



STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION

MINUTES October 16, 2025

NO QUORUM

NO OFFICIAL BUSINESS CONDUCTED

Members Present: Edward Tochterman, Chairman
Randy E. Sanger II, Commissioner
Ephraim Siff, Commissioner
Eric Smothers, Commissioner

Members Absent: Caroll H. Spriggs, II Vice-Chairman
Mark Hopkins
Jerred Johnson

Vacancy: Washington-Metro Area/Industry

Vacancy: Southern Maryland / Volunteer Fire Company

Guests: Jason M. Mowbray, Acting Maryland State Fire Marshal
Ken Bush, Chief Fire Protection Engineer
Major Robert Iman MDSP
Mischelle van Reusel Department of Labor and Licensing
Catherine Kelly, Maryland State Police
Nicole Jones, Maryland State Police
Terin Hopkins, National Fire Sprinkler Association
Shana Haughton Baltimore City Fire Marshal's Office

The Fire Prevention Commission held a public meeting October 16, 2025, at the MDSP museum located in Baltimore County, MD.

The Chairman called the meeting to order at about 10:20 a.m.

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Office of the State Fire Marshal – Report Summary

Acting Fire Marshal Jason M. Mowbray

Fire Fatalities (Calendar Year 2024)

- **Residential structure fires:** 58 confirmed fatalities
- **Vehicle fires:** 10 confirmed fatalities
- **Other settings:** 5 confirmed fatalities
- **Total:** 73 confirmed fire deaths statewide
- **Multi-fatal incidents:** 5 confirmed cases
- Fatality trends remain consistent with prior years.

Fire Fatalities (Year-to-Date 2025)

- **Residential structure fires:** 33 confirmed fatalities
- **Vehicle fires:** 4 confirmed fatalities
- **Other settings:** 7 confirmed fatalities
- **Total:** 44 confirmed fire deaths
- **Pending cause (Medical Examiner):** 13 cases
- **Multi-fatal incidents:** 11 to date (double or more fatalities)

Note: Some delegated metro agencies have been slow to report fatal fires. Victims transported to D.C. complicate information flow.

- Reminders sent via Metro Fire Chiefs and delegated Assistant State Fire Marshals to ensure **timely reporting**.
- Coordination efforts underway with the **D.C. Medical Examiner's Office** to improve data sharing.

Agency Activities

- **Investigations (YTD):** 736 (Fire, explosive, and other)
 - Trending slightly above last year's total of 953.
- **Inspections (YTD):** 9,733
 - Slightly lower output due to staffing vacancies.
- **Engineering:** Nearly **1,200 plan reviews** completed (ahead of 2024 pace).
- **Public Education & CRR Outreach:** 98 events prior to October, consistent with prior years.

Ongoing Initiatives & Legislative Updates

- **Lithium-Ion Battery Work Group (HB 468):** Chief Fire Protection Engineer **Ken Bush** represents OSFM; final report due end of 2025.
- **Residential High-Rise Sprinkler Study (HB 823):** Report submitted; public and legislative follow-up ongoing.
- **CSST Law Changes (Effective June 1):**
 - Prohibits sales or installation of **non-arc-resistant tubing**.
 - Outreach ongoing with the Department of Labor; represented by Deputy Chief **Caryn McMahon** and Engineer **Derek Murgatroyd**.

Communications & Public Outreach Expansion

- With **Public Information Officer Ms. Ngan Ho**, OSFM is expanding **video production** and digital outreach:
 - **131st Anniversary Event Video** – Highlighted agency history, achievements, and celebration.
 - **Fire Safety Video** – Demonstrated home fire risks and **sprinkler effectiveness** with staff and Maryland State Firefighters Association.
 - Builds on the **Fireworks Safety video** from July.
- OSFM will continue leveraging video and social media to increase **community awareness and education**.

Significant Incidents

1. **Parsonsburg (August):** Fatal fire involving an 11-year-old boy; smoke alarms present; investigation ongoing.
2. **Garrett County:** Intentional house fire; suspect apprehended.
3. **Salisbury (September):** Fatal fire claiming elderly couple (ages 85 & 79); no smoke alarms present.
4. **Corriganville, Allegany County (September):** Fatal fire, one deceased female (69); no smoke alarms; investigation ongoing.
5. **Hagerstown (October):** Arson in occupied storage unit; victim sustained minor injuries; suspect arrested.

Personnel Updates

- **Departure:** *Ms. Charnyce Leslie*, Executive Assistant (resigned end of September).
- **New Hire:** *Ms. Ngan Ho*, Public Information Officer (effective October 1), with expertise in journalism, media, and social outreach.

Canine Program

- **Accelerant Detection K-9 Team:** Senior Deputy **Adam Rounds** and **K-9 Quinn** (graduating November 7).
- **Statewide total:** Four ATF-certified accelerant canines; first in **Western Maryland** in 20 years.

Community Risk Reduction (CRR)

- Since August 1: **25 events**, 160 outreach hours, ~1,700 citizen interactions.
- **Corriganville Response:** 17 homes visited; 47 smoke alarms and 12 CO detectors installed; promoted **Get Alarm Maryland** portal.

Fleet & Facilities Updates

- Focus on **investigator health:** separating fire debris and PPE from occupied vehicle compartments.
- **New Vehicles:** 7 Ford F-250s, 2 Ford F-350s, 1 Chevrolet Silverado 1500; upfitting underway.
- **Headquarters Refresh:** Building C undergoing painting, carpet replacement, lighting upgrades, and bathroom renovations; expected completion before December.

Data Systems & Reporting

MFIRS Transition to NERIS:

- MFIRS to be retired at end of 2025; NERIS onboarding underway.
- **50% of Maryland fire departments** have begun onboarding.
- Departments should contact **Deputy Chief Walters** to complete the transition.

New OSFM Records Management System:

- Cloud-based portal integrating **plan review, inspections, and licensing.**
- Engineering module reviewed; licensing module review to begin.
- **Beta launch anticipated Q1 2026.**

Mid Atlantic Life Safety Conference Update Deputy Chief Joe Walters

- **Date & Location:** Next Friday, DoubleTree Hotel, Annapolis.
- Sponsorships strong; conference costs fully covered.
- **Low registration:** ~65 attendees (lowest on record).
- Registration fee maintained at **\$75** to encourage attendance.
- Budget limitations and state/county training restrictions likely caused low participation.

- Conference will proceed as planned and promises to be **successful and engaging**. All members are encouraged to attend or visit.

Annual Fee Schedule Discussion

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray presented the **annual fee assessment** to the Commission. A copy of the document was provided for review.

Key points discussed:

1. **Purpose of Fees:**
 - State law requires that fees cover the **cost of performing the duties** of the Office.
 - The assessment lays out background information, supporting documentation, the **current fee schedule**, and employment cost breakdowns.
2. **Methodology:**
 - Employee statistics are currently **approximated** to estimate costs for inspections, plan reviews, and other services.
 - The new **Records Management System** (to be deployed next year) will allow more precise tracking of employee time per activity, improving future fee assessments.
3. **Comparisons with Other Agencies:**
 - Direct comparisons with peer agencies and local jurisdictions are challenging.
 - Different jurisdictions may use varying methodologies (e.g., flat fees vs. square footage-based fees), making apples-to-apples comparisons difficult.
 - Focus remains on **internal cost assessment**, man-hours, and resources required to perform each service.
4. **Next Steps:**
 - Given limited Commission attendance, **Chairman Tochterman** suggested distributing the fee schedule to all Commissioners before the **December meeting**.
 - Commissioners will have an opportunity to **review, discuss, and vote** on the proposed fees at that meeting.

Personnel Update: Retirement of Ms. Heidi Ritchie

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray acknowledged the upcoming retirement of **Ms. Heidi Ritchie** at the end of the month, marking the conclusion of over **four decades of state service**.

Key points:

1. **Career Overview:**
 - Ms. Ritchie has been a **steadfast professional**, contributing extensive knowledge and institutional expertise.
 - Her service in the **Western Region** and her commitment of over 20 years to the Commission have been significant assets to the organization.
2. **Retirement Wishes:**
 - Ms. Ritchie requested **no formal retirement ceremony**.

- She prefers a **humble acknowledgment** and welcomes emails, calls, or well wishes from colleagues and Commission members.
3. **Transition of Responsibilities:**
- To ensure continuity, responsibilities for staff support to the Commission have been **temporarily assigned** to the **Logistics and Technology Section** within the Special Programs Unit.
 - **Deputy Carl D. Witmer** will assume this role, having collaborated closely with Ms. Ritchie over the past month to document procedures, nuances, and develop a **desk manual / SOP** for Commission support.
 - This assignment is **temporary** until a permanent arrangement is established. Deputy Witmer will be present at all upcoming Commission meetings to provide support.

Engineering Staff Report - Chief Fire Protection Engineer Ken Bush

Chief Fire Protection Engineer Bush provided an update on several ongoing projects and code-related initiatives:

1. **Lithium-Ion Battery Safety Commission**
 - Bush serves on the legislatively appointed commission studying **lithium-ion battery safety in Maryland**.
 - The commission's report is due by the **end of this calendar year**, with a meeting scheduled for next Thursday to consolidate findings.
 - Challenges include the **wide scope** of battery applications—from consumer devices to large-scale energy storage—and the **rapidly evolving technology**.
 - Recommendations may include interim guidance, recognizing that continued study will be necessary.
2. **Permit Issuance Commission / Pilot Projects**
 - A separate commission is reviewing permit issuance across the state. Six pilot projects were selected, covering size, complexity, and geographic diversity.
 - The Office of the State Fire Marshal is directly involved in **two projects**:
 - **Bainbridge area industrial development** (Cecil County)
 - **Pimlico Racetrack redevelopment** (Maryland Stadium Authority)
 - Engineer Harry Bradley is assigned to both projects and has provided reviews and updates to the commission.
 - An additional commission on **single stairs through DLLR** is pending; the office remains ready to participate.
3. **Intern Project – Permit Process Analysis**
 - Intern **Clayton Dennies** conducted a study on permit processing across multiple jurisdictions in Maryland.
 - Key findings:
 - Diverse submission methods exist (electronic vs. hard copy).
 - The next step is to **integrate this diversity into the new reporting management system** to streamline the process, educate the public, and ensure timely project progression.

4. **State Fire Prevention Code Updates – NFPA 2024 Editions**
 - NFPA-1 and NFPA-101 updates have been referenced in the updated State Fire Prevention Code.
 - **Training sessions** with NFPA are being planned:
 - One-day basic overview of code updates.
 - Two-day in-depth training for personnel unfamiliar with previous editions.
 - Invitations will be extended to **all code enforcement personnel statewide**.
5. **2027 Model Codes Updates**
 - NFPA-1 Fire Code is in a **second draft ballot session**.
 - Notable considerations:
 - **Firefighter air replenishment systems** in high-rise buildings (potential reinsertion into code as an annex note).
 - **Class L portable fire extinguishers** for lithium-ion battery fires remain unlisted and unapproved for public use.
 - Updates to **data center protection codes** (NFPA 75 and 76) in public comment period.
 - Draft **NFPA 420** covering cannabis operations for fire safety and extraction processes is open for public comment.
 - New standards for **remote inspections** and related testing are under review.
 - **Rechargeable batteries in fixed appliances** (e.g., cooking appliances) are being addressed in proposed UL 858 standard.

CFPE Bush emphasized that these projects and code updates are ongoing and evolving. The engineering staff continues to provide guidance, review pilot projects, and support statewide safety initiatives.

Chairman’s Report – Chairman Tochterman

Chairman Tochterman provided updates and remarks on several items:

1. **Commission Expenses**
 - For the first quarter of the fiscal year, **Commission expenses totaled \$1,390.55**.
2. **August 21st Meeting Minutes**
 - No action can be taken on the minutes from the August 21st meeting at this time.
3. **Inspection of High-Rise Buildings**
 - The topic of Commissioners inspecting existing high-rise buildings was discussed in August.
 - According to **Susan Baron**, there is no legal provision authorizing the Commission to conduct such inspections.
 - The senior attorney for the State Police, **Mr. Pickus**, agrees with this interpretation.
 - Therefore, this item remains **on hold** for the time being.

4. **Montgomery County Master Plan**
 - Chairman Tochterman received an electronic copy of **Montgomery County's new master plan**, which prioritizes sprinklering existing high-rise residential buildings as a primary fire prevention measure.
5. **Commission Leadership Transition**
 - Reflecting on 2019, when **Danny Davis** stepped down due to illness, Chairman Tochterman outlined a similar **transition plan**.
 - Commissioners should be prepared to **vote on a new chairman at the December meeting**.
 - The outgoing chairman will remain for **six months** to ensure a smooth transition.
6. **Recognition of Guests**
 - **Ms. Ngan Ho**, the new Public Information Officer (PIO), introduced herself, expressing enthusiasm to join the Fire Marshal's Office and a commitment to excellence.
 - Ms. Ho was warmly welcomed, with lighthearted laughter from attendees.
7. **Status Updates from Staff**
 - Chairman Tochterman invited **Ms. Vanreusel** to provide updates on several ongoing items.

Deputy Director Mischelle van Reusel Department of Labor and Licensing

Ms. Mischelle van Reusel, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Licensing, provided updates on ongoing projects and collaboration with the Fire Prevention Commission and Fire Marshal's Office:

1. **Collaboration with Fire Marshal's Office**
 - Ms. Mischelle van Reusel acknowledged the strong working relationship with **Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray** and **Chief Fire Protection Engineer Ken Bush**.
 - A recent collaboration involved a **fatality during sprinkler installation** in a residential elevator shaft. The investigation required coordination between the Fire Marshal's Office, building codes, OSHA/MOSH, and elevator units.
 - This collaboration allowed staff to identify risks, clarify original fire plan designs versus field installation, and develop guidance for county inspectors and homeowners.
2. **Building Codes Unit Staffing**
 - The Building Codes Director resigned to join the **International Codes Council**, reducing the three-person unit to two: a structural engineer and an administrative staff member.
 - Despite the reduced staffing, the team continues managing building, mechanical, plumbing, accessibility, and energy efficiency codes, alongside administrative support for modular building programs.
3. **Ongoing Studies**
 - **CSST (Corrugated Stainless-Steel Tubing) Fuel Gas Piping Study:**
 - Investigating fuel gas piping installations in residential and commercial settings, with emphasis on past fire fatalities.

- Engaged with manufacturers, Plumbing Board, home inspectors, and local jurisdictions to review installation and safety requirements.
 - Coordinating with the Fire Prevention Commission; interim report due **December 1, 2025**, with full report due **September 2026**.
- **Single Staircase Study:**
 - Work has not yet begun due to resource limitations.
 - Interim planning includes volunteer collection, file preparation, and anticipated meetings in **late November/early December**. Final report due **December 1, 2026**.
- 4. **Interim Report and Coordination**
 - The CSST study is prioritized due to its upcoming interim report deadline.
 - Efforts include **active dialogue with the Fire Prevention Commission** to integrate insights and guidance, ensuring an informed legislative submission.
- 5. **Building Code Adoption and Revision**
 - Ms. Mischelle van Reusel emphasized the need to integrate fire-related requirements in upcoming **building code revisions**.
 - Proposed adoption documents are expected **toward the end of November**, with various amendments under review.
- 6. **Resource Challenges and Ongoing Efforts**
 - Despite staffing and resource constraints, the Division is committed to **timely completion of studies, code adoption, and regulatory coordination**.
 - Collaboration with Fire Marshal staff has been critical to maintaining progress.

Remarks – MDSP Major Iman

Major Iman addressed the Commission with brief remarks:

1. **Acknowledgment and Appreciation**
 - Major Iman expressed sincere thanks to the Commission for their **volunteer service**.
 - Highlighted his appreciation both as **Chief of Staff of the Maryland State Police** and as a **citizen of the State of Maryland**.
 - Praised the **State Fire Marshal’s Office** for the professionalism and dedication of its staff, noting their significant contributions in responding to major incidents, fatalities, and arrests.
 - Recognized the leadership of Major Brady, Acting Fire Marshal Jason Mowbray, and their staff for developing a highly professional organization.
2. **Commitment to Communication and Collaboration**
 - Emphasized the importance of **fostering communication** between the Maryland State Police, the State Fire Marshal’s Office, and the Commission.
 - Assured the Commission that during the **superintendent’s transition and retirement (effective November 1)**, efforts would be made to **strengthen working relationships**.
 - Highlighted the engagement of Catherine and her deputy Nicole in maintaining collaborative efforts between the agencies and the Commission.

3. Closing

- Reiterated appreciation for the Commission's service and professionalism.
- Opened the floor to any questions, though none were posed.

Remarks – Lieutenant Shana Haughton Baltimore City Fire Marshal's Office

Lieutenant Shana Haughton introduced herself and provided brief remarks:

1. Introduction

- Lt. Haughton is **sitting in for the new Baltimore City Fire Marshal, Robert Hamlin**.
- She serves as the **Public Education CRR (Community Risk Reduction) Officer** for Baltimore City.
- Noted that this was her **first Commission meeting** and expressed appreciation for being included.
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2. Observations and Engagement

- Took extensive notes for the **executive committee** to identify areas where Baltimore City programs could align with state initiatives.
- Acknowledged that Baltimore City has been **an outlier** in certain areas and expressed interest in increasing **engagement at the state level**.
- Emphasized the importance of collaboration given the **many city programs that correlate with state fire prevention efforts**.

3. Closing

- Thanked the Commission for the opportunity to participate.

Next Meeting:

December 18, 2025

10:00 a.m.

MDSP Museum

1201 Reisterstown Road

Pikesville MD 21208

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at about 11:28 am.

Respectfully submitted,

(as summarized from transcript provided by eScribers),

Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal

Carl D. Witmer