



**2017  
WHITE  
PAPER**

**UNDERSTANDING  
THE ROLES,  
CHALLENGES &  
NEEDS OF OUR  
NATION'S FIRE  
AND EMERGENCY  
SERVICES**

## Introduction

On December 8, 2016, member organizations of the Congressional Fire Services Institute's (CFSI) National Advisory Committee (NAC) approved a resolution to develop a white paper that describes the current state of the American Fire Service in protecting the public, their property and the nation's critical infrastructure from fire and other emergencies. It is designed to help government officials better understand what is expected of firefighters nationwide who respond to over 35 million emergency calls annually – and how specific federal programs enhance the readiness and response capabilities of these brave men and women.

The information contained in the White Paper Appendix addresses important aspects of the federal government's role in supporting the mission of our nation's fire and emergency services. The Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 is the foundation on which the United States Fire Administration (USFA) was established. The legislation also contains the authorizing language for the Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant programs. The Fourth Fire Service Needs Assessment, produced by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), describes the current needs of the fire service in terms of equipment, staffing and training. And the NAC resolutions reflect the consensus positions taken by NAC members throughout the years regarding key areas of federal support for our nation's fire and emergency departments.

If you have questions about the information contained in this white paper, please contact the Congressional Fire Services Institute at 202-371-1277.

Thank you.

## WHITE PAPER SIGNATORIES

American Fire Sprinkler Association  
Center for Campus Fire Safety  
Center for Public Safety Excellence  
Common Voices  
Congressional Fire Services Institute  
Cumberland Valley Volunteer Firemen's Association  
Federation of Fire Chaplains  
Fire Apparatus Manufacturers' Association  
Fire and Emergency Manufacturers and Services Association  
Fire Chief/FireRescue1  
Fire Department Safety Officers' Association  
Firehouse Magazine  
Institution of Fire Engineers - United States of America Branch  
Insurance Services Office  
International Association of Arson Investigators  
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International Association of Fire Chiefs  
International Association of Wildland Fire  
International Code Council  
International Fire Buff Associates, Inc.  
International Fire Marshals Association  
International Fire Service Training Association  
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National Fire Protection Association  
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UL  
USA Sprinkler Fitters Association

## UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES, CHALLENGES & NEEDS OF OUR NATION'S FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

On October 29, 1974, President Gerald R. Ford signed the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act (FFPCA) affirming a federal responsibility to help address the nation's fire problem. In his statement, President Ford said:

“While fire prevention and control is and will remain a State and local responsibility, I believe the Federal Government can make a useful difference.”

Forty-three years have elapsed since President Ford issued that proclamation. In the wake of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the growing scourge of wildfires, and the ever increasing demand for Fire Service-Based Emergency Medical Services, it is past time to remind our federal leaders why the fire service needs the support of the federal government to protect our communities and the critical infrastructure of the nation.



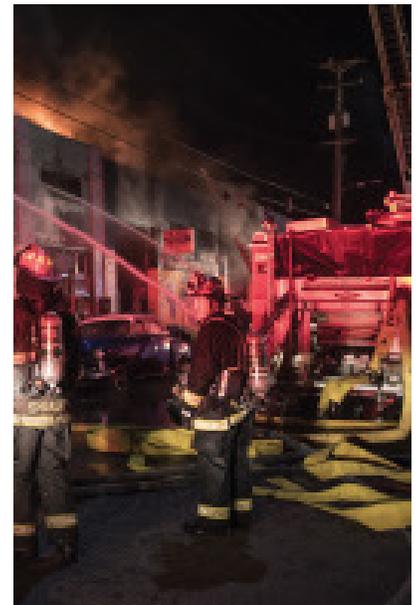
### Background

The American fire service is constantly evolving in order to keep pace with the changes and challenges taking place in our society. At the start of the millennium, fire departments responded to 20.5 million emergencies; in 2015, the number increased to 33.6 million. The types of responses include structure fires, medical emergencies, hazardous materials incidents, vehicle accidents, natural disasters, and myriad other events. When emergency 9-1-1 calls are placed to fire departments, these callers are expecting fire departments to arrive at the scene within minutes with the proper equipment, training and staffing to handle their situation...irrespective of the type of the emergency they have.



Sadly, it often takes a major tragedy to capture national attention about the devastating consequences of fire, such as the tragic fires that occurred in Oakland, California and Gatlinburg, Tennessee in 2016. There have been many other such tragedies throughout the years. The stark reality is that more than 3,000 people die in fires each year in our nation. In 2015, fire caused 15,700 civilian injuries and over \$14 billion in direct property damage. Fires most often occur in places where the victims are most vulnerable – in structures that lack built-in protection systems such as smoke alarms, smoke control, adequate egress, and fire sprinklers.

When fires occur in large structures that involve mass casualties, such as the Oakland warehouse fire, it raises many questions, especially about modern codes, code enforcement, occupancy inspections and whether the structure should have been closed or condemned. Also in question is whether the structure was being used within the code requirements of that particular occupancy type. Nationally, the code development process is excellent and provides up-to-date codes for adoption. Among the primary issues are the variations in the adoption of these current codes by states and local entities that could weaken or dilute the requirements in the model consensus codes. Without the adoption of modern codes and regular enforcement, the public and firefighters are simply at greater risk.



In Gatlinburg, TN, 14 people died and 2,500 structures were damaged or destroyed when a wildfire tore through the mountain town. Wildfires pose serious threats to communities across the nation, like Gatlinburg, that occupy land in the wildland-urban interface. Fighting these fires requires special training, tools and equipment. In addition, local firefighters often face a number of challenges that make their work more difficult such as sudden changes in temperatures and wind conditions, steepness of the terrain, and limited water supplies and access roads. There needs to be more discussion and better decisions made about the challenges facing local fire departments concerning the ongoing penetration of developments within the Wildland-Urban Interface. This includes an emphasis on preventing these fires. Failure to do so puts the nation at risk of more disastrous fires such as the one suffered in Gatlinburg.

Firefighters cannot pick and choose which calls for service they respond to; they respond to every call regardless of the type of emergency and potential threat to their own safety. It is indeed a dangerous profession. Nobody is forced to become a firefighter, but it takes a special type of individual to do so -- the type of person who is willing to put his/her life on the line to serve others and save a total stranger.

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Unfortunately, injuries and death are part of the profession. According to the NFPA, 68 firefighters died in the line of duty in 2015, while more than 68,085 firefighters sustained injuries in 2015. These statistics don't include the growing number of firefighters who are being diagnosed with cancer or serious behavioral health issues that can be directly traced to their work. While these injuries and deaths are hazards of being a firefighter, complacency on the part of the fire service is not. Rather than accepting the status quo, the fire service continues to develop new technologies, adopt new training methods, and conduct new research to explore ways of making the profession safer.

### The Fire Service Mission

When you travel across our country, you will find a fire station in every town and city. These stations are staffed by career and volunteer personnel. These firefighters are diverse in their races and religions, and come from different economic backgrounds. For many, the fire service has been a family tradition dating back to earlier generations.

According to the NFPA, there are 1,134,000 firefighters in our nation: 346,150 career firefighters and 788,250 volunteers. They serve in approximately 29,980 fire departments (2,440 career, 2,045 mostly career, 5,580 mostly volunteer, and 19,915 volunteer.) It has been said that the fire service is the most decentralized part of government that exists. There is at least one fire station in literally every community in the United States. Essentially, the fire service is the only public safety entity that is locally situated, staffed, trained and equipped to respond to all types of emergencies. When a 9-1-1 call is placed, firefighters arrive on scene within a matter of minutes. No other agency has that capability to respond as quickly to provide emergency services day in and day out – 24/7/365.

For many years, the role of being a firefighter was said to be “putting the wet stuff on the red stuff.” They had performed that role long before the 13 colonies united under one nation. But the public expectations of firefighters, and thus their missions, have expanded significantly. The mission now incorporates an “all-hazards” menu of responsibilities, and it is incumbent on the fire service to ensure that policy makers, as well as the general public, have a current and accurate understanding of the modern-day fire department's mission. The public expectations, as well as the policy expectations of local fire departments, include dealing with any emergency situation that threatens people and property throughout the nation. For purposes of training, funding, public safety, and public understanding, the fire department's missions can be delineated into certain areas of responsibility:

- Fire Suppression
- Emergency Medical Services
- Hazardous Materials Response
- Disaster and Terrorism Response
- Code Enforcement
- Fire Prevention and Public Education
- Technical and Swift Water Rescue
- Urban Search and Rescue
- Fire, Arson and Explosive Response and Investigation
- Critical Infrastructure Protection (such as roadway, railway, waterway, and pipeline incidents)
- Fire Service-Based EMS Training and Education
- Industrial Fire and Life Safety
- Federal and Military Fire Protection
- Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting
- Wildland Fire Prevention, Suppression, and Mitigation
- Transportation Rescue



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For each of these important elements of their mission, firefighters need specialized training and equipment to execute their responsibilities safely and effectively. A set of basic turnout gear (Personal Protective Equipment) can cost more than \$3,500; radios to communicate – approximately \$5,000; self-contained breathing apparatus - \$8,000 and thermal imaging cameras - \$7,500. Added to these costs is that of purchasing apparatus. The cost of a fire engine averages \$400,000, while the cost of ladder trucks can exceed \$800,000 each. A firefighter/EMT who must perform at a high level requires considerable training to earn basic firefighting credentials, and significantly more to be certified and function as an EMT. In addition, the training required to operate modern equipment, perform inspections, respond to HAZMAT incidents, and qualify for wildfire operations demands a greater investment of time and money.



Even when local economies are facing economic challenges, fire departments need a stable source of funding to maintain their staffing levels, equipment, and apparatus. This is just one critical way the federal government can “make a useful difference” as President Ford pronounced in 1974.

In 2015, fire departments received more than 33.6 million calls for the following types of emergencies:

- 1.35 million were fires,
- 21.5 million were emergency medical incidents,
- 1.49 million mutual aid,
- 1.08 million hazardous materials/conditions incidents
- 5.65 million other, and
- 2.53 million were classified as false alarms



## Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act (FFPCA)

At the time that Congress was deliberating passage of the FFPCA in 1974, the nation was gripped by a devastating fire problem. Approximately 12,000 people were dying in fires each year and more than 300,000 were being injured. Direct property loss amounted to almost \$3 billion, while the total economic cost was estimated at \$11 billion annually.

The FFPCA of 1974 codified the federal role as Congress realized the federal government has a significant stake in protecting our local communities and the nation. One of the findings in the legislation described the prevailing public attitude at the time about fire and indisputable facts that had been preventing progress in fire protection. It stated:

“The Nation’s fire problem is exacerbated by (A) the indifference with which some Americans confront the subject; (B) the Nation’s failure to undertake enough research and development into fire and fire-related problems; (C) the scarcity of reliable data and information; (D) the fact that designers and purchasers of buildings and products generally give insufficient attention to fire safety; (E) the fact that many communities lack adequate building and fire prevention codes; and (F) the fact that local fire departments spend about 95 cents of every dollar appropriated to the fire services on efforts to extinguish fires and only 5 percent on fire prevention.”



Passage of the FFPCA was a landmark moment for the nation’s fire service. It created the United States Fire Administration (USFA) and the National Fire Academy (NFA), and identified a number of important areas where the federal government should assume a role in fire prevention and control. The four core missions of USFA are training, public education, research and data collection. But the authorizing legislation identifies other areas of involvement for USFA that include rural and wildland-urban interface assistance, codes, emergency medical services, training, terrorism response, fire sprinklers and smoke detectors, arson detection, hazardous materials, and other areas of responsibility.



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In 2000, Congress amended the FFPCA when it established the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG). While the legislation authorized control of the grant program to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), AFG was established to provide grant funding directly to local fire departments for purchasing equipment, training and apparatus. Included in the AFG program is the Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grant Program. Targeting high-risk populations, the FP&S grants support projects that enhance the safety of the public and firefighters from fire and fire-related hazards. Congress expanded the eligible uses of funds to include Firefighter Safety Research and Development when it reauthorized the grant programs in 2005. Also, in 2005, Congress created a separate program under AFG – the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program – that allows departments to hire career staff and recruit and retain volunteer staff.



### A Current Review

The FFPCA serves as the governing document for the USFA, conveying how Congress expects the agency to conduct its mission. In 1998, FEMA Director James Lee Witt formed a Blue Ribbon Panel in response to growing concerns from the fire service about USFA's performance. The panel, comprised of 13 highly respected fire and emergency services officials, developed 34 recommendations that addressed areas of concern within the USFA. To its credit, USFA acted in response to each of these recommendations with appropriate action to the extent of their limited fiscal resources.



With the 20th anniversary of the Blue Ribbon Panel Report approaching, the fire service calls on the appropriate federal leaders to bring together a fire service panel to conduct a current review of USFA to assess whether it is fulfilling its mission as codified in the FFPCA. This assessment should include budget factors as well. Since FY 2012, USFA has been authorized at \$76,490,890, while the appropriated level has not exceeded \$44.04 million. In USFA's defense, how can an agency perform its mission as mandated by Congress when it continually receives only 58% percent of its authorized budget? The fire service is in need of the federal support that an adequately resourced USFA and NFA could provide.

### Future Federal Support

The fire service is the first to acknowledge that funding local fire departments is primarily the role of local and state government. But federal leaders, both in Congress and within the federal agencies, must recognize and reaffirm the federal role as so clearly enumerated in the FFPCA.

Federal leaders who question federal support need to understand a local fire department's role in protecting the federal infrastructure. Our highways, our waterways, our power sources – these are part of the federal infrastructure that are protected by local fire departments. Interstate commerce and financial institutions, both of which are regulated by the federal government, also heavily depend on local fire departments to prevent disruptions that could otherwise cripple our economy. In rural areas, we witness local fire departments on the front lines of major wildland fires that threaten to penetrate the Wildland Urban Interface and destroy homes. On April 19, 1995, the day of the Murrah Building bombing, and on September 11, 2001, our nation was transfixed on the devastation that occurred in both Oklahoma City and New York City. All Americans witnessed the brave actions of our firefighters to save the lives of so many victims.



In addition, local fire departments are major stakeholders and "first due" responders in the National Preparedness System. In fact, FEMA added Fire Management and Suppression as a Core Capability of the National Preparedness Goal. When there is a national disaster or emergency, local fire departments are dispatched through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact or state and local mutual aid agreements to provide assistance to communities across the nation. Because today's fire service is an all-hazards response force with a variety of emergency response capabilities, a strong fire service is a key component to any effective national response to a national emergency.

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When buildings collapse as a result of major disasters or other causes, Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams are deployed to stabilize structures, while locating and rescuing trapped victims. As the only self-sufficient, all-hazards, ready to respond force of its kind, USAR is essential to our nation's homeland security. The highly trained and skilled personnel are not federal employees; they are members of local fire departments from cities around the United States. They are selected to these teams because of their unique skills, experiences and abilities. Much of the success of these elite teams is predicated on rapid deployment, allowing them to begin their operations within hours, not days, of an incident. These are local responders, dispatched whenever and wherever they are needed – whether in a nearby city, an adjoining county or a distant state...sometimes even to another country. USAR relies on local responders brought together to form teams that are dedicated to protecting our homeland.

Local communities across the nation are being exposed to emerging threats. They could be attributed to many factors, including government inaction, public apathy and nefarious actions. Regardless, fire departments must respond to every call every day. For their safety, and the public's safety, they must respond with the right tools, training and staffing. While support for local fire departments will primarily remain a local and state responsibility, the federal government cannot abdicate its responsibilities. To do so would undermine the readiness and response capabilities of fire departments across our nation, leaving local communities, and the nation as a whole, at greater risk.

The fire service looks forward to working with Congress, the Administration, and federal agencies to identify a path forward to protecting our nation from fire and the many other hazards the fire service is responsible for within its mission.

As President Ford made clear many years ago, "the federal government can and should make a useful difference."



## APPENDIX

- [Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 \(Public Law 93-498\) \[As Amended Through P.L. 112–239, Enacted January 2, 2013\] \(15 U.S.C. § 2201 et seq \[2015\]\)](#).
- [Fourth Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service \(National Fire Protection Association, November 2016\)](#)

## CONGRESSIONAL FIRE SERVICES INSTITUTE NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS

[\(https://www.cfsi.org/about-us/national-advisory-committee/\)](https://www.cfsi.org/about-us/national-advisory-committee/):

- Approved Fall 2016:  
[Resolution Supporting a Three-Year Code Adoption Cycle](#)
- Approved Spring 2012:  
[Resolution in Support of USFA's Public Education Campaign – Fire is Everyone's Fight](#)
- Approved Fall 2011:  
[Resolution in Support of the Safe Building Codes Act of 2011](#)
- Approved Fall 2007:  
[Resolution Supporting a Change to the International Residential Code to Require Fire Sprinklers in One- and Two-Family Dwellings and Townhouses](#)  
[Resolution in Support of Legislation to Strengthen the Enforcement of Fire and Building Codes](#)
- Approved Spring 2007:  
[Resolution Expressing Recognition and Support for Initiatives to Strengthen Coordination Among Stakeholders in Addressing the Wildland Urban Interface Fires](#)
- Approved Fall 2006:  
[Resolution Requesting CFSI to Educate Congress and Federal Agencies about the Role and Importance of Fire Service-Based EMS to the Safety of U.S. Citizens](#)
- Approved Spring 2005:  
[Resolution Regarding the February 24, 2005 Summit Concerning the U.S. Fire Administration](#)  
[Resolution Expressing the Need for Full Funding of the U.S. Fire Administration \(USFA\)](#)
- Approved Fall 2004:  
[Resolution Offering Continued Support for the Assistance to Firefighters Grants Program](#)
- Approved Spring 2004:  
[Resolution Expressing Support for the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Line of Duty Death Initiatives](#)
- Approved Fall 2003:  
[Resolution Expressing Support for Increased Funding for Advanced Fire Research](#)
- Approved Spring 2003:  
[Proposed Resolution to CFSI NAC – Improved Standards, Technology, and Practices for Buildings and First Responders](#)
- Approved Fall 2002:  
[Resolution Expressing Support for the Firefighter Research and Coordination Act](#)  
[Resolution Expressing the Need for Federal Tax Relief to Encourage the Installation of Fire Sprinkler in Residential and Commercial Buildings](#)

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