

**STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION  
MINUTES  
February 20, 2025**

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

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

The Fire Prevention Commission held a public meeting February 20, 2025, at the Eastport Fire Department in Annapolis, Anne Arundel County

Chairman Tochterman called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Following the public meeting, a public hearing will be held at 11:00 a.m. with Chief Fire Protection Engineer (CFPE) Kenneth Bush presenting proposed amendments to the State Fire Prevention Code to include the adoption of the 2024 editions of NFPA 1 and NFPA 101. The Commissioners will then ask any questions and hear testimony or questions from the public. A sign-in sheet was circulated for persons wishing to testify.

The Chairman recognized guests present at the meeting:  
Mischelle Vanreusel, Deputy Commissioner Division of Labor and Industry  
Terin Hopkins, National Fire Sprinkler Association

**FIRE MARSHAL REPORT**

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

There were 56 confirmed fire fatalities in 2024 involving residential structures, nine associated with vehicle fires, and five in other settings for a total of 70 confirmed fatalities. Baltimore City, Prince George's County, Baltimore County, and Montgomery County had the majority of fatal fires which is consistent with historic data.

To date in 2025, there have been three confirmed fatalities involving residential structures, and none associated with vehicle fires or other settings. Two of the fires have been double-fatals. Six deaths are pending determination by the Chief Medical Examiner. The 2025 fatalities occurred in Charles County, Prince George's County, and Baltimore County.

A/SFM Mowbray reviewed the agency's 2024 calendar year statistics:

- 13,900 inspections – an increase from 11,600 in 2023
- 1,425 plan reviews – an increase from 1,162 in 2023
- 235 public education/community risk reduction activities (the first year this has been tracked)
- 683 fire investigation (151 incendiary) – an increase from 672 (116 incendiary) in 2023
- 119 explosive investigations – a decrease from 159 in 2023
- 70 cases closed by arrest – an increase from 49 in 2023

Staff are off to a strong start in 2025 with 790 inspections, 111 plan reviews, 8 public education/CRRs, 103 fire investigations (12 incendiary), 12 explosive investigations, and 5 cases closed by arrest.

A/SFM Mowbray reviewed some legislative matters the agency has been working on with its partners. There are no departmental bills this year.

- HB022/SB0175 - Public Safety - Corrugated Stainless Steel Tubing for Fuel Gas Piping Systems to strengthen requirements of what products may be sold and used in Maryland.
- HB0477 - Family Child Care Homes and Child Care Centers - Adult to Child Ratios to increase the number of infants from two under 24 months old to four for a home daycare with one provider. The agency opposes this bill and with permission from its legislative unit and the Governor's Office has filed a letter of information with the legislative committee.
- HB0489/SB0436 - Maryland Department of Labor - Study on Building Code Requirements for Single-Staircase Buildings. The State Fire Marshal's Office and engineering staff are not involved with this workgroup or study but feel it is important that fire code officials statewide be represented.
- HB0943/SB0334 - Criminal Law - Crimes of Malicious or Fraudulent Burning. This is a Howard County State's Attorney Association bill that aims to increase penalties for malicious burning fires that injure firefighters. Even though the current wording in the bill precludes injuries to EMS providers, law enforcement, and fire marshal staff, it is a good bill.
- HB1002 - Consumer and Display Fireworks. This bill would expand legal fireworks in Maryland beyond the ground-based sparklers that are currently permitted. It stipulates when and where fireworks can be discharged. It creates a 16% sales tax with 30% of the collected taxes going into the Amoss Fund. The OSFM was requested to file an impact statement on the agency and has provided a staffing study as well as other information impacting licensing, engineering plan reviews, and inspection code enforcement. The OSFM has not been directed to provide a technical review or official opinion and at this point remains neutral. Counties may opt out to prohibit fireworks within their jurisdictions. The bill does not address an opt out option for municipalities. For example, if Worcester County does not opt out, Ocean City would not be able to opt out. This point will be raised if the opportunity arises.
- Workgroup HB0468 - Lithium-Ion Battery Safety. CFPE Bush represents the agency on this group which is staffed by an OSFM administrative specialist. The group's report is due at the end of the year.
- Workgroup HB0823 - Non-Sprinklered pre-1974 Residential High-Rise Buildings. Chairman Tochtermann serves as the Commission's representative on this group which continues to meet every other week and aims to complete its final report mid-summer.

Regarding the HB0823 Workgroup, Chairman Tochtermann expressed that regardless of what the fire service or pro-fire protection representatives present, workgroup members that either live in or represent the apartment/condominium owners raise three basic issues – the cost of installing sprinklers, the cost of taking appropriate asbestos precautions if encountered, and the displacement of residents during the process. A/SFM Mowbray concurred with that assessment. Chairman Tochtermann asked Workgroup Chairman Mowbray if he has given any thought to submitting both a majority and a minority report which could represent the concerns of all involved. A/SFM Mowbray said the work is challenging because the law mandates consideration of several different factors, to include assessing the risks, identifying best practices to minimize or remedy the risks, and address the financial and displacement impacts. The legislative intention was for the workgroup to be diverse in order to represent various viewpoints. While the general topic impacts all parties in various ways, the group has been very respectful of everyone's opinions. It is his goal to present a report that reflects the overall recommendations of the workgroup but to also include concerns about any counter or minority positions.

A/SFM Mowbray reviewed some noteworthy incidents:

- December 25 fire in Joppa, Harford County. Six family members who were upstairs escaped after being alerted by a smoke alarm. Unfortunately a 69-year-old wheelchair-bound man who lived in the basement was unable to escape. The fire remains under investigation.

- January 9 fire in Hughesville, Charles County. The Sheriff's office responded to a welfare check and located the 94-year-old fatal victim inside. The victim's clothes had been accidentally ignited by the kitchen stove.
- January 15 fire in Queen Anne, Queen Anne's County, claimed the lives of two residents. Upon fire department arrival the double-wide mobile home was engulfed and after extinguishment the two victims were located. The fire occurred during the day and several kerosene heaters were among the debris. The fire remains under investigation.
- January 2025 – During December, Western Region deputies have investigated ten incidents in detention facilities for maliciously set fires and intentionally broken sprinkler heads in inmate cells. Several inmates have been charged. There have been similar incidents in lower shore and Baltimore City facilities.
- January 22 explosion at a cannabis extraction facility in Stevensville, Queen Anne's County, injured two employees although they were not in the actual extraction booth at the time. Both propane and butane are used in the extraction process. Both the fire alarm and sprinkler systems activated which limited damage.
- January 2025 – Deputies in the Western Region working with the Hagerstown City Fire Marshal's Office arrested a Hagerstown woman after she made online threats to several local churches and their pastors. The threats were written in an online blog and with the assistance of the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center, investigators were able to link the suspect to the blog.
- January 2025 – the OSFM Honor Guard and K9 Sandy assisted with the funeral detail for Lt. Higgins of the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service who died in the line of duty. Over several days, K9 Sandy and her handler Senior Deputy Mike Redding assisted Peer Support Teams.
- February 2025 – the OSFM Special Operations Underwater Hazardous Device Team deployed to the District of Columbia to support the FBI and metropolitan police with recovery of debris and evidence from the airplane/helicopter crash in the Potomac River. The conditions were challenging, cold and hazardous. The team has been a valuable asset and also assisted with the collapse of the Key Bridge last year.

Accelerant K9 Zorro retired in December after eight years of service. K9 Zorro was assigned to Deputy Chief John Nelson in the Southern Region and assisted with fire scene investigations not only in Maryland but also Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The agency currently has three accelerant and two explosive K9s throughout the State. An application has been submitted to ATF to obtain a fourth accelerant K9 when they commence their next class. It is slated to be deployed to Western Maryland. The other K9s are currently deployed in the northern, southern, and eastern shore areas of the State. Vice Chairman Spriggs inquired if the agency was looking at options other than ATF now that State Farm Insurance has curtailed its K9 program. A/SFM Mowbray advised it was his understanding that State Farm would continue to re-certify K9s already in the program. The current OSFM dogs are re-certified through ATF and it is anticipated this will continue and remain funded. It does not appear ATF will have a class in March but hopefully the fall class in November will proceed. With the significant changes in the federal government and ATF, budgets may impact the K9 program. The agency will continue to look at other sources and other options if the need arises.

Master Deputy Oliver Alkire was awarded the Chief G. Crawford Wiestling Scholarship Award through the Yvorra Leadership Development Foundation. He is one of seven 2024 award recipients. The scholarship will support him as he continues his education in Public Safety Administration through Neumann University in Aston, Pennsylvania.

Administrative Specialists Mary Bare and Patti Ward officially retired at the end of 2024. Contractual employees will temporarily cover the administrative responsibilities at the bomb squad and southern region.

At the Congressional Fire Service Institute Conference in the District of Columbia, Community Risk Reduction Specialist Teresa Crisman was the recipient of the 2025 Dr. Anne W. Phillips Award in recognition of her service and devotion back to her time with the Prince George's County Fire Department and the Maryland State Firefighters Association, and now with the OSFM.

Master Deputy Ernst and Administrative Specialist Nicodemus participated in Shop-With-A-Cop in the Western Region and Senior Deputies Decker, Valles, and Matthews participated in the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office event during December.

Agency personnel attended a three-day conference with the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the U.S. Fire Administration, and Underwriters Laboratories to review the rollout of the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS). The OSFM is working with its governmental affairs unit and the Maryland Department of Emergency Management to coordinate updates and training.

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

CFPE Bush introduced Fire Protection Engineer Derek Murgatroyd who is assigned to Headquarters and Fire Protection Engineer Christopher Koch who is assigned to the Western Region. The Western Region still has a vacant contract engineer position which is being advertised with one application received thus far.

Regarding the NFPA and International Code Council model codes, progress is still moving forward on new 2026 editions. The second draft meetings for both sets of codes will be held in June and July.

CFPE Bush attended the International Fire Marshals Association (IFMA) Board of Directors meeting in the District of Columbia in the past week. The Association is in the process of reviewing its by-laws to make extensive changes which will be presented at the NFPA conference in June.

NFPA is in the process of forming a Code Development Committee which will consist of ten members from across the country representing each chapter of the IFMA. That process should begin in March 2025 and will hopefully be in place for the Committee to review the upcoming editions of the model codes at a national level.

Regarding lithium ion battery safety, that workgroup has been holding both in-person and virtual meetings once a month. Several speakers have reported on different issues dealing with production, use, storage, and disposal of the batteries.

Underwriters Laboratories is in the process of updating UL Standard 217 which deals with smoke alarms, particularly the residential type. The upcoming tenth edition will attempt to better standardize the testing means for different types of detectors that are used in the smoke alarms. In the past there has been controversy as to whether a photoelectric-type detector or an ionization-type detector is better. Hopefully the new test will take into consideration smoke and other products of combustion that are produced by normal operations such as cooking fires. It will still be sometime before the tenth edition smoke alarms will be available as there are probably still many older style alarms currently for sale and in use.

### **CHAIRMAN REPORT**

Chairman Tochtermann reported that the ninth vacancy on the Commission remains unfilled. The appointment must be a representative of either the fire prevention or fire protection industry and reside in the Washington-Metro area (Montgomery or Prince George's County). Anyone who wishes to apply should contact Commission Secretary Heidi Ritchie.

Commission members were reminded to file their annual financial disclosure statements with the Ethics Commission if they have not already done so.

Chairman Tochterman called on Mischelle Vanreusel to make any comments. She did not have any specifics to report but for the benefit of Commissioner Siff provided an overview on her department. Because the Fire Prevention Commission, the fire and building codes, as well as other responsibilities under her department, intermesh with the State Fire Marshal's Office and various fire service agencies around the State, she likes to attend the Commission meetings to keep informed. The Division of Labor and Industry (DLI), a unit within the Department of Labor, houses the statewide minimum building codes. The Division adopts the building codes and works closely with CFPE Bush to ensure modifications, if needed, can be made to match the fire codes. The Division also covers accessibility, manufactured (mobile) homes, industrialized homes (modular homes built off-site and shipped into Maryland), boilers, elevators, amusement rides, railroads and almost all the labor laws and wages, but not unemployment insurance. The Maryland Occupational Safety and Health Administration is also under DLI covering the safety of employees, firefighters, EMS personnel, and also works on emergency response and disaster preparedness.

One legislative bill previously mentioned deals with single exit staircases. It has been proposed DLI lead a study on this so a fiscal note was submitted on how much time and cost the study would take. The OSFM was not included in the legislation, but feeling that would be very appropriate, DLI supported an amendment to include the OSFM. Commissioner Hopkins inquired if there would be an opportunity to participate and she believes there will be outreach to stakeholders to gather information. The concern is the study would commence July 1 and then a report would be submitted by December 31 which does not allow a lot of time. Commissioner Hopkins volunteered to participate if the opportunity arises. If the bill passes, she will forward information to Chairman Tochterman for dissemination.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Motion by Commissioner Hopkins, second by Commissioner Johnson, and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the December 19, 2024, meeting.

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Johnson, second by Commissioner Hopkins, and unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 10:50 a.m.

#### **Next Meeting:**

**Thursday April 17, 2025**  
**10:00 a.m.**  
**(location to be determined)**

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



Heidi Ritchie, Secretary