



**STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION**

**MINUTES February 25, 2026**

**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026

**Time:** 10:01 a.m. – 10:59 a.m.

**Location:** Oracle Building  
7031 Columbia Gateway Drive  
Columbia, Maryland 21046

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**Members Present:** Carroll Spriggs II, Chairman  
Mark Hopkins, Vice Chairman  
Randy E. Sanger II (Google Meet)  
Jerred Johnson  
Eric Smothers  
Edward Tochterman

**Absent Members:** Jamie McAllister  
Ephraim R. Siff

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**Guests:** Jason M. Mowbray, Acting State Fire Marshal  
Mary Beth Collins, Assistant Attorney General  
Ken Bush, Chief Fire Protection Engineer  
Major Delaine Brady Maryland State Police  
Chris Koch FPE Western Region

**Court Reporter:** Chris Hofer, Notary Public

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## **Call to Order**

Chairman Carroll Spriggs II called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

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## **Approval of Previous Minutes**

Chairman Spriggs provided commissioners with time to review the previous meeting minutes. A motion to approve the minutes was to be entertained following review.

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## **State Fire Marshal Report**

Acting State Fire Marshal Jason Mowbray presented the agency report and provided updates on fire fatality statistics, agency activities, and current legislative matters.

## **Superintendent Representation**

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray introduced Major Delaine Brady, representing the Superintendent's Office of the State Police.

Superintendent Jackson sent his regrets for not attending due to involvement in matters related to a tragic trooper shooting incident in Baltimore City.

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## **Fire Fatality Statistics**

### **Calendar Year 2025**

- Residential fire fatalities: 52
- Vehicle fire fatalities: 7
- Other fire-related fatalities: 9

### **Total Confirmed Fire Deaths: 68**

- One additional death is pending cause determination by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.
- There were 11 multi-fatality fires during 2025.

## **Calendar Year 2026 (to date)**

- Residential fire fatalities: 6
- Vehicle fire fatalities: 0
- Other fire-related fatalities: 1

### **Total Confirmed Fire Deaths:**

- Seven confirmed
- Five additional deaths remain pending cause determination.
- One double-fatality fire has occurred so far this year.

### **Trend Data**

- 2023: 85 fire deaths
- 2024: 73 fire deaths
- 2025: 68 fire deaths

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray noted that the trend is improving compared to 2023 and credited agency personnel and partner agencies for their community risk reduction and prevention efforts. Baltimore City was specifically recognized for progress in reducing fire fatalities.

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## **Agency Activity Report**

### **Investigations**

- 2026 (to date): 101 investigations
  - Includes fire, explosive, and related incidents.
- 2025 Total: 885 investigations
  - Slight decrease from the previous year.

### **Inspections**

- 2025 Total: Just under 11,500 inspections.

### **Plans Review**

- 2025 Total: Just under 1,500 plans review.
- 2026 (to date): 81 reviews completed.

## **Community Risk Reduction (CRR) / Public Education**

- 2025: 142 outreach events.
- 2026 (to date): 10 events conducted.

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray noted that inspection numbers were impacted by staffing vacancies, including both permanent and contractual positions.

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## **Legislative Update**

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray provided an overview of legislation being monitored during the current legislative session.

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## **House Bill 149 / Senate Bill 513**

### **Public Safety – Fire Safety Reform**

This legislation addresses several fire safety matters including:

- Requirements for training and certification tracking of delegated inspection agencies.
- Sprinkler retrofitting requirements for high-rise buildings undergoing significant renovation (40% or greater).
- Establishing licensing requirements for fire alarm system companies and technicians.

Currently, Maryland does not regulate or license fire alarm contractors, and this bill would address that gap.

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## **House Bill 345 / Senate Bill 341**

### **Affordable Solar Act**

This legislation would allow residential use of plug-in solar devices (approximately 1,200 watts) used for supplemental or backup power.

Concerns include:

- Lack of interlock mechanisms to prevent back feeding electricity into the grid.
- Potential hazards to:
  - First responders
  - Utility workers

- Citizens working on electrical systems.

The bill requires devices to be UL listed, though it is believed no such devices currently meet that requirement.

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## **House Bill 833 / Senate Bill 553**

### **Lithium-Ion Battery Safety Commission**

This legislation would reestablish a previously formed workgroup studying lithium-ion battery safety.

- The previous workgroup produced a 70-page report in 2025.
  - The group determined additional research and evaluation is necessary.
  - The State Fire Marshal's Office would again participate and help staff the commission.
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## **House Bill 848 / Senate Bill 621**

### **State Fire Prevention Code – Valet Trash in Apartments**

This bill addresses the valet trash service provisions related to apartment buildings.

Previously:

- A Commission workgroup reviewed NFPA 1 and NFPA 101 (2024 editions).
- The workgroup recommended not permitting valet trash services in apartment buildings.
- The Commission adopted the recommendation following public hearings.

This proposed legislation would mandate inclusion of those provisions in state law.

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## **Senate Bill 242 / House Bill 420**

### **Licensing Reciprocity Act (Military Members and Spouses)**

This bill would require Maryland agencies to recognize professional licenses from other states for:

- Active-duty military personnel
- Military spouses assigned to Maryland.

Potential impacts on the State Fire Marshal's Office include:

- Non-governmental electrical inspector licenses
- Explosive licensing

Concerns include:

- Differences in code versions used by other states.
- Lack of background check requirements for explosives licensing in some states.

The agency has requested approval to oppose the legislation.

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## **Senate Bill 624**

### **Short-Term Rental Fire Safety Requirements**

This legislation addresses fire safety in short-term rental properties such as Airbnb and Vrbo.

The bill was prompted by a fatal fire involving Montgomery County residents while vacationing.

Proposed requirements include:

- Smoke alarm installation
- Audible alarms throughout the structure
- Posting emergency information
- Fire extinguishers

The current draft does not require carbon monoxide detectors, and the agency is working with sponsors to include that requirement.

The bill would also require:

- Annual inspections by counties, or
  - Inspections by third-party contractors meeting criteria established by the State Fire Marshal's Office.
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## **Legislative Workgroups**

### **CSST Study**

#### **House Bill 222 / Senate Bill 175**

- Study related to corrugated stainless-steel tubing (CSST).
- Final report due September 2026.

### **Single Staircase Building Code Study**

#### **Senate Bill 436**

- Study examining building code requirements for single staircase buildings.

- Led by the Maryland Department of Labor.
- Final report due December 1, 2026.

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray reported that the Department of Labor is in the process of staffing a building codes director and preparing to initiate the study.

## **Significant Fire and Incident Updates**

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray highlighted several significant incidents that occurred across Maryland since the Commission's previous meeting.

### **Arson Investigations**

Multiple arson arrests have occurred throughout Maryland in recent months. Details are included in the written report provided to the Commission.

### **Smoke Alarm and Sprinkler Saves**

Two notable life safety incidents were highlighted:

- Harford County (December 2025):  
A 71-year-old female survived a residential fire due to a working smoke alarm.
- Cecil County – Elkton (January 26, 2026):  
A smoke alarm and sprinkler system save prevented further injury or damage.

### **Fatal Fires and Major Incidents**

#### **Wicomico County – Parsonsburg (February 1, 2026)**

A fatal residential fire occurred resulting in a death.

#### **Baltimore County – Towson (January 19, 2026)**

A high-rise fire occurred in a 13-story mixed-use residential and office building.

Key details:

- The building had a sprinkler system installed, but the system was offline due to a fire pump issue.
- The building was operating under a fire watch at the time of the incident.
- Investigators determined the fire originated in a storage room containing recyclable materials.
- The State Fire Marshal's Office assisted the Baltimore County Police Department Fire Investigations Unit.
- The investigation remains ongoing in coordination with the Baltimore County Fire Marshal's Office and the Baltimore County Department of Permits and Inspections.

### **Kent County – House Explosion (February 14, 2026)**

A house explosion resulted in the death of a 68-year-old homeowner.

### **St. Mary's County – Mechanicsville (February 20, 2026)**

A fatal residential fire resulted in the death of a 69-year-old female, who was located in a bedroom.

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## **Personnel Updates**

### **Acting Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal**

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray announced the appointment of:

#### **Deputy Chief Dexter Hodges**

- Serving as Acting Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal
- Previously served as Commander of the Northeast Region
- Currently overseeing Field Operations

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray noted that Chief Deputy Chief Hodges has transitioned into the role successfully and has already made significant progress in the position.

### **Acting Northeast Regional Commander**

Master Deputy State Fire Marshal Howard Ewing was appointed as:

- Acting Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal
- Acting Northeast Regional Commander

Acting Deputy Chief Ewing is a 25-year veteran of the agency, a former K-9 handler, and an experienced investigator who has served in the Northeast Region throughout his career.

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## **Retirement**

Joe Goodrich, Fire Safety Inspector for the Western Region, retired in December.

Service Highlights:

- 35 years of service to the State of Maryland
- 8 years with the Office of the State Fire Marshal
- Previously served as a Correctional Officer with the Maryland Division of Corrections

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray noted that Mr. Goodrich was deeply committed to fire prevention, public education, and community risk reduction and often used inspection opportunities to educate occupants on fire safety.

Mr. Goodrich plans to spend time with his new grandchild and pursue his interest in photography.

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## **Awards and Recognitions**

Two investigators were recognized for their work with federal partners.

### **ATF Task Force Officer of the Year**

- Senior Deputy Pete Raia – Northeast Region
- Senior Deputy Melissa Decker – Southern Region

### **Hall of Fame Recognition**

Chief Fire Protection Engineer Ken Bush was inducted into the Talbot County Hall of Fame in recognition of his service.

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## **In Memoriam**

The Commission recognized the passing of:

Retired Deputy State Fire Marshal Dickie Powell

- Passed away November 23, 2025
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## **Community Outreach and Public Education**

Mr. Mowbray emphasized the agency's continued focus on community outreach initiatives.

### **Holiday Outreach Programs**

During December, sworn staff participated in programs such as:

- Shop With a Cop
- Other community engagement initiatives supporting youth and families.

These programs aim to build positive relationships between public safety officials and local communities.

## **Get Alarmed Maryland Program**

Through the Get Alarmed Maryland website portal, the agency coordinated distribution of:

- 355 smoke alarms
- 65 carbon monoxide detectors

These were distributed to residents across Maryland.

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## **Upcoming Training and Conferences**

### **Public Fire and Life Safety Educator Seminar**

- Date: March 21, 2026
- Location: Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI), College Park
- Cost: Free registration

### **Mid-Atlantic Life Safety Conference**

- Date: September 15, 2026
  - Location: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Annapolis, Maryland
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## **Fire Incident Data System Transition**

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray reported on the transition from the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) to the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS).

The transition occurred recently and overall implementation has been largely successful, though several issues remain.

### **Data Submission Issues**

One significant challenge involves the Montgomery County Fire Department, which currently cannot upload incident data directly to the NERIS system due to limitations in their internal records management system.

Possible solutions being considered include:

- Manual data entry into NERIS
- Alternative data upload methods.

## **Data Access Limitations**

The State Fire Marshal's Office currently cannot directly query detailed fire data through the NERIS portal.

Examples of currently unavailable queries include:

- Number of residential fires in Maryland
- Causes of fires
- Lithium-ion battery fire statistics

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray has contacted:

- U.S. Fire Administration
- UL Solutions (system developer)

Both organizations have acknowledged the issue and are working toward improved data access tools.

## **Interim Data Analysis**

Currently, the agency must:

1. Download data from the system
2. Analyze it manually through spreadsheets

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## **2025 Fire Data Submission Issues**

Some fire departments were unable to submit their 2025 fire data before the NFIRS system was shut down.

This data is required for 508 funding eligibility.

The State Fire Marshal's Office is working directly with affected departments to:

- Extract data from their local systems
- Submit the data directly to the agency for validation.

Ten departments recently submitted their missing data, reducing the number of outstanding departments.

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## **Strategic Planning and Leadership Development**

The agency continues to focus on leadership development and strategic planning.

In December, senior leadership held a strategic planning workshop at the JFK Center in Perryville.

The workshop focused on:

- Reviewing organizational progress
- Evaluating goals and priorities
- Updating the agency's strategic plan

An updated one-year strategic plan will be published in 2026 outlining:

- Accomplishments
- Remaining challenges
- Strategic priorities for the coming year.

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## **Annual Agency Report**

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray announced that the agency will reintroduce its annual report, which had not been produced for approximately 12–14 years.

The report will include:

- Agency statistics
- Operational highlights
- Photographs and program information

The report will be produced in both print and electronic formats and is expected to be completed before the annual convention in June 2026.

The project is being led by the agency's Public Information Officer.

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## **Commission Questions**

### **Data Reporting and Funding**

Chairman Carroll Spriggs II asked whether Montgomery County's reporting issues could affect 508 funding eligibility.

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray confirmed that it could, since state law requires incident reporting through the designated national system.

However, the department is aware of the issue and is working toward a resolution.

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### **Staffing Vacancies**

Chairman Spriggs asked about progress filling agency vacancies.

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray reported recent hiring progress:

#### **New Hires**

- Administrative Specialist III – Southern Region Office (Prince Frederick)
- Contractual Fire Safety Inspector – Southern Region Office

The administrative position had been vacant for over one year following a retirement.

#### **Deputy Vacancies**

Two Deputy State Fire Marshal positions remain vacant.

The agency is preparing to advertise the positions and will work with the Maryland State Police recruitment unit to streamline the hiring process.

Changes to recruitment include:

- Integration with the Maryland State Police testing process
- Transition from in-person orientation sessions to online orientation materials

The agency expects to advertise the positions during Spring 2026.

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## **Discussion on Fire Alarm Contractor Licensing**

Vice Chairman Mark Hopkins asked whether new staff positions would be created to manage fire alarm contractor licensing under the proposed legislation.

Acting Fire Marshal Mowbray confirmed that the agency submitted a fiscal impact statement indicating that additional staffing would be required to administer the program if the legislation is enacted.

### **Legislative Discussion Continued:**

#### **Affordable Solar Act – House Bill 345**

Discussion centered on safety concerns related to solar devices and regulatory oversight.

Key points:

- Devices must be UL-listed, though concerns remain about enforcement.
  - Unlisted devices are reportedly being sold online through retailers such as Amazon.
  - Regulators noted difficulty controlling equipment purchased from out-of-state sources.
  - Enforcement is further complicated because fire officials are prohibited from entering single-family dwellings under the State Fire Prevention Code.
  - Concerns were raised about back-feed electrical hazards that could endanger first responders during emergencies.
  - One manufacturer indicated their device only functions when grid power is present, potentially reducing back-feed risk, though this may not apply to all products.
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#### **House Bill 848 – Valet Trash in Multi-Family Buildings**

The Commission discussed its position regarding HB 848.

Key points:

- The Commission indicated strong opposition to the bill.
- A proposal to allow valet trash only in fully sprinklered buildings was discussed but not accepted by stakeholders.
- Fire safety concerns include:
  - Adding combustible materials in corridors and egress routes
  - Obstruction of exit pathways
  - EMS and firefighter access limitations
  - Increased smoke and fuel loads in emergencies
- Concerns were also raised about scenarios where trash service is delayed or skipped, potentially causing dangerous accumulation.

A letter of opposition is being prepared, pending approval through the appropriate executive branch process.

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### **Short-Term Rental Bill – Senate Bill 624 / House Bill 1221**

Discussion addressed fire safety requirements for short-term rental properties.

Key points:

- Proposed legislation requires:
    - Carbon monoxide detectors
    - Updated fire alarms
  - Residential sprinkler requirements were not included, primarily due to cost and the number of existing short-term rentals.
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### **Senate Bill 436 – Single Exit Staircases**

Discussion addressed state and local policy considerations.

Key points:

- A study group was created to examine single-stair building designs.
  - Baltimore City has already adopted a local ordinance permitting single stairwells in some applications.
  - State findings could potentially influence or override local ordinances.
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### **Chief Fire Protection Engineer Report**

Report presented by Ken Bush.

#### **Staffing**

- Engineering staff continues statewide workload despite two vacant contractual positions.
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## **Lithium-Ion Battery Safety**

Major ongoing safety issue discussed.

Key updates:

- Study commission membership and scope are being expanded.
- The Port of Baltimore is a focus area due to increased shipping of vehicles and battery-powered equipment.
- The International Standards Organization (ISO) has introduced a definition for Class L fires, referring to lithium-ion battery fires.

Important clarification:

- Class L designation does not yet correspond to a listed fire extinguisher type.
- Current industry focus is on containment rather than extinguishment, as lithium-ion thermal runaway events are difficult to extinguish.

Possible containment methods under development:

- Battery containment pouches
- Protective enclosures
- Specialized containers

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## **Life Safety Code – Healthcare Occupancies**

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Healthcare Technical Committee is reviewing a Tentative Interim Amendment (TIA) affecting the 2012 edition of the Life Safety Code.

The amendment would permit certain security devices in means of egress.

Concerns identified:

- No standards for slip resistance
- No height restrictions
- Accessibility concerns for wheelchairs, gurneys, or medical equipment
- No limitations on how many exits could contain the devices
- The rule would only apply to healthcare occupancies, despite similar devices being used in other facilities such as courthouses and assembly spaces

Public comments on the amendment were open until March 5.

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## **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

A motion was made by Commissioner Smothers and seconded by Vice Chair Hopkins to approve the minutes from the previous meeting held on December 15, 2025. Motion carried.

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## **Guest Comments**

Guest attendees were acknowledged.

- Major Brady thanked the Commission for the invitation and noted upcoming work related to staffing a new hire.
  - Chris Koch expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate and commended the public safety work represented at the meeting.
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## **Roundtable Comments**

Commissioners were invited to provide additional comments.

Highlights:

- Continued monitoring of Class L lithium-ion fire classifications
  - Recognition of Commissioner Smothers for representing the Commission at the MSFA executive meeting
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## **Upcoming Meetings**

- Next meeting scheduled for April. A final date and location will be announced.
  - Future meetings may be scheduled at locations across the Eastern Shore, including a potential June meeting near Ocean City.
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## **Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Smothers.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

**Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal  
Carl D. Witmer**

(as summarized from transcript provided by eScribers),

APPROVED