

Testimony of
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Introduction

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Ernest Mitchell, Jr. and I am an Assistant Administrator at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the United States Fire Administrator in charge of the United States Fire Administration (USFA) at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the USFA.

In 1974, Congress passed the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act which established the USFA and the National Fire Academy (NFA) to help decrease tragic losses and to promote professional development of the fire and emergency response community. The U.S. Fire Administrator oversees, coordinates, directs, and sets policy for these efforts; serves as the fire protection and emergency response community expert to the FEMA Administrator; and acts as an advocate at the Federal level to address challenges facing the Nation's fire service.

In concert with FEMA's *Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management*, it is essential that USFA engage government and private stakeholders in exploring research, development, testing and evaluation of programs that will address emerging fire, emergency medical and disaster response needs of the fire service. USFA develops and delivers education to the public, Federal, State, local, tribal, and non-governmental organizations that lead to the control of the evolving fire hazards, such as the expanding wildland/urban interface zones, and addressing the needs of an aging population requiring greater support from the fire and fire-based emergency medical services community.

The combined efforts of USFA and fire service stakeholders have contributed to a decline in fire-related deaths through public safety education, fire prevention inspections, fire code initiatives, and installation of smoke alarms and residential sprinkler systems. In the general population, fire related deaths declined by 18.6 percent from 2001-2010. In addition, the number of on-duty firefighter fatalities, excluding the events of September 11, 2001, and the Hometown Heroes' fatalities, decreased 26 percent. The Nation has also seen recent progress in further reducing

firefighter-line-of-duty deaths. For the last three successive years, we have experienced firefighter death totals below 100. USFA has played a major role in promoting a culture of safety within the fire service across the Nation.

Despite making progress over time, USFA analysis of international and domestic fire statistics show that the United States fire problem remains among the worst in the industrial world. Thousands of Americans die each year, tens of thousands of people are injured, and property losses reach billions of dollars. There are huge indirect costs of fire as well, such as temporary lodging, lost business, medical expenses, psychological damage, and others. The National Fire Protection Association has estimated that the total economic cost of fire loss in the United States reached over \$300 billion in 2008. These indirect costs may be as much as 8 to 10 times higher than the direct costs of fire. The annual losses from floods, hurricane, tornadoes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters combined in the United States by comparison averages just a fraction of those from fires. The public, media, and local governments are generally unaware of the magnitude and severity of the fire problem to individuals and their families, to communities, and to the Nation. USFA is committed to providing national leadership to foster a solid foundation in prevention, preparedness, and response.

Current Programs and Initiatives

The USFA is a national leader in providing fire safety and prevention programs. We also lead the way in preparing communities to respond to fires and other hazards. USFA is supporting the efforts of local communities to reduce the number of fires and fire deaths, and it champions Federal fire protection issues and coordinates information about fire programs.

National Fire Academy

In terms of our preparedness programs, we recognize the importance of education as a vital step toward a first responder community prepared to respond to any kind of emergency, ranging from a small fire to a terrorist attack involving a large number of victims or extensive infrastructure damage. We continue to administer educational programs for community leaders and first responders to help them prepare for and respond to emergencies regardless of cause or magnitude, consistent with the concept of building and sustaining core capabilities laid out in Presidential Policy Directive 8: National Preparedness (PPD-8). USFA also strongly advocates for local fire departments to be the center of preparedness within their jurisdictions.

NFA offers a wide variety of training and educational programs to promote the professional development of command level fire officers, emergency managers, emergency responders, technical staff, and allied professionals such as architects and engineers.

In FY2011, NFA provided 3,409 course offerings, reaching 110,112 students, which is an increase of 22% over 2007. This was achieved through campus offerings at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) in Emmitsburg, Maryland, off-campus offerings by State training academies, and online courses. While the campus completions fell by 16%, there was an increase of 89% in online course completions. This was accomplished through delivery of NFA-sponsored courses, State and local partner sponsored courses, technology-based self-study programs, and higher education courses. Courses are delivered at NETC and throughout the United States in cooperation with State and local fire training agencies, colleges and universities, and online technology.

Students and their supervisors who have attended NFA courses have reported that Academy courses have improved their job performance and increased their professional development. Through feedback from its long-term, follow-on evaluation survey, 96.9 percent of students reported that what they learned in their NFA course work helped them do their jobs better and 89.6 percent of supervisors of students who attended NFA training indicated the information gained from the NFA training course helped improve the performance of their departments.

NFA continues to face the challenge of reaching America's estimated 1.2 million firefighters with meaningful education and performance-improvement training. Consequently, NFA has begun exploring significant curriculum enhancements that include mobile computing, webinars, podcasts, online training, and other adjuncts to classroom delivery.

Public Education and Awareness

In support of FEMA's *Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management*, USFA continues to deliver fire safety messages, develop national campaigns targeting high risk populations (e.g. children, seniors), and leverage our distribution/impact by working with a wide range of public/private partners (e.g. Federal agencies, Ready.gov, fire service organizations, and special interest organizations like AARP and Safe Kids). USFA serves as a conduit to the national firefighting and first responder community, allowing distribution of information about important cross cutting issues such as human trafficking with the DHS Blue Campaign.

Data Collection and Analysis

USFA assists State and local entities in collecting, analyzing and disseminating data and special reports on the occurrence, control, and consequences of all types of fires, emergency medical incidents, and other emergency activities through the efforts of the National Fire Data Center (NFDC). The NFDC tracks firefighter fatalities and conducts an analysis of the fatalities that occur each year. Through the collection of information on the causes of firefighter deaths, the USFA is able to focus on specific problems and direct efforts towards finding solutions to reduce the number of firefighter fatalities in the future. This information is also used to measure the effectiveness of current efforts directed toward firefighter health and safety.

In recent years, the USFA has developed the National Fire Incident Reporting System web application that facilitates participation by smaller departments. The application is almost finished with a data warehouse initiative that will provide better system performance and greater functionality for users (e.g. improved ability to access, share, and compare incident data among departments, States, and outside agencies). It is anticipated that wide access to detailed incident data will assist USFA and the Nation's fire service in identifying trends, developing focused prevention, and mitigating programs and measures.

Research and Technology

Within the DHS Science & Technology Directorate (S&T), USFA staff serve as subject matter experts for first responder needs as they relate to fire safety, and advocate for current S&T projects such as GLANSER (Geospatial Location Accountability and Navigation System for Emergency Responders), a firefighter locator technology and firefighter physiological monitoring equipment. Working in collaboration with public and private partners, USFA provides technical expertise and serves as a liaison to the fire community for projects of mutual interest such as emergency vehicle and roadway safety, emergency medical services issues, firefighter safety and health, and residential fire sprinklers and detectors. Partners include Federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology, as well as non-governmental partners such as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), International Association of Fire Fighters, and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

One example of this collaboration is the USFA partnership with NFPA to administer the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition (HFSC) initiative to promote better knowledge, understanding, and use of automatic fire sprinkler technology in residential dwellings. The mission of HFSC is to inform consumers about the life-saving benefits of installing home fire sprinkler systems.

Emergency Response Support

USFA provided technical expertise and assistance during the development of All Hazard Incident Management Teams (AHIMTs). Teams today are representative of local, State, tribal, and Urban Area Security Initiative regions. USFA Type 3 AHIMTs are currently located in 9 of the 10 FEMA regions. AHIMTs have been deployed in response to local/State requests, through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) for State-to-State assistance, and mobilized nationally through efforts coordinated by USFA. USFA can also assist with the coordination of other forms of State-level collaboration.

USFA, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Department of the Interior through their cooperative agreement with the IAFC, developed an initiative titled "Ready, Set, Go!" This program is designed to assist fire departments in at-risk communities to develop pre-fire strategies and actions aimed at reducing risks within the wildland/urban interface (WUI). National rollout of the program occurred in March 2011 at the IAFC Wildland Interface Conference resulting in an increase in fire department participation.

Trends/Challenges

There are a number of trends and challenges that will affect the future of the fire service, and further increase the importance of a coordinated, national approach to fire prevention and mitigation.

Changing Nature of the Fire Threat

A number of factors have led to a significant increase in the intensity and severity of residential fires, including changes in home design, furnishing materials, and building construction. The amount of time that residents have to safely evacuate has decreased, causing greater danger to residents and firefighters. Tactics to effectively fight residential fires must be adjusted over time to meet the evolving threat. USFA works with partners to constantly update and revise curriculum in response to changes in the fire environment, and this further highlights the importance of training for first responders. The use of residential sprinklers and smoke detectors together are a highly effective way to mitigate this increased risk. In particular, residential fire sprinklers are underutilized and increasing their installation has the potential to make the public and fire fighters significantly safer.

Wildland Urban Interface Fires (WUI)

WUI fires are becoming a more significant threat and will continue to be a high priority. The past two decades have seen a rapid escalation of severe fire behavior, and home and property loss resulting from drought conditions combined with expanded interface area developments. For the firefighting community, this translates into a greater need for response to WUI fire incidents. We must continue to assist communities in reducing risk and mitigating the impact of WUI fires.

In response to this increasing threat, the USFA plays an active role in several intergovernmental and coordinating bodies. The USFA serves as a member of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council, an intergovernmental council of Federal, State, tribal, and local government officials, and leaders in non-governmental organizations. The USFA also serves on the Wildland Fire Executive Council, a Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) committee. In addition, USFA currently chairs the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, actively participated in drafting the

first two phases of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and will continue to participate in the drafting of the third phase to address the threat posed by WUI fires.

Demographic Changes

The demographic profile of the United States is expected to change dramatically as the large “baby boomer” generation enters retirement age. Over the coming decades, there is a risk that fire deaths and injuries among older adults will increase, based upon the projected increase in that segment of the population. Given historical data identifying high rates of illnesses and injuries among the elderly, the Nation may also experience an increase in emergency medical calls for service. Monitoring and preparing for these trends will influence USFA's out-year program planning in order to educate and prepare the fire and emergency services community for the changing work environment.

Budgetary Realities

The question of how to maximize resources is ever more important than ever. The improvement and development of data collection, particularly tools that can leverage geospatial technology, may help local officials more effectively stretch resources by helping to identify the location of at-risk populations and identify local trends.

Increasing Fire Service Role in Disaster Response

In concert with FEMA's *Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management*, USFA has and must continue to work with fire service stakeholders and partners to expand local fire service participation in emergency preparedness. These initiatives need to include an enhanced development of fire service deployment strategies to address floods, hurricanes, terrorism, and other disasters.

Moving Forward

The USFA has identified five goals as a framework to provide national leadership to foster a solid foundation for our fire and emergency services stakeholders in prevention, preparedness and response. The Goals, which provide support to FEMA's mission and are consistent with the core capabilities as outlined in PPD-8, are the foundation for USFA strategic planning. These five broad Goals are supported by detailed strategic and operational initiatives.

1. Reduce Risk at the Local Level through Prevention and Mitigation
2. Improve Local Planning and Preparedness
3. Improve the Fire and Emergency Services' Capability for Response to and Recovery from All Hazards
4. Improve the Fire and Emergency Services Professional Status

5. Lead the Nation's Fire and Emergency Services by Establishing and Sustaining USFA as a Dynamic Organization

The USFA will continue to pursue these goals, through effective existing programs, while evaluating and instituting new initiatives relevant to our current and future operating climate and the challenges the Nation's fire and emergency services face.

Conclusion

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me this opportunity to appear before you today. Your continued support is greatly appreciated. I will be glad to answer any questions you or other Members of the Committee may have.