

**STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION**  
**MINUTES**  
**August 21, 2025**

**Members Present:** Edward S. Tochterman, Chairman  
Caroll Spriggs, Vice Chairman  
Mark Hopkins  
Ephraim Siff  
Eric Smothers  
Jerred Johnson

**Members Absent:** Randy Sanger

**Vacancies:** Washington-Metro Area/Industry  
Southern/Volunteer Fire Service

The Fire Prevention Commission held a public meeting August 21, 2025, at the Laurel Municipal Center, 8103 Sandy Spring Road, Laurel, Prince George's County.

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. The pledge of allegiance was recited.

The Chairman recognized several guests: Catherine Kelly and Nicole Jones with the Maryland State Police (MSP) Government Affairs Unit, and Terin Hopkins with the National Fire Sprinkler Association.

**FIRE MARSHAL REPORT**

A copy of Acting State Fire Marshal (A/SFM) Jason Mowbray's written report was distributed.

To date in 2025, there are 39 confirmed fire fatalities—28 involving residential structures, four associated with vehicle fires, and seven in other settings. Nine causes of death are pending the Medical Examiner's determination. There have been nine double-fatality fires. Vice Chairman Spriggs suggested including information on whether homes had working smoke alarms. A/SFM Mowbray advised that information is collected on the fire fatality reports so in the future he will provide that data. In response to an inquiry from Commissioner Johnson regarding vehicle fire fatalities, A/SFM Mowbray advised the vehicle fire report is a bit more difficult as they may be homicides, suicides, or accidents either because of collisions or mechanical failures. When traumatic injuries occur there is an uncertainty if the death was from the injury or the result of the vehicle catching on fire. The OSFM works closely with MSP on vehicle accidents and sometimes it can be determined but other times an autopsy and determination by the medical examiner is needed. If the occupant was alive at the time of the fire and if it is determined that fire or smoke was the cause of death, then it is considered a fire fatality.

To date for 2025, the agency has conducted 604 investigations for fires, explosives, or other incidents; 7,164 Inspections; 859 plan reviews; and 86 public education events.

The HB0468 Li-Ion Battery Safety workgroup is ongoing with a report due at the end of the year. The inclusion of battery storage requirements in the newly adopted NFPA codes provides a positive trajectory for the workgroup.

The HB0823 Pre-1974 Non-Sprinklered Residential High-rise Workgroup has submitted its report to the legislature and it is publically available.

Effective June 1, 2025, the sale, distribution, transfer, or installation of non-arc-resistant yellow-jacketed corrugated stainless steel tubing is prohibited.

A/SFM Mowbray reviewed some noteworthy incidents:

- The MSP Government Affairs Unit and the Office of Media Communications participated in a joint training and demonstration of the OSFM Special Operations Section (SOS) in June at Sandy Point State Park. The SOS includes the bomb squad, underwater hazardous device team, accelerant and explosive detection K9s, and unmanned aerial systems (drones).
- Between June 26-July 4, 139 public fireworks displays were held in Maryland. OSFM personnel and/or local partners inspected each display for safety compliance.
- A 14-year old suffered a catastrophic hand injury on July 4<sup>th</sup> and underwent emergency surgery in Prince George's County. The fireworks were not legally permitted in Maryland.
- In the Abingdon area of Harford County, a Home Owners Association held an event in a local park to try to eliminate and minimize illegal/nuisance fireworks. The event was held without a permit, a licensed shooter, or legal fireworks. While well-intentioned, the Harford County Sheriff's Department responded and cooperated with the OSFM in confiscating more than 1,300 illegal fireworks. Two adults who did not live in the community have received court summons.
- Two suspects were arrested in August for setting unrelated fires to occupied homes in Waldorf and Salisbury. The incident in Waldorf involved a domestic dispute with the suspect charged with attempted murder. A Salisbury suspect was arrested after an argument over a \$7 debt and setting a dwelling front door on fire with gasoline. The suspect was charged with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree arson, 1<sup>st</sup> degree malicious burning, malicious destruction of property over \$1,000, reckless endangerment, and theft under \$100.
- A Grasonville resident was indicted on multiple arson and fraud related charges following a fire in November 2024. After months of investigation, the case was presented to a Queen Anne's County grand jury and resulted in nine charges which included arson, malicious burning, and insurance fraud.
- The OSFM, ATF, and the Charles County Sheriff's Office are conducting a joint investigation into a fatal fire in Waldorf that occurred in August. The fire resulted in the deaths of two adults and four children. Three other occupants were unharmed. This is the deadliest multi-fatality fire in Maryland since the 2015 Annapolis fire which also claimed six lives.

A/SFM Mowbray reported on personnel matters:

- Rosalyn Loney, a long-time OSFM employee, has assumed the role of the agency's training coordinator which was previously handled by the Administrative Specialist in the Southern Regional Office.
- Deputy Jeffery Frye retired July 1<sup>st</sup> after 19 years of service. He spent a significant portion of his career on military leave serving proudly in the armed forces.
- Deanna Pelton joined the agency as a Deputy State Fire Marshal assigned to the Western Region. She graduated from the Washington County Police Academy and is a lateral transfer from the Hagerstown City Fire Marshal's Office.
- Larry Palmer joined the agency as a Fire Safety Inspector assigned to the Northeast Region primarily focusing on day and foster care inspections. He was previously employed by the Baltimore County Fire Department and Department of Justice. He is also an active volunteer with the English Consul Volunteer Fire Department.
- Retired Deputy Fire Marshal Frank Rauschenberg was joined by family and friends for a "*Celebration of 60 Years of Service*" to community service. Deputy Rauschenberg served 30 years in the OSFM Metro Region (Carroll, Frederick, Howard Counties) and was one of the original members of the K9 unit in the mid 1980's. In the 1970's he successfully infiltrated the KKK and thwarted a bombing. OSFM Deputy Chief Dexter Hodges presented him with mementos for his dedicated service and a State Fire Marshal Certificate of Recognition.

The agency is having a busy summer with community outreach events involving summer camps, youth programs, National Night Out, and partnering with local communities and fire departments to distribute

smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. Since January 1<sup>st</sup> the agency has participated in 79 events involving 665 personnel hours and engaging an estimated 8,900 citizen interactions.

Following the recent loss of a team member, Hero Dog Sandy and K9 Rosie visited the Washington County Emergency Services Center to provide emotional support and comfort to tele communicators. The 911 staff warmly appreciated the calming presence the dogs provided them.

The OSFM partnered with the MSP Office of Media Communication to produce its first public awareness video on fireworks safety. Created during the annual joint fireworks safety news conference with Howard County Department of Fire and Rescue Services, the video is designed for ongoing use during major holidays that typically involve fireworks celebrations. A/SFM Mowbray extended thanks to the county for their support and use of its facility.

A list of fire departments with overdue CY 2025 Maryland Fire Incident Reports (MFIRS) was provided in A/SFM Mowbray's written report. The departments have been notified.

The MFIRS system will be replaced with NERIS at the end of this year. There are three training sessions scheduled at the end of August. The system is already live in a beta testing program. Commissioner Smothers questioned if just three sessions would sufficient to get enough information out across the state. A/SFM Mowbray reported that the virtual session will be recorded and will be available on the OSFM web and social media sites for the fire service to review. Some jurisdictions are reaching out with some of their concerns and are requesting additional information. NERIS is designed to be near real time as opposed to the bulk submission currently being made for MFIRS. Maryland OSFM is not unique to being the gatekeeper of data collection and fund distributions for local departments, it is a concern of the National Association of State Fire Marshals as well. The system does have a mechanism to insure submissions are compliant. Another concern is that if submissions are rejected, the fire departments are made aware of any errors so they can make corrections and not be shown as delinquent. NERIS is a modern system with many safeguards, such a dropdown and check boxes, to minimize submission errors or omissions. Departments have an option of different software vendors but fundamentally the software needs to be able to provide the required data. Commissioner Smothers noted another issue is that different jurisdictions may want to collect certain data that another jurisdiction may not. A/SFM Mowbray advised the OSFM is looking into a solution to provide a standardized fire incident module through the records management system, similar to the type of system that MIEMSS uses, but that will be difficult. Information on the new federal program is available at <https://www.usa.fema.gov/nfirs/neris>.

Deputy Chief Joseph Walters with the OSFM Logistics and Technology Section attended the Underwriter's Laboratory Research Institutes Research Symposium this week. He along with others spoke on the human elements of building the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS). He shared how the OSFM plans to utilize NERIS with the agency's upcoming records management system.

A/SFM Mowbray along with Deputy Chief Walters and Chief Fire Protection Engineer Bush joined over 300 attendees at the 35<sup>th</sup> National Association of State Fire Marshals Fire Prevention Symposium. Dozens of other State Fire Marshals also attended. Former Maryland State Fire Marshal Brian Geraci presented "Annapolis Mansion Fire: A Story of Tragedy and Triumph" and shared the events of the devastating 2015 fire that took the lives of six family members.

The State is currently going through a budget shortfall but the OSFM budget has largely remained intact except after July 1<sup>st</sup> funding for training and travel was pulled back. MSP has committed to ensuring funds will still be available for all positions that require certifications, such as bomb technicians, K9s, investigator certifications, etc. The OSFM has seven vacancies that are currently subject to a hiring freeze. A justification can be submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management to request a position be unfrozen. With the full support of MSP Superintendent Butler, these requests were submitted and confirmation has been received that all fire safety inspectors, both contractual and merit, have been unfrozen. Another position that was unfrozen is the OSFM Public Information Act compliance employee.

This Administrative Specialist position will be responsible for all of the public information requests, body cam footage, redaction of videos and reports as well as records management. Interviews have been conducted and it is moving to the final stages.

Vice Chairman Spriggs expressed concern about a recent fire fatality of child in Maryland who was transported to a hospital in Washington, DC. It seemed unusual that their medical examiner did not do an autopsy. He inquired if there is a possibility to have persons transported back to Baltimore for autopsies when they are injured in a fire in Maryland and then transported out of state and subsequently die. A/SFM Mowbray advised that it can be a challenge for the fire fatality report manager to get information or updates from other jurisdictions depending to which hospital they were transported. He will check into the matter.

### **CHIEF FIRE PROTECTION ENGINEER REPORT**

CFPE Bush reported that Clayton Dennies, a Bel Air area resident who is a senior in mechanical engineering at Frostburg State University, has been hired as an intern to work with the OSFM engineering division. He has not had any experience with fire protection work in the past but is very interested. Fire Protection Engineer Derek Murgatroyd in the Headquarters Office will be working with him. Part of Clayton's mission is to review issues with record management—the intake of information for new projects, plan submissions from both architectural and fire protection system designs, how the reviews and information are handled, how it gets returned to the submitter, and how that information is retained for OSFM records. He has been working on this in July and August and plans to have a report done by the end of September. He graduates in May and then will be ineligible to be an intern. Since he started, he has signed up as an NFPA student member, has reviewed the OSFM website, has reviewed the State Fire Prevention Code and several of the more commonly used NFPA standards. He has been in contact with the regional engineers to obtain information on the permitting process.

CFPE Bush serves as a member on the statewide workgroup to study lithium-ion battery safety. It continues to meet monthly and has gathered a lot of information. The latest edition of NFPA 855 is currently adopted by reference. The workgroup is divided into sub-groups with discussions taking place on the various sizes and uses for these batteries such as cell phones, computers, mobility devices, e-bikes, scooters, wheelchairs, electric vehicles, storage systems, etc. The recycling and disposal process is a concern—how to handle and dispose of batteries that have been damaged or have reached the end of their useful life. The OSFM has received some proposals for the sale of Class L portable fire extinguishers. In discussions with UL and other listing agencies, there is no test or standard available for these types of extinguishers, so technically they are illegal and not approved for sale anywhere.

The NFPA 101 Life Safety Code second draft meetings have concluded. The Egress Committee had interesting discussions on turnstiles. There is some very old language still in the code book. At the first draft meeting it was decided that valet trash could only occur in fully sprinklered buildings. This was challenged at the second draft meeting but the committee upheld the requirement. The recently adopted State Fire Prevention Code outlaws valet trash. It still remains an issue on the national level. An interesting topic was presented by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) dealing with the installation of fuel gas detection in buildings based on some past incidents. One occurred in Silver Spring several years ago where there were several fatalities in an apartment building. A more recent incident was at a candy manufacturing facility in Pennsylvania. The Board is not permitted by their regulations to submit proposals but they can submit suggestions. No action was taken other than to form some workgroups. However, the Educational and Daycare Committee did write a second draft proposal to install them in these occupancies. It will have to go through the valid NFPA process to become effective in the 2027 edition. Commissioner Hopkins inquired if the NTSB references NFPA 715, to which CFPE Bush responded in the affirmative. Commissioner Hopkins noted there are some correlating issues with NFPA 72 and NFPA 715. Commissioner Hopkins is on the task group for NFPA 72 dealing with that issue. CFPE Bush noted that NFPA 715 gives details on how to install the equipment but not in what occupancies they are required.

Some questions have arisen with regards to the discharge of chlorinated water, such as for fire pumps and fire hydrants, and whether it can be discharged onto open land. Some jurisdictions attach a device to the hydrant to drop a de-chlorination pill into the water before discharging onto a street. So this may become an issue for future consideration. Commissioner Hopkins commented he had experience with chlorinated water at the NASA site at Goddard where they used tables in the flow stream while conducting hydrant tests. Some states such as California and Colorado require all water to be reclaimed. A nationwide requirement may provide greater challenges and also impose additional costs.

Regarding training for the State Fire Prevention Code and the newly adopted NFPA codes, there has been some discussions with NFPA and the OSFM is awaiting further contact with them. They may provide some in-service training which may be tricky since Maryland went from the 2018 to 2024 edition, but there is a 2021 edition in between. The Delaware State Fire Marshal's Office has expressed an interest to be included as they plan to update their Code to the 2024 edition in October. CFPE Bush says the implementation of the 2024 codes appears to be going smoothly with no outstanding issues.

Another workgroup has been appointed at the direction of the Secretary of Planning to study the streamlining of the permit processes. They want to ensure the time it takes for someone to obtain a permit to start new projects is minimized and consistent throughout the State. They are addressing six pilot projects some of which involve the OSFM and others that do not. One is in Cecil County with the old Bainbridge site being converted into a large industrial complex. Another involves the Salisbury Marketplace. The Pimlico redevelopment is also a popular topic of discussion.

At the International Fire Marshals Association (IFMA) Board of Directors meeting and as part of the National Association of State Fire Marshals' (NASFM) conference in Mississippi, Tom Pitschneider, from the Minnesota area, was appointed to serve as an IFMA Board of Directors member for the next term, filling a vacancy that had occurred. CFPE Bush is secretary to the IFMA Board of Directors.

The OSFM is also represented on the single exit stairway workgroup being handled through the Division of Labor and Industry. They will be required to submit the final report. It is not believed the workgroup has yet convened. Commissioner Hopkins will also serve on that workgroup.

## **CHAIRMAN REPORT**

Chairman Tochterman noted that there are several meeting minutes still awaiting official approval. Motion by Commissioner Johnson, second by Commissioner Hopkins, and unanimously carried to approve the April 17<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes. Motion by Commissioner Johnson, second by Vice Chairman Spriggs, and unanimously carried to approve the June 4<sup>th</sup> special meeting minutes. Motion by Commissioner Johnson, second by Vice Chairman Spriggs, and unanimously carried to approve the June 17<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes. It was noted there was no quorum or official business conducted June 17<sup>th</sup> but minutes were generated for the discussions that took place.

Commission members were distributed a draft copy of the mandated annual fiscal year report to the Governor. Motion by Vice Chairman Spriggs, second by Commissioner Johnson, and unanimously carried to approve the annual report for submission to the Governor.

With the resignation of Commissioner Stevens, the Commission needs to appoint a representative to serve on the Maryland Fire and Explosives Investigators Association. Vice Chairman Spriggs is a member of the association so he volunteered to represent the Commission.

Chairman Tochterman invited the guests to make comments or ask questions. There were no comments or questions.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Commissioner Hopkins noted that at the June 17<sup>th</sup> meeting there was a discussion to do site visits to some high-rise buildings in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties. Chairman Tochterman advised there has been no further action on it. Vice Chairman Spriggs feels this is something that needs follow-up and scheduling. Motion by Commissioner Hopkins to form a task group to address the high-rise buildings and to conduct minimum on-site surveys in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties along with the OSFM. Second by Commissioner Johnson, and unanimously carried. Commissioner Hopkins recalls there was discussion to do outreach to the Governor's Office, State Police, and any other interested parties that may be concerned with the issue.

Commissioner Smothers inquired if there has been any move forward in reaching out to legislators to reinstate the requirement that all non-sprinklered residential high-rises be retrofitted. The proposed inimical hazard amendment was removed from the 2024 State Fire Prevention Code proposal and therefore was not adopted. It was noted that the final High-rise Workgroup's report has been submitted and it has multiple recommendations such as signage, lighting, and other recommendations. The one common denominator is sprinklers save lives. He recommends the Commission try to move forward and make recommendations. Commissioner Hopkins noted that at the special meeting the removal of the inimical hazard was discussed. An inimical hazard declaration would have required a special inspection of each individual high-rise. Having an opportunity to look at some high-rise buildings would provide a start to seeing the true conditions in these buildings. The first interest should be public safety for not only the occupants but the firefighters who respond to fires and other emergencies in these buildings. He agrees with Commissioner Smothers that the obvious answer is to impose sprinkler requirements.

Commissioner Smothers inquired if any progress has been made to reach out to the superintendent to mitigate any issues and move forward. Chairman believes that is why Ms. Kelly has been regularly attending the Commission meetings. She acknowledged that is part of the reason. While both A/SFM Mowbray and Ms. Kelly take information back to the superintendent, Commissioner Smothers still feels a private conversation would be beneficial. To the best of Chairman Tochterman's knowledge the only issue was the high-rise inimical hazard. With that being removed from the recently adopted regulations there should be no other issues. Commissioner Hopkins commented that perhaps the comment he had previously made about being threatened by a representative was what Commissioner Smothers was referring to. With Ms. Kelly and her dedication to fulfilling better communications, that is a good step forward. Ms. Kelly offered to help facilitate and arrange any meetings. Commissioner Hopkins agreed with Commissioner Smothers that there may be a need to reach out to improve communications.

**Next Meeting:**

Thursday October 16, 2025  
10:00 a.m.  
Maryland State Police Headquarters – Museum Building  
1201 Reisterstown Road  
Pikesville, Baltimore County

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
(as summarized from transcript provided by eScribers),



Heidi Ritchie, Secretary