

**Opening Statement**  
**Ranking Member Donna Edwards**  
***Working for a Fire Safe America: Examining United States Fire***  
***Administration Priorities***  
**May 17, 2012**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this morning's hearing to examine the activities and priorities of the United States Fire Administration. I'm very pleased to welcome Chief Mitchell here today so we can hear more about his vision for the Administration. The position of Administrator was vacant for far too long, and we're delighted to finally have you on board and at the helm. I'd also like to thank our other witnesses for taking time out of their schedules to be here today and share their critical insight with us.

The Fire Administration was created in 1974 with the goal of reducing the number of fire-related deaths by half from a staggering 12,000 per year. Through the good work of the Fire Administration and our first responders, we met this goal in 1988. The number of fire-related deaths continues to decline but, unfortunately, our country's fire-related death rate is still one of the highest in the industrialized world. And it is estimated that, in 2009, fire cost the United States over \$331 billion dollars in economic and human losses.

The Fire Administration continues to play a central role in reducing the impacts of fire and making our communities safer. It is responsible for improving the ability of fire departments around the country to respond to fires safely and effectively through research and firefighter training and for increasing fire prevention and preparedness through public education and awareness activities.

Certainly, fires are still a major problem in our country and the Fire Administration's continued leadership in this area is critical. However, we can't ignore the fact that our firefighters are not just fighting fires anymore. On any given day, our firefighters are rushing to the scene in response to over 72,000 calls that range in scope from a house fire to a car crash to a hazardous material spill to a medical emergency. The truth is that our firefighters are our first responders in all types of emergencies, including terrorist attacks and natural disasters, and the range of training and education they need to be successful must expand and evolve to reflect this reality.

As part of the Fire Administration's last reauthorization in 2008, we emphasized the need to advance training in, for example, emergency medical services and hazardous material response. I'm interested to

hear today about the status of those advances and learn from our witnesses whether the Fire Administration's training courses are in fact meeting the expanded all-hazards needs of today's fire service.

I'm also interested in hearing about the current state of fire-related research, any emerging research areas or existing gaps, and how the Fire Administration is contributing to these efforts. I would also like to learn more about how the Fire Administration prioritizes its research investments and how it coordinates its research activities with other Federal entities engaged in fire-related research, including the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the Science and Technology Directorate within the Department of Homeland Security.

Most importantly, however, I am interested in hearing recommendations or suggestions about what ought to be included in the next Fire Administration reauthorization bill. As you are aware, the current authorization for the Fire Administration expires in just over four months. I am pleased that we are holding this hearing today and think that it is an important first step. I sincerely hope that the decision to call this hearing is an indication that there are plans to draft and move a reauthorization bill through this Committee in the coming weeks. I hope that the Chairman will be able to provide some insight into these plans this morning.

As you may be aware, our colleagues on the Senate passed a Fire Administration reauthorization bill through the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs yesterday. I believe we also have an obligation and an opportunity to ensure that the Fire Administration's authority continues uninterrupted and I look forward to working with the Chairman towards that end.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing.

The Fire Administration plays an essential role in ensuring that our firefighters - who are so critical to the safety and resiliency of our Nation - have the tools they need to protect us and keep us out of harm's way. I'm looking forward to hearing from our witnesses about the "tools" Congress can provide the Fire Administration that will allow them to effectively assist fire departments across the country.

I yield back the balance of my time.