

**STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION
MINUTES
December 16, 2021**

Members Present: Edward S. Tochterman, Chairman
Kevin Simmons, Vice Chairman
Douglas Alexander
Mark Bilger
Emily Devan
Michael Faust
Randy Sanger
Daniel Stevens
Stacy Welch

Members Absent: None

The Fire Prevention Commission held a public meeting December 16, 2021 at 9:30 a.m. at the Maryland State Police Headquarters, 1201 Reisterstown Road, Pikesville, Baltimore County.

Chairman Tochterman called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Prayers were offered to the Baltimore City police officer who was shot multiple times this morning and who is in shock trauma fighting for her life.

FIRE MARSHAL REPORT

Fire Marshal Geraci thanked everyone for their condolences in the loss of his mother. He and the family very much appreciate it.

Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal Jamie Rodeheaver, Western Region, is retiring after 20 years of dedicated service. Chief Deputy Greg Der will be leaving the agency to assume the position of Howard County Police Chief. Both positions will be advertised. The Chief's position will be open to both internal and external applicants.

To date for 2021, there have been fifty fire fatalities associated with residential fires and eight fatalities due to vehicle collisions involving fire. Seven of the residential fires involved multiple fatalities. Baltimore City and Prince George's County have the highest fatalities with twelve in each. Additional information can be found at mdsp.maryland.gov/firemarshal. Fatalities, sprinkler saves, and smoke alarm saves can be reported at mdosfm.wixsite.com/blog.

As reminders, the Fire and Life Safety Information Exchange Program website is www.mdflifesafety.org and the OSFM blog site is <http://mdosfm.wixsite.com/blog>.

The Bomb Squad held an open house at Sandy Point State Park to display all of the squad's assets and equipment. The agency currently has five openings for bomb technicians. Several persons showed an interest at the open house.

The agency's sprinkler contractor licensing program manager has been working diligently to bring the licensing portal on-line and eliminate all paperwork. This should be operational at the beginning of 2022.

The Fire & Explosive Investigation Advisory Workgroup met in November. The group is working on a curriculum to use for a Fire Marshal's Academy and on minimum training and certification standards required by the Maryland Fire/Explosive Investigators. An ATF certified fire investigator agent from the Baltimore field office has joined the group. Commissioner Alexander reported that as the Commission's liaison to this workgroup, if anyone has any questions or suggestions he would be happy to relay them. Although he has been out of the fire investigation business for 30 years, he is getting up to speed with the

new technology that has come out over the years.

Several regional offices partnered with other law enforcement agencies recently to participate in the "Shop with a Cop" program.

Former Maryland State Fire Marshals Rocco Gabriele and William Barnard have been inducted into the Maryland Fire Chiefs Hall of Fame. Commissioner Douglas Alexander was also inducted. Congratulations were extended to all with thanks for their service.

The Fire Marshal reported there is an issue with lodging and rooming house requirements in Garrett County that has been on-going for years. He distributed a 2009 appeal decision and older Commission minutes on the subject. There are two appeals upcoming in February. Chairman Tochterman advised he has had several conversations with the Commission's legal counsel, Susan Baron, and she advised the topic should not be discussed prior to the February meeting since it bears on both appeals. The information Fire Marshal Geraci included in his handout is in the public domain so the members are free to read it but should not hold any discussions on the matter. The Chairman expects the Commission to render each appeal in February in a fair and impartial manner and not to predetermine any decision. Commissioner Alexander reported he saw a newspaper article that Garrett County plans to hire its own fire marshal. Fire Marshal Geraci advised he believes it is only for code enforcement and not investigations.

The Fire Marshal reported he met virtually with representatives of the Apartment and Office Building Association regarding sprinkler retrofits. It was a very good meeting and discussion. They want to introduce a bill to the Maryland legislature regarding insurance rates related to water main issues. Various other options were also discussed.

Commissioner Welch inquired if the Fire Marshal has received any response to the letter he sent to the colleges and universities about unsprinklered dormitories. He advised he has received three responses. They advised they are aware of and understand the issue. Some are in the process of installing sprinkler systems.

CHIEF FIRE PROTECTION ENGINEER REPORT

Chief Fire Protection Engineer (CFPE) Ken Bush reported there is promising news for hiring a Fire Protection Engineer (FPE) for the Southern Regional Office. The applicant has passed the polygraph and his background check is currently ongoing. Hopefully he will be on board at the first of the year. The current Southern FPE, Derek Murgatroyd, will be transferred to the headquarters office which will help alleviate some of the issues with projects in and around the metropolitan area. The full-time FPE position for the Western Region remains unfilled. The two contract part-time FPEs who previously retired from the agency continue to share the Western workload. Hopefully with having the additional engineer in Southern and FPE Murgatroyd in HQ will help relieve some of their responsibilities so they can enjoy more of their retirements.

The amendments to the State Fire Prevention Code are still in the hands of the Maryland Department of State Police and have not been forwarded to the Division of State Documents for submission to the Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review Committee (AELR). The AELR must review and approve the proposal before a public hearing can be scheduled but it appears it will not get submitted before the legislative session begins, which will cause a delay in adoption.

CFPE Bush reported the sprinkler licensing coordinator, Linda Bounds, has been working with Maryland One-Stop Portal, an on-line venue for a variety of licenses. All currently licensed sprinkler contractors have been requested to re-register under the portal. Once existing contractors are registered, the portal will be opened for new applicants.

CFPE Bush reported there have been no changes in the fee collection process but research continues to switch it to an electronic process.

CHAIRMAN REPORT

Regarding the eventual establishment of minimum fire prevention inspection frequencies and for which the Commission voted in October to support the addition of ten more fire safety inspectors, Chairman Tochterman has sent Colonel Jones a letter expressing the Commission's support.

Chairman Tochterman, as he has traditionally done each Christmas season since being elected Chairman, has sent each State Fire Marshal Regional Office, the Bomb Squad Office, and the Headquarters Office a letter expressing thanks for their good work and also referenced support for ten additional inspectors. Colonel Jones is aware of the letter and the Chairman thus presumes the Colonel himself is supportive of the ten additional inspectors.

Secretary Ritchie has completed the assembling of all information on high-rises requested under the Public Information Act by the Apartment and Office Building Association. Having received payment, the information has been provided to the them.

OTHER BUSINESS

Chief Deputy Der thanked everyone for opening their arms to his team and stated that it has been a great experience from which he has learned a lot over the years. He looks forward to continuing the good relationship if there is anything he can do from Howard County.

Commissioner Bilger reported the printing of the Maryland fire laws books will be held until November 2022. There is no value in spending \$40,000 to reproduce what would basically be a reprint of the 2019 edition if the new amendments to the State Fire Prevention Code cannot be included in it. Hopefully the amendments will be adopted by then.

Commissioner Alexander reported he turned over something he found laying in the fire house at his home station. It's called an auto fire off bomb and is about the size of a duckpin bowling ball. An on-line video shows that if a fire reaches 70 degrees centigrade, or approximately 155 degrees Fahrenheit, it explodes and supposedly sends powder all over the fire. Commissioner Alexander could find no approvals from any United States companies for the device and in his opinion it is a bomb. The Fire Marshal will follow-up on it. CFPE Bush added that a committee of the National Association of State Fire Marshals is also looking into it so it will be a nationwide issue that will need to be addressed.

Commissioner Bilger provided an update on the 2022 Mid-Atlantic Conference to be held September 27th. Jim Brown, a longtime committee member, has retired and moved to Delaware so he will no longer be on the committee. Ashley Collier, who has been on the committee for about three years, has left the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI) for a private industry job and will no longer be on the committee. MFRI is not adding any additional staff to the conference committee so it does not appear Becky Spicer or Ashley Collier will be replaced. Tim Delahaney and Mack Saunders are the current MFRI representatives. Teresa Ann Crisman, who used to represent Prince George's County but now represents the State Fire Marshal's Office, has been elected co-chair of the committee. The Johns Hopkins facility has been reserved, the luncheon menu has been selected, and work has started on the program. Richard Brooks will be the master of ceremonies. Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell with the National Fire Academy will be the keynote speaker. Some topics may include a National Fire Sprinkler Coalition workshop on standpipe systems; a State Fire Prevention Code update from CFPE Bush, and hopefully a workshop from Underwriter's Laboratory with an update on their recent smoke alarm study. Ed McDonough, who works for the Maryland Department of Emergency Management, is looking at a workshop geared towards emergency managers. Other committee members are looking for topics related to special needs individuals, pediatrics, and nurses. It is planned to continue selecting a Miss Fire Prevention and to give the Fire Prevention Award at the event. There are currently two vacancies on the committee. If anyone knows someone who would like to serve on the conference committee, please contact Commissioner Bilger.

Motion by Vice Chairman Simmons, second by Commissioner Welch, and unanimously carried to approve the October minutes.

Next Meeting – Thursday February 17, 2022 9:30 a.m.

**Location – Aberdeen Fire Department
21 North Rogers Street
Aberdeen, Harford County**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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



Heidi Ritchie, Secretary