this article unwraps the significance of a common CRR lexicon across the fire service and the covert messages chief officers deliver when they speak about CRR.

AN IDENTITY CRISIS

In the 1990s, CRR surfaced from the United Kingdom as Integrated Risk Management. It slowly captured the attention of the fire service in the United States and emerged as Community Risk Reduction. Beyond a buzzword but not quite a solidified process, CRR has been interpreted, reinterpreted, and misinterpreted many times over, resulting in diverse opinions about the true definition, function, and work associated with CRR.

The year 2020 provided a gift to frustrated CRR advocates in the form of NFPA 1300, the *Standard on Community Risk Assessment and Community Risk Reduction Plan*

Development. The standard provides a common definition of CRR: It is a process to identify and prioritize local risks, followed by the integrated and strategic investment of resources to reduce their occurrence and impact. In other words, this process helps community leaders explore local risk, prioritize issues, and develop plans to reduce them. Publication of this new standard provided legitimacy and credibility to Community Risk Reduction, as well as the opportunity to bring practitioners together with a common definition.

CONCEPTUAL CLARITY

CRR literacy helps chief officers clearly define CRR within the frame of their neighborhoods and explain how this process bolsters the local safety landscape. It also helps leaders avoid pitfalls associated with CRR such as rebranding programs and altering job titles without modernizing the work. Chief officers with strong CRR literacy communicate the important contributions of fire and life safety educators, public information officers, and fire inspectors while explaining how these roles do not equate to CRR but rather support the overall CRR strategy.

CRR literate leaders know what CRR is, what it is not, and they can articulate these ideas with precision. Additionally, they lean on underlying goals to distinguish between CRR

and other fire department activities. Questioning "What are we trying to accomplish with this activity?" provides helpful guideposts.

Community outreach activities are designed to strengthen rapport and enhance perception of the agency across the community. Public relations is an essential fire department task because it leads to support and social capital. These valuable assets should be cultivated because public sentiment is a solid measuring stick to department sustainability. Deploying apparatus to local touch-a-truck events and sending chief officers to speak to the Kiwanis Club members cultivates strong relationships. However, it is not CRR.

Similarly, Public Information Officers (PIO) can be misbranded as CRR specialists. PIOs are charged with getting critical information to the public to create transparency and increase incident awareness. Crisis communications are critical functions of any emergency services agency. But the work of the PIO does not provide a direct line to CRR. Publishing press releases about emergency incidents, conducting interviews with the media during a major event, and sharing actionable information with citizens are all valuable PIO tasks, but when it lives outside of a strategic risk reduction initiative, it is not CRR.

WHERE EDUCATIONS FITS IN

Fire and Life Safety Educators (FLSE) perform another vital function supporting the fire department's mission and may provide the highest degree of role confusion in the CRR landscape. These professionals deliver instructional interventions designed to improve residents', business owners', and even visitors' safety behaviors. Many fire service leaders confuse education with CRR to the extent that many educators' job titles have been changed to Community Risk Reduction Specialists, often without a change in function.

The truth is that FLSE exists both separate from and integrated with strategic CRR. At times, educators are focused on broad-based messaging

that impacts wide bands of the community. An example might be a campaign to change smoke alarm batteries when we change the clocks for daylight savings time or one to push out cooking safety messaging to avert Thanksgiving Day fires. This type of education often lives outside of true CRR. The initiatives are siloed from other prevention activities, local data does not inform the campaigns, delivery is not tailored to unique target audiences, and the interventions are not evaluated for impact.

On the other hand, there are educational initiatives that are integrated as one of the five Es (alongside engineering solutions, enforcement, economic incentives, and emergency response) that are included in the CRR plan developed after analysis and prioritization of the Community Risk Assessment (CRA). In this case, FLSE is an important contribution in the overall CRR system. But as a stand-alone activity, education does not equate to CRR.

LEADERSHIP STARTS WITH LITERACY

We offer a challenge to all chief officers. Evaluate your current programs with these questions: What are we trying to accomplish with this activity? Is this activity helping us get to where we want to go? We must have the courage to step back and look deeply at the alignment between our activities and our desired outcomes and then make adjustments where necessary. Building CRR literacy, starting with conceptual clarity and then layering in risk assessment, data application, and advocacy skills, provides the foundation for strategic and impactful deployment of community safety initiatives. Chief officers hold the keys to breaking down the CRR identity crisis and conceptual clarity is the first step in the right direction.


In summary, Community Risk Reduction is an important tool for modern fire departments. CRR literacy is essential for current chief officers to stay relevant and aspiring chief

officers to be competitive. Employers should prioritize these competencies when hiring and promoting fire service leaders who will need to be able to navigate the evolving risk landscape of the emergency services industry. 🔥

Landon Churchill serves as Deputy Chief of Strategic Services for Harris County ESD No. 7 in Texas, leading planning, accreditation, and community risk reduction initiatives. A former volunteer firefighter turned paramedic and educator, he also teaches nationally, supports disaster response, and advances leadership development across the fire service.

Karen Berard-Reed, M.Ed., is Community Risk Reduction Director at the National Fire Protection Association. She develops data-driven tools and partnerships to improve community safety, including CRAIG 1300™ and the CRR Kitchen Table. She serves in national leadership roles advancing prevention, risk assessment, and fire and life safety initiatives.

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A New Way to Lead:



IAFC and Columbia Southern University Expand Officer Development Program



By Keith Padgett,
Columbia Southern University

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and Columbia Southern University (CSU) are extremely proud to announce a major expansion of the IAFC/CSU Officer Development Program (ODP). Over the next year, the program will introduce three specialized leadership tracks: Wildfire Leadership, EMS Officer, and Emergency Management Leadership. Each is designed to address critical skill gaps and prepare emerging leaders for the many challenges facing today's emergency services.

This expansion represents a strategic evolution of the IAFC-CSU partnership, which has already redefined professional development in the fire service through the ODP Leadership Development Certification Series (LDCS). By adding these discipline-specific tracks, the IAFC and CSU are responding directly to fire service leaders who must navigate not only traditional structure fires but also increasingly complicated incidents such as wildland-urban interface (WUI), emergency medical response, and multi-hazard emergency management scenarios.

THREE SPECIALIZED TRACKS

The old adage, "The fire service is no longer just about fighting fires," has never been more relevant than today. Fire chiefs and company officers are expected to lead through wildfires, mass casualty incidents, hurricanes, pandemics, and community-wide disasters. The IAFC's partnership with CSU allows the association to provide the specialized leadership development these responsibilities demand.

WILDFIRE LEADERSHIP: LEADING IN THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE

The first of the three new tracks, Wildfire Leadership, will launch at the 2026 Wildland-Urban Interface

(WUI) Conference in Reno, Nevada, on March 24 to 26. This track directly addresses one of the most pressing issues facing American communities: the growing threat of wildland fires in the wildland-urban interface. The inaugural course, Wildfire Leadership I, establishes the foundation by introducing participants to the unique leadership and risk-management decision-making required during difficult wildfire incidents.

Workshop content will cover the Foundations of WUI Leadership, emphasizing the specialized competencies that distinguish effective wildfire leaders from traditional fire officers. Participants will explore WUI operations, training, and qualifications, focusing on standards and credentialing as well as operational practices.

Additional modules will highlight critical success factors, including communication and collaboration across agencies, which is essential given that WUI incidents typically involve local, state, and federal agencies working together under a unified command. The track will explore the evolving role of Incident Management Teams and firefighter health and safety during extended operations. Additionally, national direction provided by the

Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy will be examined, which emphasizes resilient landscapes, fire-adapted communities, and safe and effective wildfire response.

EMS OFFICER: ELEVATING LEADERSHIP IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

The second specialized track, EMS Officer, will launch at Fire-Rescue Med 2026 on May 19 to 21 in Glendale, Arizona. This track addresses a long-standing gap in professional development: the transition from skilled clinician to effective EMS leader.

“We’ve done an excellent job training paramedics and EMTs to be clinically competent,” notes Kevin Joles, IAFC EMS Section Chair, “but we haven’t methodically prepared them to lead people, manage operations, and address the many administrative challenges of modern EMS. This track changes that.”

The inaugural course, EMS Officer I, helps participants make the crucial shift from practitioner to supervisor by exploring the leadership competencies that define successful EMS officers. This curriculum tackles both the operational and people-centered challenges of EMS supervision. Today’s EMS leaders manage younger, more diverse teams working in high-stress, emotionally demanding conditions that can require a different leadership approach.

Core modules include Effective Communication and Conflict Resolution, essential skills given the close-quarters working conditions and interpersonal tensions that characterize EMS operations. The Crew Management and Personnel Development module addresses recruitment, retention, and mentoring, that remain critical concerns as EMS agencies nationwide struggle with workforce shortages and high turnover rates.

Perhaps most importantly, given the documented physical and psychological toll of EMS work, the track emphasizes Wellness, Resilience, and Workforce Sustainability, providing officers with strategies to support crew well-being, prevent burnout, and build psychologically healthy workplace cultures.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP: PREPARING FOR ALL-HAZARDS INCIDENTS

The third track, Emergency Management Leadership, recognizes that fire officers increasingly serve as key players in their communities’ emergency management infrastructure. From hurricanes to pandemics, fire chiefs and company officers find themselves coordinating multi-agency responses and leading communities through disasters that extend far beyond traditional fire service missions.

BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

These three specialized tracks build upon the foundation established by the ODP Leadership Development Certification Series, which has already transformed fire service education by integrating IAFC’s industry expertise with CSU’s educational excellence.

As these three tracks launch over the next year, they will establish new benchmarks for specialized fire service education. Organizations interested in hosting elements of

the IAFC-CSU Officer Development Program can contact the IAFC directly to bring these leadership development opportunities to their region.

This expansion demonstrates the power of strategic collaboration between professional associations and educational institutions. By combining IAFC’s deep understanding of fire service needs with CSU’s academic rigor and educational delivery systems, the partnership is creating sustainable, scalable solutions to the leadership development challenges facing the fire service.

Together, IAFC and CSU are not just training fire officers; they are educating the visionary leaders who will guide the profession through whatever challenges tomorrow brings, whether those challenges arrive as wildfires, medical emergencies, or community-wide disasters. The future of fire service education is here, and it is more comprehensive, more specialized, and more responsive to real-world needs than ever before.

For more information about the Officer Development Program and the new specialized tracks, visit www.iafc.org/learn-and-develop/officer-development-program. 🌱

Chief Keith Padgett is currently the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Academic Program Director with Columbia Southern University (CSU). Prior to that, he served as the Chief Fire Marshal for the Fulton County Fire-Rescue Department, a metropolitan-sized department in Atlanta.

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Legislative Update:



Ken LaSala, IAFIC Director of Government Relations and Policy

A Busy Agenda

Last year was a challenge. In the spring, the National Fire Academy (NFA) was closed and the application periods for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG), Fire Prevention and Safety, and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) were delayed. Meanwhile, the National Firefighter Registry for Cancer and the Fire Fighter Investigation and Prevention Program faced layoffs that thankfully were canceled.

In the fall, the federal government shut down for 43 days, which resulted in the NFA being closed again. Regrettably, the NFA was closed again in February after Congress was unable to reach agreement on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations bill. So, there is room for improvement in 2026, and we have a full agenda of work that needs to get done.

THE U.S. WILDLAND FIRE SERVICE

On a more positive note, the U.S. Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) was announced on January 12. The new agency consolidates the wildland firefighting capabilities from various U.S. Department of Interior (DOI)

agencies, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish, and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Office of Aviation Services, and the Office of Wildland Fire. The DOI plans for the new USWFS to “streamline decision-making, improve operational efficiency, and enhance the [DOI]’s ability to respond quickly and effectively to wildfire threats.”

Fire Chief Brian Fennessy has been appointed the Director of the new USWFS. The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) supports the creation of the new USWFS and will work to make sure that it has adequate funding and support to achieve its mission.

THE FY 2026 APPROPRIATIONS

Despite the continuous stream of government shutdowns, Congress was able to pass some of the appropriations bills. For example, Congress passed the FY 2026 Commerce, Justice, Science; Energy and Water Development; and Interior and Environment Appropriations Act (P.L. 119-74) in mid-January. The bill includes \$1.147 billion for the DOI’s Wildland Fire Management account and \$2.426 billion for the U.S.

Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Wildland Fire Management account. It also includes \$76 million for the State Fire Capacity (State Fire Assistance) program and \$21 million for the Volunteer Fire Capacity (Volunteer Fire Assistance) program. The funding for the State and Volunteer Fire Capacity programs is the same as it was in FY 2025.

Congress also passed legislation to fund programs at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the FY 2026 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 119-75). The National Firefighter Registry for Cancer received an additional \$1.5 million, bringing the total to \$6.5 million. The Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program and the National Personal Protective Technology Lab remain unchanged. The SIREN grant program for rural EMS initiatives received \$15.5 million. The public law also extended the Medicare add-on payments for ground ambulance transport through January 1, 2028.

The House and Senate reached a compromise on DHS funding before the incidents in Minneapolis occurred. The compromise proposed the funding levels for fire service programs at DHS as shown in Figure 1.

Unfortunately, Congress could not reach an agreement on conditions for Immigration and Custom Enforcement

Figure 1: Proposed Funding Levels for Fire Service Programs at DHS (in Millions (\$))

Program	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026 (President's Request)	FY 2026 (House)	FY 2026 (Senate)	FY 2026 (Jan 2026 Compromise)
AFG	360	324	324	324	360	360	342
SAFER	360	324	324	324	360	360	342
USFA	60	71.2 ¹	71.2 ¹	64.166	62.084 ²	75.744	72.140
UASI	615	553.5	553.5	415.5	615	615	284.25
SHSGP	520	468	468	351	520	520	494
US&R	37.83	40.832	40.83	37.83	56	34.832	56

1. This amount includes \$10 million for the development of the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) program and \$1.25 million for information technology upgrades at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) in the Procurement, Construction, and Improvements (PC&I) account.
2. This amount includes \$60.084 million for USFA and an additional \$2 million for the National Fire Incident Reporting System (presumably they mean the "National Emergency Response Information System") in the PC&I account

activities. So, the funding for DHS expired after February 13. Besides closing the NFA, this new shutdown may delay the application periods for the AFG, FP&S, and SAFER grants.

THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Even though it is an election year, we continue to try to get important fire and EMS legislation passed. Here is a quick summary of major bills that we are working on.

PRESERVATION OF THE FEDERAL FIRSTNET AUTHORITY

Congress has begun work to ensure the operation of the federal FirstNet Authority after the statutory termination date of February 2027. In February, both the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held hearings to consider issues surrounding the federal FirstNet Authority. The IAFC leadership has made multiple trips to Capitol Hill to ask Congress to pass legislation preserving FirstNet and currently is in negotiations on a bill with Congressional staff.

ALLOW MEDICARE REIMBURSEMENT FOR TREATMENT IN PLACE

In order to provide better service to America's seniors, fire and EMS departments need to be reimbursed for providing treatment to Medicare patients on scene without transport to the local hospital. Representative

Mike Carey (R-OH) and Senator Susan Collins introduced the CARE Act (H.R. 2538/S. 3145) last year to allow the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to create a program that allows for reimbursement for fire and EMS agencies that treat Medicare patients in place.

SET FIRE SAFETY STANDARDS FOR LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES IN E-MOBILITY DEVICES

As the nation's fire departments continue to deal with fires caused by lithium-ion batteries in e-scooters, Congress has yet to send a bill to the president's desk. The House passed the Setting Consumer Standards for

Lithium-Ion Batteries Act (H.R. 973) on April 28, 2025. The bill would allow the Consumer Product Safety Commission to set fire-safety standards for lithium-ion batteries and their charging components in e-bikes, e-scooters, and other electric mobility devices. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) introduced a Senate companion bill (S. 389), which was voted on in committee. Nevertheless, a full Senate vote on H.R. 973 has yet to be scheduled.

ALLOW CMS TO REIMBURSE FOR THE USE OF WHOLE BLOOD BY FIRE AND EMS DEPARTMENTS

In the last 10 years, the use of prehospital blood to treat hemorrhagic

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shock has dramatically increased. However, most agencies are unable to carry this lifesaving intervention because of cost. The IAFC is working on legislation to make blood products more accessible by creating a Medicare and Medicaid add-on payment for administering prehospital blood products. The add-on payments would be an at-cost reimbursement and in addition to the current ALS2 and mileage reimbursement currently received for transport of CMS patients.

PASS IMPORTANT WILDFIRE LEGISLATION

In 2023, the Congressionally created Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission made 148 recommendations about how to improve the national response to wildland fires.


Senator John Curtis introduced the Fix Our Forests Act (S. 1462) to implement almost 50 of the commission’s recommendations. It would improve coordination of federal wildland fire preparedness efforts; promote the use of prescribed fires and other measures to prevent WUI fires; and promote the development of new technologies to help local fire departments. The bill also would allow the U.S. Fire Administration to be more engaged in federal wildland fire policy by including it in the governance of a new Wildfire Intelligence Center and a Community Wildfire Risk Reduction program. S. 1462 passed the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry on October 21, 2025, and it awaits consideration by the full Senate. A companion bill (H.R. 471) passed the House on January 23, 2025.

THE YEAR AHEAD

As you can see, we have a busy agenda for 2026. Obviously, one of the key objectives of this year will be to protect federal fire service programs, such as reopening the NFA. Also, we will try to pass the FirstNet, EMS, fire safety, and wildland fire bills.


It is important to keep aware of what is happening in Washington and keep engaged to tell your Senators and Representatives how you are being affected. You can keep informed at www.iafc.org/gr, with our new weekly Washington Update and our monthly Hot Sheet of legislative issues. 🔥

Ken LaSala is the IAFC’s Director of Government Relations & Policy.



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– *Henry Ford*

I look forward to advancing the mission of the IAFC and continuing our advocacy for Fire and EMS.

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