

STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION
MINUTES
June 21, 2016

Members Present: Charles D. Davis, Chairman
Mark A. Bilger
K.C. Harrington
Martin J. LePore
Joseph L. Scheffey
Anthony J. Spencer
Richard L. Yinger
Stacy Welch

Members Absent: Mark F. Hubbard, Vice Chairman

Chairman Davis called the meeting to order at the Roland E. Powell Convention Center in Ocean City, Maryland.

FIRE MARSHAL REPORT

Fire Marshal Brian Geraci reported the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) has three sworn and six civilian vacancies. Five of these positions are currently in various stages of the hiring process. A request has been sent to the Department of Budget and Management to reclassify one civilian position to an administrative assistant. The Fire Marshal introduced recently hired Fire Safety Inspectors (FSI) Charles Morris and Michael Matthews. FSI Morris is a retired firefighter from Frederick County and is assigned to the Western Region. FSI Matthews is a retired Federal firefighter and dispatcher. He is assigned to the Southern Region. FSI Darin Grant is leaving the agency at the end of the month to take a fire inspector position with the Anne Arundel County Fire Department. Deputy State Fire Marshals (DSFM) Brad Childress and John Grothe graduated the Southern Maryland Law Enforcement Academy on June 3rd. DSFM Childress is assigned to the Upper Eastern Shore Region and DSFM Grothe is assigned to the Southern Region. DSFM Brian Collins has been transferred to the Bomb Squad. The promotional process for the Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal (DCSFM) rank is being developed with the assistance of the Maryland State Police (MSP) utilizing a contracted company. The status of the transfer of four MSP personnel slots to the OSFM is unknown. The Fire Marshal intends to use these positions to hire three inspectors and one engineer. The Fire Marshal distributed an updated agency organizational chart.

Fire fatalities currently are at 23 for the year, compared to 34 last year. Baltimore City has done an amazing job reducing its fatalities. For 2015, information obtained from MFIRS indicates there were 14,469 fire-related incidents which is a 7.4% increase from 2014. Civilian injuries increased by 13.5%. Firefighter injuries increased by 9.1%. The total estimated dollar loss reported was \$155,208,606 but this does not include Calvert County which did not report. In 2015, 54.7% of the 2,609 reported events had smoke alarms present, which is a 37.5% increase from 2014. In 26.4% of the incidents no smoke alarms were present. In 18.8% of the incidents, smoke alarm status could not be determined. In 76 of the 249 structure fires with an automatic extinguishing system present, the systems operated effectively to control the fire. The fire was too small in 94 of the incidents for the system to activate and the systems failed in 16 of the incidents. Many of the failures were due to the fires being in an area not protected by the system. Two systems had been shut off. The activated system was only ineffective in two incidents. The Fire Marshal noted that in the last ten years, Maryland has seen an overall 33.4% decrease in the number of fires. The Fire Marshal distributed an updated fatality report.

The Fire Marshal was pleased to announce that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has awarded the Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA) the "Bringing Safety Home Award" for its efforts during the past legislative session. Its efforts brought national attention to residential sprinklers. Former Fire Marshal William Barnard received this award in 2012 for the original residential sprinkler legislation.

The OSFM, members of the University of Maryland Fire Marshal's Office, and members of the Towson University Office of Environmental Health and Safety will inspect the following universities this summer: Bowie State, Morgan State, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Coppin State, Frostburg State, St. Mary's College, and the University of Baltimore. The focus will be on residential units and dormitories.

DSFM John Nelson and Melissa Decker, both of the Southern Region, have been accepted to attend the ATF Accelerant Detection Canine course in Front Royal. Once they graduate in December, the OSFM will have four accelerant canines. The new canines and handlers will remain in the Southern Region.

A fireworks training class was held at the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI) in College Park in June. The training was conducted by the American Pyrotechnics Association and pertained to federal regulations governing the fireworks industry.

A press conference on fireworks is scheduled for June 27th at the Maryland Agriculture Center in Cockeysville.

CHAIRMAN REPORT

Chairman Davis reported he has tried to set up a meeting with the Superintendent to discuss OSFM funding and vehicle concerns but to date has been unsuccessful. He plans to meet with the new MSFA leadership in August or September to discuss the possibility of obtaining funds through some type of legislative support. Efforts will also have to be made to ensure the OSFM budget request is not cut before it goes to a legislative vote.

Chairman Davis announced that former Commission Chairman Timothy Dayton was awarded the MSFA Shimer Award for Administrator of the Year and he also received the Firefighter of the Year Award.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Bilger reported that he heard some state agencies, perhaps Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) or Department of Education, don't have enough inspectors and asked how this might affect the OSFM. Fire Marshal Geraci said he was unaware of any issues with DHMH and the OSFM has always inspected the schools. DHMH is updating to the 2012 NFPA codes.

Commissioner Scheffey inquired as to the plans to update the fee schedule. The Fire Marshal stated he would like to go to a flat rate fee but the engineers and inspectors don't feel that is a good idea. He is looking at an electronic inspection system and a method to accept credit card payments. There may have to be a flat fee schedule for the systems to work.

Commissioner Yinger questioned public access to fireworks in stores after he viewed a video of a large fire in a K-mart store that was started by someone igniting the fireworks on the shelf. Legal fireworks in Maryland are limited to ground-based sparkling products but other types are legal in surrounding states which seems to be an increasing problem with them being bought out-of-state and then used in Maryland. Commissioner Scheffey said the fire was not in a Maryland store so perhaps it was a state where larger type fireworks are legal.

Commissioner Yinger expressed concern of independent counties seeking to establish their own fire marshal offices. Carroll County just hired their first fire safety inspector and they also have a fire protection engineer. Doing their own plan reviews and inspections brings in funding from the fees collected.

Commissioner Scheffey suggested the Fire Marshal encourage his engineering staff to obtain their professional engineering licenses. Fire Marshal indicated two of the engineers are licensed.

Commissioner Harrington followed up on his previous concern about having to install a separate electric meter for the fire alarm panel at a condominium building he constructed in Ocean City. It was required by Delmarva Power and not the Ocean City Fire Marshal's Office and he wanted to clarify the record.

Commissioner Welch followed up on the NFPA Convention. She was officially selected to serve on the NFPA Board of Directors. Congratulations were extended.

Commissioner Spencer encouraged the Commission to take pictures of its members and preserve information for a historic archive. The members agreed this is a good idea.

Commissioner LePore, whose term expires June 30, 2016, thanked everyone for their friendships and all they have done for him during his career and for the current Chairman's and previous Chairmen's leadership during his tenure. He wished everyone continued success. Chairman Davis thanked him for his service.

Motion, second, and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the April meeting.

Retired OSFM Chief Fire Protection Engineer John Bender reiterated his concerns regarding the OSFM's budget. He also has concerns that some counties want to establish their own fire marshal offices. It's an indication of the lack of service the OSFM is able to provide to the counties due to various reasons – personnel, budgets, vehicles, etc. Some counties can't afford to employ fire protection engineers and end up hiring less qualified individuals with little or no direct supervision from the OSFM to ensure they are enforcing the State Fire Prevention Code and making proper interpretations of the code requirements. It seems the budget issues go beyond the Superintendent who has been supportive. The budget requests MSP submits on behalf of the OSFM do not get approved somewhere higher up the line. He commended the MSFA Executive Committee for offering to donate the past president's vehicle to the OSFM. It shows the strength of the partnership between MSFA and the OSFM. Commissioner Spencer encouraged members to contact their legislators in an effort to help them understand the needs and responsibilities of the OSFM. Chairman Davis stated that unfortunately legislators cannot add money to the budget so it's important that the OSFM budget requests do not get cut before the legislators vote on it.

MEETING SCHEDULED

The next meeting has been scheduled for

Thursday August 18, 2016 9:30 a.m.
Laurel Municipal Center, Council Chambers
8103 Sandy Spring Road
Laurel, Prince George's County

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Heidi Ritchie, Secretary