

**STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION**  
**MINUTES**  
**June 20, 2017**

Members Present: Charles D. Davis, Chairman  
Mark F. Hubbard, Vice Chairman  
Mark A. Bilger  
K.C. Harrington  
Joseph L. Scheffey  
Edward Tochterman, Jr.

Members Absent: Anthony J. Spencer  
Stacy Welch  
Richard Yinger

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

Vice Chairman Hubbard introduced Acting Baltimore County Fire Chief Kyrle Preis. Once confirmed by the Baltimore County Council, Mr. Preis will replace retired Fire Chief John Hohman. Mr. Preis stated he began as a volunteer at his local fire station at the age of sixteen and turned it into his career. He is a life member of the Kingsville Volunteer Fire Company. He started his career with Baltimore County in 1990 where Vice Chairman Hubbard was his recruit instructor. He is both a firefighter and paramedic and has thoroughly enjoyed it. He serves on the State of Maryland Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Board. He looks forward to expanding his network, friends and colleagues and to his new assignments. He would like to work towards implementing a statewide ImageTrend web database to track fire response calls so everyone is using and has access to the same system, much like has already been done with EMS. It would make generating reports much easier in a timely manner and all departments would be using the same reporting system. He congratulated Commissioner Bilger for being elected the new president of the Maryland State Firemen's Association (MSFA). He extended Baltimore County's assistance to the Commission and thanked the members for their service. The Commission welcomed Acting Chief Preis to the meeting and wished him well in his new position.

Chairman Davis updated the members on Commissioner Yinger's medical condition. Commissioner Yinger is currently at home and is undergoing numerous tests. Commissioner Yinger appreciates everyone's support, cards, and phone calls.

#### **FIRE MARSHAL REPORT**

Fire Marshal Brian Geraci introduced the Office of the State Fire Marshal's (OSFM) new Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal (CDSFM) Greg Der. He will be second in command and will run the operational side of the OSFM. CDSFM Der is retired from the Howard County Police Department after 20 years of service. Prior to that he served a short time with the Easton Police Department. He has eight years of experience in fire investigations. The Howard County fire investigation division is set up similar to that of Baltimore County. He hopes to bring the police perspective to the OSFM, complementing Fire Marshal Geraci's firefighter and code enforcement experience. The Commission welcomed CDSFM Der.

The OSFM currently has two sworn and five civilian vacancies, all of which are in various stages of the hiring process. Administrative Officer Alyson Turner, assigned to the headquarters office, has announced her retirement at the end of June, bringing to six the civilian vacancies. He intends to fill this position as quickly as possible, hopefully internally.

The fire fatalities currently stand at 37 compared to 23 for the same period last year. There was a fatal vehicle fire yesterday in Montgomery County. The investigation is ongoing. Two multiple fatality fires in Baltimore City claimed the lives of 10 persons this year. Three deaths in the city were the result of

homicide by fire. One Prince George's County fatality was from suicide and one was from a vehicle collision that involved fire. Three fatalities from a vehicle collision involving fire in Prince George's County are pending autopsies. Unfortunately, the year has not gotten off to a good start.

The total number of fires reported in 2016 was 17,390 of which 1,897 were structures; 149 civilian injuries, which was a 22% decrease from 2015; 441 fire services injuries (of which over 300 were from Prince George's County), which was a 60% increase statewide from 2015; and three firefighter line of duty deaths occurred from gunshot wounds, occupational cancer, and a fall. The estimated dollar loss was \$142,607,005.

The OSFM has rolled out its ESCAPE plan for commercial facilities, a copy of which was distributed to the Commission members. The one page flyer will be given out during inspections at which time the inspectors or deputies will discuss with owners and managers the importance of establishing and informing employees of good fire safety practices. The OSFM has gotten some good feedback.

Governor Hogan proclaimed May 7-13, 2017 as Arson Awareness Week. The theme is "Protecting Houses of Worship". Deputies conducted inspections and arson prevention surveys in 184 facilities throughout the state.

During the first quarter of 2017, the OSFM conducted 252 investigation of which 195 were fire related; 48 of the 195 fires were incendiary; 44 of the 252 investigations were explosive related; 11 criminal cases were closed by arrest; 32 individuals were arrested of which 10 were juveniles; 2,818 inspections were performed; and 400 plans were reviewed. The backlog of plan reviews for the first quarter was 189.

To comply with the department's strategic plan, the OSFM developed three performance measures consisting of maintaining case closure rate for incendiary incidents that is above the 18% national average, reducing fire deaths by 10%, and increasing the number of hazardous devices technicians by 5%. To help achieve these goals the agency is looking at new technology to assist with criminal investigations, the Maryland State Police (MSP) is providing fifteen new cameras, and the Fire Marshal intends to place a fire investigation response unit on the shore. Last year the closure rate was 26% and for the first quarter of this year it was 28%. There is some training scheduled in the fall pertaining to report writing and NFPA 921 updates. The agency continues to use the International Association of Arson Investigators' on-line monthly training. The Fire Marshal would like to hire more inspectors so the deputies can focus solely on investigations and closing criminal cases. Currently there are not enough resources to separate the inspection and investigation divisions. Reducing the number of fire deaths by 10% will not be achieved this year. Community risk reduction weekends continue to try to educate the public and check smoke alarms. The agency is working with the MSFA, the Maryland Fire Chiefs Association, and Underwriters Laboratories on a "Close the Door" campaign. Another program being developed is "Get Alarmed Maryland" to map incidents and target specific areas most impacted by fires. The agency has advertised to hire additional hazardous devices technicians to achieve the 5% increase.

In response to an inquiry, Fire Marshal Geraci advised the OSFM does not conduct inspections in Baltimore City except for state-owned properties and it only conducts investigations when requested to provide assistance. The city fire department has been working very hard to get out in the communities to check and install smoke alarms. Unfortunately they have had a rough start with fatalities so far this year, three of which were homicides and two that took the lives of ten persons. The city only has five fire investigators and the Fire Marshal has extended his assistance. The fire investigators do origin and cause and then turn the investigations over to the police department. With recent changes in leadership in both the fire and police departments, efforts are ongoing to improve the working relationships.

The Fire Marshal has not seen the investigation report for the large apartment building fire in College Park. That fire is being investigated by the Prince George's County Fire Department. The building is to be completely razed and rebuilt. Contact should be made with the Prince George's County fire chief to request a copy of the investigation report. Chairman Davis advised he will do so.

For the next fiscal budget, the Fire Marshal will request additional personnel, a salary review for the inspectors, funds for more new vehicles, updating technology to move towards automated fire safety inspection reports and electronic plan reviews. Electronic plan reviews for Baltimore County schools are already being done with equipment provided by the Stadium Authority and that is working out well. Chairman Davis offered the Commission's support for his budget request.

Craig Beyler, a fire-science expert, requested a meeting with the Attorney General regarding the OSFM's fire investigations and reports. The Fire Marshal met with him and the MSP Attorney General to discuss Mr. Beyler's suggestions and concerns. He would like Maryland to conduct fire investigations similar to Texas, with a science advisory work group.

## **CHAIRMAN REPORT**

Chairman Davis congratulated Commissioner Bilger on his election to President of the MSFA. Commissioner Bilger stated he looks forward to his continued relationship with the Commission and the MSFA. He thanked everyone for their support.

Chairman Davis noted that Vice Chairman Hubbard's second term expires at the end of June. Colonel Palozzi has submitted a recommendation for his replacement to the Governor's Appointment Office but there has been no confirmation. It has been difficult to find a replacement for Commissioner Spencer who served as the at-large/member of public representative. No action will be taken on replacing Commissioner Yinger, whose second term expires June 2018, until the status of his medical condition is determined. Chairman Davis spoke to Mr. Yinger recently and he indicated he hoped to remain active. Vice Chairman Hubbard thanked everyone for their support during his tenure.

Chairman Davis recognized former Chairman Timothy Dayton and former Chief Fire Protection Engineer (CFPE) John Bender.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

Motion by Commissioner Bilger, second by Vice Chairman Hubbard, and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the April meeting. It was noted that the header should be corrected to indicate some members were absent instead of present.

Commissioner Scheffey stated he was unable to attend the previous test on laminated wood construction due to scheduling conflicts but he hopes to attend the test next week.

Commissioner Harrington expressed his appreciation for all the support to him and his family on the passing of his father-in-law. CFPE Bush, retired Wicomico County Fire Marshal Ed Torbert and several local fire marshals attended the service. His father-in-law, Edward Cropper, was the first full time fire marshal in Worcester County and he would have been proud of the service.

Commissioner Tochterman was very complimentary of the 2016 fire fatality report stating it was well put together. Fire Marshal Geraci stated Penny Doty compiled the report and she is working the booth on the lower level if he would like to stop by and see her. He suggested the 10% reduction in fatalities goal might be more practical if the vehicular fires were taken out of the equation. Fire Marshal agreed it probably would but unfortunately this year even that would not help reach the goal due to the high numbers already.

Former CFPE Bender informed the Commission of the passing of David Hammerman who was the first Fire Protection Engineer to be hired by the OSFM in 1966. He was hired by former Fire Marshal James C. Robertson. He was promoted to Chief Fire Protection Engineer when Mr. Bender was hired in 1971. He served as CFPE until 1981. He also had the distinction of being one of the first graduates of the University of Maryland fire protection engineering program. Mr. Hammerman passed away three weeks

ago at the age of 81.

**MEETING SCHEDULED**

The next meeting has been scheduled for  
Thursday August 17, 2017 – 9:30 a.m.  
Laurel Municipal Building, Council Chambers  
8103 Sandy Spring Road  
Laurel, Prince George's County

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted  
(as summarized from recording and notes  
provided by Allison Nicodemus),



Heidi Ritchie, Secretary