

VIRGINIA FIRE SERVICES BOARD

Fire Prevention and Control Committee
Thursday, September 21, 2023
Conference Room C
Hampton Roads Convention Center
1610 Coliseum Drive Hampton, Virginia 23666
2:15 PM

Minutes

A regular meeting of the Fire Prevention and Control Committee was held at the First Responder Virginia Conference. The meeting was called to order by Chair Steven Sites and a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Steven Sites, Committee Chair – Virginia Municipal League
Ernie Little – Virginia Fire Prevention Association
Billy Hanks – Local Fire Marshal
JM Snell II – Board of Housing and Community Development
Keith Johnson – Virginia Fire Chiefs’ Association
John Miller – Department of Forestry
Dennis Linaburg – Virginia Chapter of IAAI

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Billy Hux, State Fire Marshal
Will Merritt, Marketing and Communications Manager
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager
Troy Bower, Assistant State Fire Marshal – Special Operations
Robert Parker, Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal – Central Region
Rusty Chase, Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal – Eastern Region

GUESTS PRESENT

CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

PUBLIC COMMENTS

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion: To approve the minutes of the previous meeting (June 2023)

Motion: Johnson, **Second:** Linaburg

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Minutes approved

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REPORT FROM THE VIRGINIA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Billy Hux, Chief State Fire Marshal, provided a report on the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO). This included an update on new staff, new equipment, the FAST lab project, and legislative updates related to fire marshal law enforcement authority, additional funding, and additional positions. Chief Hux also spoke about the SFMO's attempts to create a fee through the Board of Housing and Community Development for food truck inspections. Chief Hux presented updates on the Virginia Fire Marshal Academy, including updates to the NFPA 1031 class, additional classes scheduled in 2023, and classes that are set to be held in 2024. Chief Hux also presented on the number of continuing education hours at the First Responder and Fire Rescue Conferences'.

CODES AND STANDARDS SUBCOMMITTEE

Committee Chair Steve Sites stated that no report had been submitted. Sites offered that he attended the last Codes and Standards Subcommittee meeting on September 12th and that the group met to go over next steps and plans for the next code cycle. Sites asked Ernie Little if he had anything to add. Little stated that the group discussed lithium-ion battery storage issues.

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Sites thanked VFSB Chair Johnson and Vice Chair Johnston for appointing him as the committee chair. He also spoke about business for the day, including the Fire Prevention and Control Plan and the MOU between the Board of Housing and Community Development and the VFSB. He highlighted the importance of the MOU during the code development cycle. He stated that VDFP staff were working to get to a solution regarding the MOU. Sites sent an email to the Department of Housing and Community Development concerning the MOU and spoke about how utilizing the Office of the Attorney General may be examined if no answer is provided.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a. Fire Prevention and Control Plan Updates

Sites presented updates to the document in its initial draft. This draft included background information on the plan, the VFSB, the committee, partners in fire prevention, and data about fire prevention. He highlighted that data is only as good as is reported. Sites also outlined goals and objectives that are in the document. This could include legislative proposals over the next few years. Incident reporting and possibly making it mandatory is something that is being included in the plan. He spoke about the removal of provisions in the Statewide

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Fire Prevention Code that are making fire prevention more difficult. Sites spoke about consistent fire safety messaging across the Commonwealth of Virginia. He also spoke about lithium-ion battery safety and public safety communications related to fire prevention and control.

Hux spoke about an Office of EMS workgroup examining public safety communications. He is a member of this group for the fire service. He lauded the group for their work.

Sites outlined his intention for the plan's final approval in December. He solicited feedback from the committee members.

Keith Johnson offered to assist with the lithium-ion battery recommendation, as well as soliciting information for public safety communications.

Sites offered to include forestry information. John Miller offered to assist on behalf of the Department of Forestry and supported the opportunity to look at wildland urban interface.

b. BHCD/VFSB MOU Update

c. Update on HB 2451 Workgroup: Local Fire Marshals

Johnson asked if the draft response from DCJS had been reviewed by fire service representatives. Willett outlined the timeline issues with the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). VDFP escalated the lack of communication to the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security's Office. VDFP did receive communication after this from DCJS outlining a draft report was being written and would be shared. VDFP and the fire service representatives would not support a document that did not include their review and edits. Willett reiterated that the agency had not received a draft document. Johnson spoke about the limitations on VDFP, which Willett concurred with. Johnson spoke about involving Garrett Dyer, former Executive Director of VDFP and VFSB representative to the workgroup, in crafting a response to DCJS.

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NEW BUSINESS

Sites spoke about the upcoming National Fire Academy Summit on Fire Prevention and Control. Sites and Chief State Fire Marshal Hux will be attending.

Johnson spoke about a lithium-ion battery training discussion that occurred at a Metro Chiefs meeting. Johnson stated he brought the U.S Fire Administrator to a data center to see the fire hazards and the experience was eye opening. He spoke about the recent approval of the 2021 SFPC and Building Code. He went on to speak about energy storage systems, and the need to update codes or zoning restrictions to make sure these areas are safe. He talked about the need for codes and standards to protect firefighters and citizens.

Spencer Willett outlined procedural issues related to the Codes and Standards Subcommittee of the VFSB. Willett outlined that this subcommittee is not made up of board members appointed by the Governor. The board policies, such as the Remote Participation Policy, applies to all components of the board. Willett requested comments and history on the Codes and Standards Subcommittee to create an informed proposal for the December VFSB meeting. He suggested calling the group a workgroup, rather than a subcommittee. Willett reiterated the important role the subcommittee plays.

Johnson stated it should probably be a workgroup and that this group historically does not meet the FOIA requirements. It is difficult to get this group together for 25 meetings or so without virtual meetings. Willett stated this is the exact problem because the subcommittee is considered part of the board for FOIA.

Sites asked if a policy existed on how this committee is formed. Willett stated that the Rules of Procedure outlined certain spots on the subcommittee, but little existed on its actual formation. Willett emphasized that he did not want to hide the work of the group, but it makes it much more difficult for the group to meet quickly for code development.

Sites stated that the committee should review how this group is formed and that members be approved by the VFSB. Sites spoke about his involvement in the group and how he joined and was approved by the VFSB years ago.

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ADJOURNMENT

Clerk of the Committee
Spencer R. Willett



Virginia Fire Prevention and Control Plan



Fiscal Years 2024 to 2028

Effective XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Prepared by:
Virginia Fire Services Board
Virginia Department of Fire Programs

A message from the Fire Prevention and Control Committee

The following pages represent the newly revised five-year Fire Prevention and Control Plan (FY) 2024 to 2028 for the Commonwealth of Virginia. This plan identifies strategic goals and objectives to reduce fires, casualties, property loss, and improve first responder safety by changing how people think about fire and making fire prevention a way of life in the Commonwealth.

From the United States Fire Administration: In 1971, our nation lost over 12,000 civilians and 250 firefighters to fire. To help decrease tragic losses and to promote professional development of the fire and emergency response community, Congress passed the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974. Since 1974, there has been a reduction of more than 70 percent in civilian fire fatalities and more than 60 percent in firefighter fatalities annually from fire.

Fire continues to be a problem in the Commonwealth of Virginia and as such there is a need to have a robust Fire Prevention and Control Plan. The Virginia Fire Services Board, in coordination with the Virginia fire and emergency services community, will strive for continuous improvements and seek positive results to safeguard the Commonwealth and its citizens from fire.

Virginia Fire Services Board

The Virginia Fire Services Board (the Board) is established as a policy board within the meaning of § 2.2-2100 in the executive branch of state government pursuant to § 9.1-202 of the Code of Virginia. Furthermore, the Board is given the authority to ensure the development and implementation of the Virginia Fire Prevention and Control Plan.

About the Fire Prevention and Control Committee

The Committee on Fire Prevention and Control shall be responsible for providing information and making recommendations to the Virginia Fire Services Board and Agency to ensure the development and implementation of the Virginia Fire Prevention and Control plan; advising the Agency on the development a statewide plan for the collection, analysis and reporting of data related to fires in the Commonwealth; and evaluating all fire prevention and protection programs, and make any recommendations deemed necessary to improve the level of fire prevention and protection in the Commonwealth.

Virginia Fire Service Partners

The following agencies and organizations have vested interest in the Fire Prevention and Control Plan.

Virginia State Agencies -

- Department of Fire Programs
- State Fire Marshal's Office
- Fire Marshal Academy
- Department of Forestry
- Virginia Department of Emergency Management
- Department of Housing and Community Development
- Virginia State Police

Fire Associations and Organizations –

- Virginia Fire Prevention Association
- Virginia Fire Chiefs Association
- Virginia Chapter International Association of Arson Investigators
- Virginia Fire and Life Safety Coalition
- Virginia State Firefighters Association
- Virginia Professional Firefighters Association

Current state of fire problem in the Commonwealth of Virginia

Over the last four years on average civilian fire fatality numbers have remained steady. Cooking and improperly discarded smoking materials are the top two causes of residential fires. The average median age of persons that are listed as fire fatalities is 60 years old.

Number of Civilian Fire Fatalities Over a Four-Year Period			
2019	2020	2021	2022
67	48	64	68

Nationally for the last 10 years on average, 81 percent of fire deaths occurred at residential structure fires. While the number of residential fire deaths has reduced substantially since the original “America Burning” report (1974), most of these losses could be reduced through requiring automatic sprinklers systems in residential occupancies.

Absent, non-functional, or outdated smoke alarms are a real issue throughout Virginia. 3 out of 5 fire fatalities occurred in a residence without a functioning smoke alarm. Combining smoke alarms deficiencies with no fire sprinkler system, the ability to prevent fire casualties is seemingly insurmountable.

One significant issue facing the fire service is recruitment and retention, in both the career and volunteer ranks. This challenge increases the risks for communities struggling to provide day-to-day emergency responses and as such directly impacts any capability and capacity to provide Community Risk Reduction activities.

Tall wood frame building construction is becoming increasingly popular because of material availability and costs. An uncontrolled fire in these types of buildings is a tactical challenge for firefighters and can quickly become deadly for occupants. Fire service participation in code development and education is paramount.

Plan Goals and Objectives

Goal 1 – Fire Incident Reporting. Virginia does not mandate fire incident documentation and reporting. This is a major impairment to research and analyze fire casualty and property loss. The outcomes from such research and analysis can yield focused Community Risk Reduction initiatives locally, regionally, and statewide, as well as contribute to improving fire department service delivery and firefighter health and safety. The method of incident documentation is not consistent across the Commonwealth. There are both handwritten and electronic documentation methods being used.

Objectives:

1. Begin discussions about mandatory electronic incident documentation and reporting with the fire service community. Determine what are the challenges or impediments to the process.
2. Begin discussion about creating legislation mandating incident reporting with fire service stakeholder's associations and groups.
3. Identify funding for technology grants – hardware (continuance) software (new).
4. Develop a statewide reporting policy and training program that identifies the minimum procedural requirements.
5. Begin discussion about creating legislation mandating all fire casualties be reported to the State Fire Marshal.
6. VDFP would compile an annual presentation to the Fire Services Board and make such a report available to the public.

Goal 2 – Practical and Useful, Statewide Fire Prevention Code. In recent Virginia code development cycles, the Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) has undergone significant changes. The primary focus of change was removing unenforceable provisions. The scope of these changes has left the fire inspector with a fragmented document.

Objectives:

1. The Codes and Standards Subcommittee will actively participate in the Virginia code development process. The work of this committee will directly influence the Fire Services Board's vote in the promulgation of the SFPC with the Board of Housing and Community Development.
2. The subcommittee will review future editions of the model codes to be knowledgeable of new or changed provisions.
3. The Code and Standards Subcommittee will actively pursue code change proposals that identify critical fire and life safety provisions, listed in the model fire code, and justify their re-establishment into the SFPC.

4. Actively participate in and support fire and building code development of safety provisions for Agrotourism activities.
5. Actively work with the Board of Housing and Community Development on the promulgation of the Statewide Fire Prevention Code. Routinely update the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to ensure the process is fair and equitable.

Goal 3 – Automatic Fire Suppression Systems in Single-Family Residences. In the Virginia code development process, the Board of Housing and Community Development chooses to exclude model code language that requires fire sprinklers in residential occupancies. It is a demonstrated fact that home fire sprinklers are a crucial, life-saving technology, since the risk of dying in a reported home fire is 85 percent lower if sprinklers are present.

Objectives:

1. Actively pursue conversations with all stakeholders about the inclusion of model code provisions for sprinkler systems in the Uniform Statewide Building Code for all townhomes.
2. If necessary, actively pursue legislation that mandates sprinkler systems in all townhomes.
3. Conduct research and prepare an informational document that identifies other states success data, current water supply requirements, developer and builder incentives, and average costs.

Goal 5 – Statewide Community Risk Reduction Messaging. Fire causes and casualty's trends are the basis for themes of public fire and life safety messaging in localities. There is currently no identified method to create and deploy messaging to be utilized statewide. Because of the transient nature of our citizens and visitors there is a need to provide unified messaging across the state.

Objectives:

1. Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFFP) Community Risk Reduction (CRR) Coordinator will work with associations, localities, and other governmental agencies to identify fire and life safety trends.
2. VDFFP CRR Coordinator will work with associations, localities, and other governmental agencies to create uniform messaging for use across the state.

Goal 6 – Lithium-Ion Battery Safety

Goal 7 – Public Safety Communication Deficiencies