

STATEMENT

OF

DENIS ONIEAL, ED. D.  
ACTING U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATOR

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

BEFORE

THE

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE AND TECHNOLOGY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

“U.S. Fire Administration and Fire Grant Programs Reauthorization:  
Examining Effectiveness and Priorities”

Submitted

By

Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20472

July 12, 2017

## Introduction

Good morning, Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Denis Onieal, and I serve as Acting Assistant Administrator at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Acting United States Fire Administrator responsible for managing the United States Fire Administration (USFA) at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC). It gives me great pleasure to be here today to discuss the functions of the USFA.

## Background

In 1974, Congress passed the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act that established the USFA and the National Fire Academy (NFA) to help decrease tragic loss due to fire and to promote the professional development of the fire and emergency medical services (EMS) community.

The USFA focuses on supplementing, not duplicating, existing programs of training, technology and research, data collection and analysis, and public education. Over the years, the USFA has adjusted to the constant changes and challenges facing the fire and EMS community - from all hazards to terrorism.

From the DHS/FEMA perspective, it's important to recognize that every emergency, every Federal disaster, starts with a local emergency response. The fire and emergency services responded to 25 million local emergencies last year. To the extent that a community has well-trained, well-led cadre of fire and emergency responders, the emergency stays local. During incidents so large that the local forces are overwhelmed, the emergency becomes a disaster, triggering State and Federal response, assets and costs. It is in the interest of both DHS and FEMA to keep local emergencies local through fire department data analysis, fire prevention, public education and response.

In the case where the local responders are overwhelmed, it is important that the local forces integrate seamlessly with outside help – State and Federal – using the National Incident Management System and the Incident Command System. Not properly prepared and trained, the local forces will not integrate well with State and Federal assets resulting in increased loss of life and property and increased criticism of DHS/FEMA efforts. Through its training, data collection and analysis, research, and public education/prevention programs, the USFA helps prepare local first responders to protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards by partnering with State and local fire and emergency services and stakeholders to achieve the desired outcomes:

1. Reducing all-hazards risks through preparedness, prevention, and mitigation.

2. Promoting response, local planning, and preparedness for all hazards
3. Enhancing the fire and emergency services capability to respond to and recover from all hazards
4. Advancing the professional development of fire service personnel and other people engaged in fire prevention and control activities (Public Law 93-498).

Because of our collective efforts with fire and emergency services stakeholders in public safety education, fire prevention programs, inspections, fire and building code initiatives, and installation of smoke alarms and residential sprinkler systems, fire related deaths in the United States declined 11 percent from 2006-2015. In addition, the number of on-duty firefighter fatalities has decreased 28.9 percent during the same period. The USFA is committed to promoting health and safety for all of the Nation's firefighting and EMS communities.

### Strategic Framework

The USFA identified five broad goals as a framework to implement our mission: to provide national leadership to foster a solid foundation for our fire and emergency services stakeholders in prevention, preparedness and response.

These goals provide strategic and operational direction:

1. Reduce Fire and Life Safety Risk through Preparedness, Prevention and Mitigation
2. Promote Response, Local Planning and Preparedness for All Hazards
3. Enhance the Fire and Emergency Services' Capability for Response to and Recovery from All Hazards
4. Advance the Professional Development of Fire Service Personnel and of Other People Engaged in Fire Prevention and Control Activities
5. Establish and Sustain USFA as a Dynamic Organization

The USFA actively supports these goals in partnership with the fire and EMS community. We continue to evaluate and institute new initiatives as needed based on the current climate and existing challenges.

### Trends and Challenges

While we have made great strides, the analysis of international and domestic fire statistics show the United States fire problem remains among the worst in the industrial world. There are a number of factors that contribute to the Nation's fire problem beginning with the changing nature of the fire threat. Today, the intensity and severity of residential fires due to building construction, home design and furnishing materials, make safe evacuation more difficult than in the past.

The USFA works with partners to develop tactics and to update and revise curriculum and programs to effectively fight the evolving threat of residential fires.

### Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

There has been a rapid escalation of severe wildfire behavior over the past two decades. Consequently, there are increased risks to responders and citizens, greater home and property losses, higher costs, and larger threats to communities and landscapes. Drought contributes to these impacts. As communities continue to expand into wildland areas, the number of buildings damaged or destroyed in wildland fires increases. We must continue to assist communities in reducing risk and mitigating the impact of WUI fires.

The USFA plays an active leadership role in several intergovernmental and coordinating bodies including the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and provides subject matter expertise to the Mitigation Framework Leadership Group. Since the release of the National Strategy and the National Action Plan, the USFA works with WUI partners to continually promote and implement the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

The NFA provides six different courses to help fire departments and local communities contend with the growing risk of fire in the WUI. The courses focus on mitigation through community awareness, land use planning, adoption and code enforcement, and preparation of evacuation plans.

The USFA also developed a toolkit to assist fire and EMS departments with educating themselves and their communities about wildland fire threat and risks along with mitigation strategies. The toolkit contains community risk assessment tools, information on Fire Adapted Communities, related codes and standards, outreach mitigation materials, specialized community planning, and land use resources. There is also access to current research articles, links to local training for citizens and responders, and wildfire safety tips and messages to share through social media. This collection of WUI resources assists fire departments, community organizations, local governments, emergency managers, and citizens alike to strengthen the way their city, town, or community prepares for a wildfire emergency.

### Demographics

As the population of older adults increases, National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) data show that their risk of fire death increases. As the “baby boomers” begin to age, there is a projected increase in the number of fire and emergency medical services calls. The USFA is adjusting its training and programs to prepare for this shift in demographics. The use of residential sprinklers and smoke alarms together are a highly effective way to mitigate this increased risk. We are working diligently to promote the installation and use of residential fire sprinklers.

## All Hazard Response

Between 2011 and 2015, fire and emergency services responded to an annual average of 142,490 technical rescues (such as vehicle extrications, swift water rescues and high-angle rescues) and 1,515 explosive bomb removals. It is not commonly known but about 20-25 percent of bomb disposal teams are part of fire departments. To provide perspective, in 2015 about 25 million incidents were reported to NFIRS. Of these, 64.5 percent were rescue and EMS; 4.5 percent were fires; 3.6 percent were hazardous conditions with no fire; and all other types of incidents accounted for 27.4 percent. The fire and emergency services have evolved well beyond a fire focus to encompass all hazard response.

## Active Shooter/Mass Casualty Incidents (AS/MCIs)

Over 500 people have been killed in the United States in AS/MCIs since the Columbine High School shootings in 1999. AS/MCIs occur locally and impact fire, EMS, and police departments. The ambush on Dallas police offices on July 7, 2016 is an example of a collaborative effort where a Dallas Fire Department Captain and crew entered the active shooter scene to save police officers. The initial commanding officer for the Dallas Fire Department, Chief Tami Kayea, is a graduate of the NFA's Executive Fire Officer Program. She publicly attributed her success in managing the initial response to that tragedy to the training she received at the NFA.

The USFA recognizes that it is essential to be at the forefront of this increasing demand on emergency providers by ensuring we offer educational and training materials to ensure incident safety. We clearly have a role and responsibility to all emergency responders for fire and fire-based EMS.

## Fiscal Impacts

Thousands of Americans die each year, tens of thousands of people are injured, and property and business continuum losses reach billions of dollars. There are huge indirect costs of fire, such as temporary lodging, medical expenses, psychological damage and negative environmental impacts. The direct loss by fire in 2015 included 3280 civilian deaths, 15,700 civilian injuries and \$14.3 billion in property loss. Someone is injured by fire every 34 minutes, killed every two and a half hours every day in America.

It is imperative to evaluate all aspects of USFA programs to realize the most effective way to do business. This evaluation is necessary at the Federal, State and local levels. The idea of maximizing limited resources to achieve optimal results is important for the sustainability of the Nation's fire service and the livelihood of our communities. The USFA cooperates with others in the development of data collection tools to identify the location of at-risk populations and local fire and emergency trends. As instructor fees and student travel stipend costs increase, the NFA has begun converting some of its courses from residential delivery to mediated on-line

delivery. While on-line training does increase costs, it also increases the number of people trained. Additionally, it makes NFA training available to those who cannot travel to the NETC.

### Current Programs and Key Initiatives

The USFA programs and key initiatives are in support of the efforts of local communities to reduce the number of fires and fire related deaths and injuries. We champion Federal fire protection issues and coordinate information about fire programs.

### National Fire Academy (NFA)

The NFA promotes the professional development of the fire and emergency services response community and other allied professionals engaged in fire prevention and control activities. We deliver training and education to first responders and community leaders to assist in the preparation and response to all emergencies. As a result, first responders are better prepared to manage hazards at the lowest possible level. The NFA provides a variety of education and training opportunities for command level fire officers, emergency managers, emergency responders, technical staff, and other allied professionals such as architects and engineers.

In Fiscal Year 2016, NFA provided 3,737 course offerings, reaching 103,257 students. Courses are delivered in classrooms at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC), and in classrooms throughout the United States in cooperation with State and local fire training agencies and colleges and universities. The NFA also has a robust system of online instructor mediated and self-study courses.

Students who attended NFA courses reported that courses have improved job performance and increased professional development. Through feedback from the NFA's long-term, follow-on evaluation survey, 94.4 percent of students reported that their NFA course work helped increase their skills and enhance their job performance; and 90 percent of supervisors of students indicated that the information gained from the courses helped improve performance within their departments.

NFA continues to face the challenge of reaching America's estimated 1.3 million firefighters with meaningful education and performance-improvement training. In recognition of this challenge and need to further reach into a changing workforce, the NFA implemented significant curriculum enhancements that include mobile computing, webinars, podcasts, online training, and mediated online education and other adjuncts to classroom delivery.

### Public Education and Awareness

The USFA serves as an information conduit to the fire, emergency services and allied professional communities. We distribute research findings and information through multiple channels including social media, our web site, the Learning and Resource Center, national radio and print, and other outreach efforts that directly reach our fire and emergency services'

practitioners. Critical issues such as community risk reduction, prevention, firefighter health and safety, the WUI, human trafficking and critical infrastructures are disseminated to our colleagues and partners every day. Our educational outreach effort create prevention and life safety infographics (i.e., graphics without words) for people with limited English language abilities. These tools help our fire departments get information about life-saving practices to large and small communities throughout the country. The USFA also leads the Fire is Everyone's Fight (FIEF) national initiative to unite the fire service, life safety organizations and professionals in an effort to reduce home fire injuries, deaths and property loss by changing how people think about fire and fire prevention.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The 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.

The USFA is in the process of modernizing the NFIRS data entry browser tool along with other NFIRS web tool applications in order to improve overall system reliability, performance, ease of data entry, and system administration by fire departments and state users. The goal of the modernization is to make the software more user friendly and encourage further participation. The modernization will integrate user access to the NFIRS Data Warehouse which has been in use by USFA for several years and is now being rolled out to an increasing number of states and departments. The NFIRS Data Warehouse provides a much larger suite of standard reports and the ability to create new reports or modify existing ones. Data warehouse users are able to access, share, and compare incident data among departments, States, and nationally. Use of the data warehouse has allowed USFA to track data quality issues in near real-time and therefore improve the data used for annual analyses and data distribution. This tool assists USFA and the Nation's fire service in identifying trends, developing focused prevention, and mitigating programs and measures.

### Research and Technology

Supporting the DHS Science & Technology (S&T) Directorate, USFA staff serve as subject matter experts for first responder needs as they relate to firefighter health and safety. Working in collaboration with public and private partners, the USFA develops projects, provides technical expertise, and serves as federal liaison to the fire community for initiatives of mutual interest such as emergency vehicle and roadway safety, firefighter occupational health and safety, emergency medical services (EMS) issues, residential fire sprinklers, and smoke alarms. Some of the Federal agencies we partner with include the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, U.S. Department of Energy,

Oak Ridge National Laboratories (ORNL), and the National Institute of Standards and Technology; Non-governmental partners include the NFPA; International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC); International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), National Volunteer Fire Council, International Fire Service Training Association, and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

An example of this collaboration is the partnership with FEMA's Mission Support office which resulted in the development and installation of fire sprinklers in temporary housing for disaster survivors. The USFA partnered with CPSC to conduct research on new smoke alarm technology and focused on the modernization of the 40 year old alarm devices for greater effectiveness and safety. We collaborated with the ORNL on the development of new technologies to detect direct current to protect responders from electrocution. The USFA is also working with the IAFF on a study of occupational violence to firefighters and EMS to find ways to mitigate attacks on first responders.

#### Emergency Response Support

To enhance response capacity and capability at the state, local, and tribal levels, the USFA supports the development of Type 3 All Hazard Incident Management Teams (AHIMT). Currently, there are 128 Type 3 AHIMTs strategically located in 44 states within the ten FEMA Regions. These teams are all-hazard responders and manage incidents ranging from wildfires to hurricanes to terrorism incidents. The Type 3 AHIMTs have been able to manage incidents that formerly utilized the National Type 1 or Type 2 Incident Management Teams, producing the same outcomes at a fraction of the costs. The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) recognizes the operational value of Type 3 AHIMTs, considers them part of their response resource base, and has incorporated USFA's training and development program into their core training requirements for future credentialing of Type 3 Incident Management Teams.

#### Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program Roles and Responsibilities Framework

At the recommendation of the Government Accountability Office, the USFA signed an agreement with FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate in December 2016. This agreement provides a framework for each component's role and responsibility to improve the management of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. This collaboration is ongoing and will be reviewed and evaluated by Assistance to Firefighters Grant and USFA staff to ensure quality grant program management.

#### Conclusion

Madam Chairman, thank you for your time today. I appreciate the opportunity to highlight the accomplishments of United States Fire Administration and the hard work of our staff. Today we know that annual losses from floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters combined, by comparison average just a mere fraction of fire loss. Your continued



support is instrumental as we work together for a fire safe America. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.