

STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION
MINUTES
December 15, 2016

Members Present: Charles D. Davis, Chairman
Mark F. Hubbard, Vice Chairman
Edward Tochtermann, Jr.
Joseph L. Scheffey
Stacy Welch
Richard L. Yinger

Members Absent: Mark A. Bilger
K.C. Harrington
Anthony J. Spencer

Chairman Davis called the meeting to order at the North Point-Edgemere Volunteer Fire Department in Sparrows Point, Baltimore County.

FIRE MARSHAL REPORT

Fire Marshal Brian Geraci distributed his printed report to the members.

He reported the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) currently has two sworn and four civilian vacancies. A contractual inspector was recently hired for the Northeast Region to conduct foster and day care inspections in Carroll County. The Chief Deputy position resulted in 15 applications being received with two applicants qualified for the position. The promotional exam for Deputy Chief has concluded with 11 Deputy State Fire Marshals (DSFM) participating. A promotion for that position will be forthcoming.

Fire fatalities stand at 62 today compared to 59 for this period last year. A breakdown by county was contained in his written report. Seven occurred in Baltimore City within the last week, four of which were children. One December fatality involved a hoarding issue which restricted fire department access to the house and the victim's ability to escape. Additional fatality information is available on the website <http://mdsp.maryland.gov/firemarshal>.

January through October, the agency investigated 804 incidents, 536 were fire related with 54 criminal cases closed with arrests. A total of 94 persons were arrested for both fire and explosive crimes, 44 of which were juveniles. To date 9,309 inspections and 1,459 plan reviews have been conducted.

The Director of Community Outreach & Media Affairs, DSFM Bruce Bouch and Executive Officer, DSFM Joe Walters traveled to Tennessee to network with the Tennessee State Fire Marshal to look at their "Get Alarmed" and other community outreach programs. "Get Alarmed" is a statewide mapping program to track demographics, responses to calls, and other information to help target issues and reduce risk. We hope to have the mapping system and a Maryland program developed and running by the first quarter 2017.

The OSFM received 1500 smoke alarms from Delmarva Power again this year for distribution to fire companies on the Eastern Shore. This long standing partnership has provided smoke and carbon monoxide alarms for thousands of families.

The National Association of State Fire Marshals Fire Research and Education Foundation and the Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company announced that the City of Laurel Fire Marshal's Office and the Huntington Volunteer Fire Rescue Department received its 2015 Life Safety Achievement Award. To qualify for the award, fire departments must record zero fire deaths in residential structures or a 10% reduction in fire deaths from the previous year. Award recipients also document active and effective fire prevention programs and a commitment to reduce the number of residential fires. The Fire Marshal is pleased that departments and communities in Maryland are recognized for their efforts.

The OSFM has two newly certified accelerant detection canines (ADC) and handlers. Zorro is a male black lab assigned to DSFM John Nelson. Sky is a female black lab assigned to DSFM Melissa Decker. All are assigned to the Southern Maryland Region. This brings the total ADC team up to four. Anne Arundel and Prince George's counties also each have a dog which gives Maryland a total of six ADC teams. The dog in Howard County will be retiring at the end of this year.

Members of the Capital Region Fire Sprinkler Association donated time and material to provide sprinkler protection to the National Fire Heritage Center in Emmitsburg. The center is visited by thousands of visitors each year. The system not only protects the facility but also has different risers, sprinkler heads and other materials to be used as an educational component of the center. A photo of the components is contained in the Fire Marshal's written report. The OSFM supported this effort and was present to see the completed work. An open house will be held in April.

The Fire Marshal and Superintendent met with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to discuss the \$500,000 over-the-target request for vehicles. Five additional inspectors and three fire protection engineer positions were also requested. \$600,000 was requested for the bomb squad. The Superintendent did most of the presentations with the Fire Marshal interjecting to be sure they understood the OSFM's needs and concerns. The use of contract positions was discussed but DBM Secretary Brinkley commented that contract positions won't be needed if DBM provides funding for personnel. The Superintendent requested they fund a little bit of everything instead of just funding one or two things fully. MSP made additional requests for its needed items such as for aviation, radios, IT, etc. It was a positive meeting with good dialogue.

CHIEF FIRE PROTECTION ENGINEER REPORT

Chief Fire Protection Engineer Ken Bush reported the OSFM is in the process of hiring a replacement fire protection engineer. He thanked Commissioner Welch for her participation in the interview process. Unfortunately only one applicant applied and the agency is waiting to hear a response by the end of the week for the conditional offer of employment.

The online voting for the International Code Council Group B codes has been completed and the proposal to eliminate residential sprinklers was voted down so the requirement for new homes to be sprinklered will remain in the 2018 edition. While the requirement is not enforced as part of the State Fire Prevention Code, it certainly is the backbone to require sprinklers in new homes. He clarified for Commissioner Scheffey that residential sprinkler requirements are referenced in NPFA 101 (not NFPA 1) but since the State Fire Prevention Code does not apply to one- and two-family dwellings, the residential sprinkler requirement is enforced as part of the International Residential Code as adopted by the Department of Housing and Community Development. It appears that the online voting is starting to get much higher participation than in the past now that members are becoming used to it and earlier problems have been resolved. All the proposals are bundled and you can log on and vote at any time before the deadline and on any items you choose. The results of the vote are not actually known until several weeks after the meetings end since the online voting remains open for a period of time. Unfortunately, there is no way to tell the specific tally of yes or no votes just whether a proposal passed or not. Since Maryland does not use the International Fire Code, other Group B votes have no significant impact in Maryland.

The NFPA 1 ballot is due out to committee members next week which will impact Maryland directly since it is a referenced standard adopted under the State Fire Prevention Code. As previously reported, some major topics are the energy storage systems (lithium batteries), wood pallet storage, mobile food trucks, and medical vegetation growth and processing which involves the use of butane gas and some other highly hazardous products. He wished everyone a merry Christmas and a safe and happy new year.

The proposed amendments for the sprinkler contractor licensing regulations have been forwarded to the MSP legislative coordinator for processing. Once they complete what they need to do, the proposal will need to be published and a public hearing held.

The Maryland Society of Professional Engineers is making a formal request for changes to COMAR related to electronic signatures. Once they finalize the language and hopefully amend the regulations, that may be something the OSFM can reference regarding submission of plans to its office. CFPE Bush will keep the Commission apprised.

CHAIRMAN REPORT

Chairman Davis thanked the Fire Marshal and his personnel for all they do.

He reported that the Southern Maryland Association had a legislative reception in December, extending invitations to legislators. For the first time, every delegate and senator serving the area attended. It was an opportunity to express concerns and discuss the need to retain the sprinkler requirement. The Chairman took the opportunity to talk with Senate President Miller about sprinklers and funding for the OSFM. Fire Marshal Geraci has made attempts to meet with President Miller but to date has not received a response.

Motion to approved the October minutes, second by Commissioner Welch, and unanimously carried.

Chairman Davis will request Secretary Ritchie send an invitation to Colonel Pallozzi to attend the February meeting in Annapolis.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Scheffey inquired if the Fire Marshal has heard any news regarding the investigation of the fatal warehouse fire in Oakland, California. Some ATF agents were assisting but they did not call out the National Response Team for it. The National Institute of Standards and Technology's fire protection division is pretty much defunct so he doesn't think they will be involved. The Fire Marshal spoke with Colonel Pallozzi about it, citing this as a good reason more inspectors are needed. He stated that if the agency receives a complaint regarding a property it is investigated. Vice Chairman Hubbard expressed the need for local inspection programs to use due diligence to ensure properties are being occupied and maintained in accordance with requirements for its specific use. CFPE Bush commented the Oakland fire serves as evidence to solidify the OSFM's position on wedding barns and to try to identify buildings which were not designed, constructed, and protected for the intended use.

Chairman Davis introduced former Fire Marshal William Barnard. Mr. Barnard commended the Maryland State Fireman's Association's Residential Fire Sprinkler Committee and the people who help rebuild the side-by-side residential sprinkler demonstration trailers. They've been very busy this year with about 50 demonstrations and reaching out to garner support to retain the residential sprinkler requirements. A lot of hard work goes into rebuilding the trailers after a complete burnout of one side and sometimes there is a very short turnaround time before the next demonstration. There is an event scheduled for Thursday night and another one on Saturday. Regarding the upcoming legislative session, the Maryland Association of Counties was looking at the residential sprinkler issue but it does not appear that group will attempt to modify the requirements. There is discussion of some tax incentive type program. Individual senators or delegates could still propose legislation that would affect residential sprinklers so it is very important to remain vigilant. Commissioner Welch volunteered her presence at any hearings or assistance if there is anything she can do. Mr. Barnard commended Fire Marshal Geraci for all his efforts last year to help defeat legislation attempting to repeal the requirement.

Being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

MEETING SCHEDULED

The next meeting has been scheduled for

Thursday February 16, 2017 – 9:30 a.m.
Taylor Avenue Fire Station
Upper Level Classroom
620 Taylor Avenue
Annapolis, Anne Arundel County

Respectfully submitted
(as summarized from transcript furnished by Hunt Reporting),

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Heidi Ritchie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Heidi Ritchie, Secretary