

**STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION  
MINUTES  
October 17, 2024**

**Members present:** Edward S. Tochterman, Chairman  
Caroll Spriggs, Vice Chairman  
Mark Hopkins  
Jerred Johnson  
Randy Sanger  
Daniel Stevens

**Members Absent:** Ephraim Siff  
Eric Smothers

**Vacancy:** Washington-Metro Area/Industry

The Fire Prevention Commission held a public meeting on October 17, 2024, at the Odenton Volunteer Fire Company, 1425 Annapolis Road, Odenton, Anne Arundel County.

Chairman Tochterman called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. He thanked Commissioner Sanger and the Odenton Volunteer Fire Company for making arrangements for the meeting and use of its facility.

The Chairman recognized the presence of Terin Hopkins with the National Fire Sprinkler Association.

**FIRE MARSHAL REPORT**

A copy of Acting Fire Marshal (A/FM) Mowbray's written report was distributed.

A/FM Mowbray provided an update on fire fatalities. Thus far in 2024, there have been 36 confirmed fire fatalities in residential structures, 7 vehicle-related, and 3 in other settings, for a total of 46. Three causes of death are pending the Chief Medical Examiner's report. There have been four multi-fatality fires. Fatalities are trending down from 2023 which is contributed to the various community outreach efforts. This year's Fire Prevention Week/Month message is working smoke alarms, something former Fire Marshal Brian Geraci stressed, and it is believed working smoke alarms are a contributing factor in the reduction of fire fatalities.

As an update to the last quarterly statistics, the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) conducted 655 investigations, 8,697 inspections, 942 plan reviews, and participated in 115 community outreach events. Further breakdowns and comparisons were provided in A/FM Mowbray's written report.

A/FM Mowbray reported on some significant incidents in which the OSFM was involved:

- In October the Upper Eastern Region investigated a fatal fire in Denton that involved a 58 year-old-male who was located just outside a shed. An occupant of the property discovered the victim but was unable to assist due to fire and heat conditions. A second occupant sustained burns and was treated and released. The cause of the fire remains under investigation and the Maryland State Police are assisting with the death investigation.

- This month the OSFM Special Operations Command performed a controlled burn of pyrotechnics confiscated and recovered in Western Maryland. The OSFM is pleased that Prince George's County Fire Departments, Montgomery County Fire Departments, the Delaware State Fire Marshal's Office, and ATF partnered in assisting with the controlled burn.
- In September a ten-day jury trial ended with the conviction of the defendant on two counts of first-degree arson and two counts of second-degree murder in Charles County. The fire occurred in 2022 at a Waldorf townhome after an altercation with the defendant and other occupants. The defendant started the fire after being advised he could no longer reside at the residence. Two other occupants were entrapped in the fire and lost their lives. Sentencing is scheduled for December 19, 2024, with a maximum penalty of 140 years in prison.

A/FM Mowbray reported on some recent community outreach events in which the OSFM was involved:

- Senior Deputy Decker, K9 Taylor, and retired K9 Sky kicked off Fire Prevention Month at the Leonardtown Volunteer Fire Department Touch-a-Truck.
- Bomb technicians, Deputy Chief Hodges, and Senior Deputy Raia joined Hero Dogs Sandy at the Abingdon Fire Company annual open house.
- Fire Safety Inspectors Goodrich and Hummer joined the Halfway Volunteer Fire Company at the Washington County Family Center to speak about fire prevention, home safety, and firefighter response to home fires.
- Master Deputy/Bomb Technician Ernst joined a host of other emergency services at the Washington County 2024 Emergency Preparedness Expo to discuss the role of the OSFM Bomb Squad and the use of the bomb disposal robot.
- Senior Deputies Raia and Yedinak joined Singerly Fire Company for its annual open house during Fire Prevention Month sharing information on the OSFM Bomb Squad.
- The OSFM Public Education and Risk Reduction Officer Crisman has posted social media messages throughout Fire Prevention Month. Additionally, the OSFM has coordinated with the BWI Airport to set up a display and meet with passing travelers to promote fire prevention and safety, with one traveler calling his wife to talk with the Officer to discuss fire prevention.

A/FM Mowbray reported there are no changes in the reports on personnel or MFIRS submissions since the last meeting.

The OSFM continues to promote its 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary. After further research it has been confirmed that Maryland is the oldest OSFM having been formed in 1894. North Carolina was formed in 1899 and then Ohio in 1900. The celebration was held September 18<sup>th</sup> at the Pikesville Volunteer Fire Department. Open houses at the State Police Museum at Pikesville Headquarters remain scheduled for Sunday October 20<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday October 29<sup>th</sup>.

The Mid-Atlantic Conference has moved to only one day on November 4<sup>th</sup> at the BWI Airport Marriott Hotel.

In response to an inquiry from Commissioner Stevens, A/FM Mowbray advised the OSFM continues to do annual school inspections. A list of public and private schools is obtained from the

Department of Education with staff starting the inspections in August after schools open with an expectation to have them completed by mid-November.

### **CHIEF FIRE PROTECTION ENGINEER REPORT**

CFPE Kenneth Bush reported the OSFM has three major school projects with the Maryland Stadium Authority. One is the Baltimore City high school which is currently at 50% design development with construction starting in July 2025. The Poly Western Complex in Baltimore City is scheduled for design development drawings to be submitted in January 2025 with construction starting in July 2026. The Kent County Middle School is scheduled for design development drawings to be submitted in November 2024 with construction starting in January 2026. The other schools projects are handled locally with the regional engineers working closely with the county building departments.

The Maryland Codes Administration received an inquiry from both a State delegate and senator on the push to extend the requirements to permit single exits from four stories up to six stories in residential occupancies. This topic will most likely resurface during the next legislative session depending on whether the change gets incorporated into the updated model codes. Current building codes permit only three-stories and the fire code permits four-stories. There is a lot of misinformation and proposals are being made individually which complicates the issue. Code hearings for the International Code Council should be starting later this month. A pretty extensive floor modification will be proposed to hopefully bring the issue more in line with the requirements of the fire code, reduce the number of actual stories which are permitted, and introduce some additional features to make the topic more palatable for the fire service.

As Hurricane Milton was making landfall in Florida, the Maryland OSFM received an inquiry from Florida representatives regarding assistance for incidents of such nature. The International Fire Marshals Association and the local fire marshal are interested in developing a mission-ready package to have personnel available to dispatch to locations where natural disasters strike. This EMAC, which is the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, can be utilized in any affected state or region and would be handled through state emergency management offices. It would cover reimbursement of personnel who participate in responses as well as liability to those personnel. The goal is to have services ready to put in place on a case-by-case basis within short notice. Personnel would do surveys, not official inspections, to assess the extent of damage as it affects the fire service and then report back to local agencies who would enforce any corrective actions that may be needed. This is in the initial development stage with a compact to cover natural disasters and a second type arrangement for surge assistance, for planned events such as the Olympics or World Cup.

The International Fire Marshals Association has also indicated there is a proposal that is being made by the Congressional Services Institute to prepare legislation to identify fire safety issues with lithium-ion batteries.

The Underwriters Laboratories Fire Councils will meet in Chicago on November 12-14, 2024. CFPE Bush will participate. They will introduce a lot of interesting information with regard to the work of the Fire Service Institute and research of new product information, listing products, and changes to testing standards. Following that event, the Consumer Products Safety Commission has also scheduled a two-day meeting to discuss alternative, nonconventional consumer fire protection products, such as fire blankets and specialized portable fire extinguishers.

### **CHAIRMAN REPORT**

Chairman Tochtermann entertained a motion to approve the September minutes. Vice Chairman Spriggs noted that Secretary Ritchie sent an email this morning with some needed corrections to the draft

minutes. Motion by Commissioner Sanger, second by Commissioner Hopkins, and unanimously carried to approve the draft minutes with noted corrections.

Regarding the 2024 code update, A/FM Mowbray reported that he has not received an official update but believes Maryland State Police is completing its review of the proposed amendments. He is optimistic there will be a new updated code but he could not confirm any timeline. He continues to remind MSP of the importance of adopting new versions of the codes since there have been many changes over the last several years regarding food trucks, lithium-ion batteries, solar power and other technological advances. A recent Ford truck fire in Joppa-Magnolia was the result of some kind of malfunction while charging the lithium-ion battery.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Terin Hopkins with the National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA) inquired if there was any update on new legislation dealing with charging stations in all residential garages. CFPE Bush was not aware of any updates.

Vice Chairman Spriggs inquired if there has been any response from the Superintendent's or Governor's Office on the status of hiring a new State Fire Marshal. A/FM Mowbray advised he has not been briefed on the status.

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Johnson, second by Commissioner Hopkins, and unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

**Next Meeting: To be Determined**

Respectfully submitted,  
(as summarized from transcript provided by eScribers),



Heidi Ritchie, Secretary