

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
DIVISION OF FIRE SAFETY
NEW JERSEY FIRE SAFETY COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING**

Meeting of November 15, 2023

The New Jersey Fire Safety Commission meeting was held on Wednesday, November 15, 2023 at the Atlantic City Convention Center in Atlantic City, NJ.

Commission Members Present: Mr. Kevin Krushinski, Chairman
Sen. Anthony Bucco
Asm. Kevin Rooney
Mr. Fred Collender
Mr. Charles Siedenburg
Mr. Charles Maria
Mr. Kevin Bellew
Mr. Lawrence Wood
Mr. Arthur Hayducka
Mr. Paul McGrath
Mr. Nelson Wiest
Mr. Armando Roman
Mr. George Aleu
Mr. Gerard Naylis
Mr. Richard Blohm
Mr. Karl Spinner

Commission Members Excused: Mr. Arthur Londensky, Vice-Chairman
Ms. Kathleen O'Leary
Mr. Steve O'Gorman
Mr. Daniel DeTrollo

DCA Staff Members Present: Richard Mikutsky, NJ State Fire Marshal
Louis Kilmer, NJDFS
Timothy Weiss, NJDFS
Charles Lavin, NJDFS
Gregory Kirkham, NJDFS
Dan Timmerman, NJDFS
Don Nelsen, NJDFS
Lenny Inzerillo, NJDFS

<u>Guests :</u>		
Ronald McGowan Jr.	Tom Pizzano	Nick Lombardi
Vincent Corsaro	Michael Robertson	Edwin Hale
Elizabeth Sweeney	Scott Trythall	Brian Prochnow
Bryant Curry	Dan Speigel	Jim Burleigh

Anthony Cirz
Ryan LaVigne
John Garton
Shawn Layton
Jacob Hughes
Paul Cafone
Ross Kownatsky
Kenneth Dooley
John Medina
Wade Houlihan
John Burmeister
Steve Williams
Jose Nieves
Anthony Vecchio
Heidi Michel
Bruce Mizak
Frederick Fritz
Michael J. Moccio
Paul Mazzeo
Ryan Troiano
Brian Taylor
Cory S. Spillar
John J. Kurz
Mark Gallagher
Steve Kerns
Chad DiGiorgio

Matthew Janora
Charles Weinburger
Steven Curry
Steve Smith
Alfred Cirelli
Marc Strauss
Steven Spurr
Jonathan Little
Joe Signorello
Kate Triggiano
Stanley O'Brien Jr.
Joseph Gullia
Joseph Chukwueke
Scott Bromiski
Louis Tramontana
Brian McDade
Grady Griffin
James O'Connell
Dean Manante
Chris Assenheimer
Brian Pericone
Scott McCormick
Angela Morello Lange
James Mozier
Cary Costa

Richard Foster
Ken Schulz
Rich Heimbach
Patrick Mason
John Niland
Paul Dansbach
Fredrick Roll
Andrew Williams
Tim Coyle
Frank Ur
Chris Sorrentino
Michael Balog
Kevin Batzel
Chris Esposito
Scott Oatman
Robert Echevarria
Shaun Dannenfelser
Rick Schreck
Brian Martone
Michael S. Famularo
Dominick McClain
Peter Rocco
Paul Short Sr.
Glenn Werner
Craig Bierbaum

A. Call to Order

Chairman Kevin Krushinski called the meeting to order at 10:09 AM. He led the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence for those lost in the line of duty and the men and women serving our nation overseas.

B. Approval of Minutes

With no discussion requested or additional corrections, the minutes of the regular meeting of September 14, 2023, were approved as submitted. Assemblyman Kevin Rooney made the motion to approve. The motion was seconded by Commissioner John Wisniewski and passed unanimously.

C. Correspondence

Chairman Krushinski noted that any and all correspondence for today's meeting was contained in the Commission packets.

D. Public Comment I

Chairman Krushinski opened up the meeting to any members of the public present wishing to address the Commission. With no members of the public wishing to address the Commission at this time, the meeting was moved to Division of Fire Safety Activities.

E. Division of Fire Safety Activities

Director Mikutsky began his report by talking about the new Acting Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, Jacquelyn Suarez. She is the current Director of Local Government Services and is awaiting Senate approval. She was appointed by Governor Murphy on September 14th and she is already very familiar with the NJDFS, as she was in the DCA Commissioners Office prior. Director Mikutsky met with Acting Commissioner Suarez recently to discuss NJDFS activities, need, and goals going forward.

Director Mikutsky reported that there was an update to the Deployment Act published in the October 16 edition of the New Jersey Register. These rules establish a mechanism to coordinate fire resources throughout the State and facilitate a quick and efficient response to emergency incidents that require immediate deployment. The NJDFS has reviewed the rules and determined that they should be readopted with amendments. Since the DCA has filed this notice of readoption prior to the expiration date, that date is extended 180 days to March 17, 2024, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:14B-5.1.c(2). The comment period is currently open until December 15, 2023.

Over the past few months, the NJDFS has conducted numerous Marine/Shipboard Firefighting training meetings. They are working on the development of a Shipboard Working Group under the northern Fire Boat Task Force (FBTF). There is buy-in from the FBTF departments, but funding for the training remains the main obstacle. The NJDFS met with the Port Authority on October 31st to discuss funding mechanisms for conducting training in the future.

Director Mikutsky reported that Recruitment & Retention Task Force was created through legislation a few years ago and they have been meeting monthly. A final report from the task force is due at the end of the year and they are currently working on recommendations. The NJDFS also met with Frelinghuysen Twp. Fire Department to discuss their progress on creating their own department. They are moving forward nicely and should be done sometime after January 1, 2024.

This afternoon the NJDFS will be hosting a broad base session at the League of Municipalities that will give an overview of the Uniform Fire Code, Department Monitoring, Annual Reporting requirements, and the transition to the new Dynamics Registration and Inspection Management System. That will be held in Room 415 at the Atlantic City Convention Center and convention credentials will be required.

Director Mikutsky made note of a few upcoming events. The annual Holiday Fire Safety Demonstration will be held in conjunction with the NJ Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board and Sprinkler Fitters Local 696 at Monmouth County Fire Academy on November 20th. It will consist of a side-by-side sprinkler/non-sprinkler Christmas tree burn and turkey frying safety demo. Also, the 20th Annual New Jersey Youth Firesetting Intervention Conference is scheduled to take place at Middlesex County Fire Academy on November 30th & December 1st. Registration is open until November 22nd (one week from today) at www.keanfiresafety.com

The next County Fire Coordinators meeting is scheduled for January 27, 2024 at Middlesex County Fire Academy. New Jersey Weekend 2024 has been scheduled for June 1st and 2nd at the National Fire Academy. In addition, the NJDFS's annual Homeland Security Conference has been scheduled for June 6, 2024 at Kean University.

The NJ Department of Community Affairs' Division of Local Government Services is administering the FY2024 American Rescue Plan Firefighting Grant Program, which will help local and regional fire departments in New Jersey provide first responders with proper protective and cleaning equipment. All local and regional fire departments in New Jersey are eligible to apply. The funding can help cover costs associated with the purchase of: protective items, cleaning equipment, oxygen equipment, personal protective equipment, etc.

From the Office of Training & Certifications, the FY2024 contract with Kean University has been approved. IFSAC has approved the NJDFS for numerous certification titles as well. Training is also beginning the interview process to backfill the vacant Training & Certification Specialist 1 position.

Hazardous Materials: Incident Commander Train-the-Trainers have started running this month. They are scheduled for November 13th (Passaic), November 21st (Ocean) and December 18th (Middlesex). An ARFF Train-the-Trainer is scheduled for December 18th at Middlesex County Fire Academy also. Apparatus Driver/Operator Train-the-Trainers will start next month – on December 7th (Burlington) and December 13th (Middlesex). Registrations for all of these are open on the Kean Fire Safety website.

Director Mikutsky reported that the 2024 New Jersey Fire Safety Calendars are in and distribution is beginning here at today's meeting – all Commissioners will find a copy in their meeting packets. We will proceed to get supplies to all county poster contest coordinators and sponsors starting tomorrow. Everyone will have them in hand by the holidays. Also, the November edition of Fire Focus should be available any day now. It was submitted to the DCA Communication Office on October 20th for approval.

From the Office of Fire Department Preparedness, the CODES project for county fire coordinators and NJDFS staff saw iPads distributed to all and training held on November 3rd at Morris County Fire Academy. Fire coordinator appointment/reappointment letters have been sent out to each County OEM and Chief Associations. Several letters have

been returned with their fire coordinator selections. The current two-year term for county coordinators expires on January 1st.

The foam take-back program was reinstituted with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection. Surveys were sent with a return date of November 1st and 205 departments responded with approximately 62,000 gallons for disposal. More meetings are scheduled with the NJDEP to determine pickup locations. Also, the Fire Threat Task Force sponsored NJ Transit training at Montclair State on November 4th – approximately 100 first responders participated in both classroom and hands-on training.

The Statewide Active Violent Environment Response (SAVER) program working group scheduled four presentations to NJ Chiefs of Police Leadership and Command classes, as well as Executive Leadership of State Agencies. Also, there are currently seven ongoing fire department complaint investigations, dual investigations, or referrals with NJDOL/PEOSH/NJDOH.

Director Mikutsky reported on the following statistics from the NFIRS Unit. So far in 2023, there have been 69 fatal fires, 73 school fires, 466 civilian burns, and a total statewide property loss of approximately \$299.2 million. Additionally, there have been 41 lithium-ion battery fires. 511 out of a possible 703 departments are reporting (roughly 73%). Effective January 1st, all fire departments will send all NFIRS data directly to the United States Fire Administration via the eNFIRS data entry tool. Director Mikutsky also gave updated statistics on the NJ Fire & EMS Lifeline and urged the Commission members to keep promoting it. Chairman Krushinski asked if the NJDFS could put more placards out advertising the hotline and Director Mikutsky agreed to do so.

Assemblyman Rooney asked for Director Mikutsky's thoughts regarding the lithium ion battery fires – in particular concerning the larger items – and whether there has been an uptick in fires. Director Mikutsky answered that there certainly is an increase and agreed that more and more types of battery-powered devices should be monitored statistics-wise. Assemblyman Rooney proposed the possibility of legislation to add fire safety measures to all of the electrical-based vehicles and devices being mandated for the future. Commissioner Richard Blohm added that a new NFIRS reporting system is coming from USFA (NERIS) and Director Mikutsky answered that the NJDFS is aware of the upcoming system and Vince Campagna has been a part of working with USFA on its development.

Bureau Chief Louis Kilmer began his report by talking about the rollout of the new Dynamics system, which the NJDFS is working on on a daily basis with their partners from IBM. The process is going well and the system is easy to learn. The NJDFS has also opened up a portal on the system for contractors to enter/upload all of their reports, which go directly to the fire official. A tutorial on this will be going out to all contractors that the NJDFS has on file. The new system has brought to light that a lot of data cleanup needs to be done.

Chief Kilmer spoke about it being Annual Reports time, and rebates will be going out using the new system. Chief Kilmer also mentioned that there is no provision in the code that allows for extensions, so the hard deadline of January 31st will be enforced.

NJDFS staff has finished going over all the comments on the new Fire Code. It is now in the hands of the DCA Commissioner's Office, who will be doing some formatting on it and sending it along to the Attorney General's Office and then the Governor's Office. Chief Kilmer added that the administration has been extremely supportive of the Fire Code. Chief Kilmer also spoke about having the Peer Review Board running by January 1st and the administration has been supportive on this as well. The NJDFS also continues to dedicate staff to the School Suppression Survey and getting varying levels of cooperation from school districts on this.

At previous meetings, Fire Safety Commissioner members proposed a class be held related to changes of occupancy and what happens concerning fire sprinkler systems. Chief Kilmer was pleased to announce that, based on that suggestion, this class will begin in dry-run form next month and then be ready for the Spring 2024 semester. Chief Kilmer also mentioned a bill that had been passed by the Senate and Assembly (but not yet signed into law) concerning smoke dampers. The NJDFS is working with the sponsors of the bill on this and all parties concerned. Chief Kilmer also spoke about the changes to the Fire Safety Act requiring for inspections to be done by licensed individuals.

Chief Kilmer spoke about the continuing work on mobile food trucks, mobile fueling, and marine mobile fueling – all of which the NJDFS has issued bulletins on. Also, Chief Kilmer reported that anticipated revenue for 2023 has gone out to all Local Enforcing Agencies.

Chief Kilmer spoke about the lack of candidates for full-time personnel in the Inspections Unit. Like many professions, the NJDFS is having difficulty filling their ranks. There was a robust discussion on this matter amongst the Fire Safety Commission, exploring ways to bolster the NJDFS ranks with qualified candidates. Recommendations included everything from social media, working with schools/local departments, outreach at local/state meetings, etc. All in all, there is clearly an issue with the experience of candidates, competitive pay compared to other agencies, and the fire service knowing that the need is there. Commissioner Raymond Heck added that the NJDFS should be focused on promoting the positions as careers rather than jobs – showing the opportunity for upward movement.

Chief Kilmer reported that the NJDFS has reached out to all state agencies that have jurisdiction over New Jersey's highways in regards to the status of roadside standpipes. The NJDFS will begin working with these agencies to test these systems, as many of them have admitted that the standpipes have not been tested in years or – in many cases – known not to be working. This is a major issue and one that the NJDFS will be taking up in the year to come, and they have already issued violations on it. A meeting has been scheduled with the Department of Transportation and Highway Authority.

With no additional questions raised regarding Division of Fire Safety Activities at this time, the meeting was moved to Advisory Council reports.

F. Advisory Council Reports:

1. Codes Advisory Council

Commissioner George Aleu reported that the previous meeting of the Codes Advisory Council had been canceled. However, Chief Kilmer sufficiently covered all code related issues under his NJDFS Activities report prior. The next meeting will be scheduled for December.

2. Training and Education Advisory Council

Commissioner Nelson Wiest reported that the Training & Education Advisory Council met on October 17th and the minutes of that meeting is contained in the meeting packets for the Commission members to review. Commissioner Wiest noted that Director Mikutsky covered all bases regarding training and education during his NJDFS Activities report.

In the aftermath of the tragic fire that took two firefighters' lives in Newark, Commissioner Richard Blohm asked a question in regards to shipboard/marine training and whether that was being looked at as a statewide program going forward. Director Mikutsky said that many meetings have been held – with Port Authority, with FDNY, with firefighting training providers from out of state - and they are concentrating on awareness and command/control. So far the meetings have been productive, however funding will be the main challenge. A discussion between Director Mikutsky, Assemblyman Rooney, Commissioner Blohm, and Commissioner Wisniewski took place focusing on funding sources for training, which fire departments are responsible for ports, and potential legislation that could be passed to mandate/fund the necessary training. Commissioner Aleu asked if – similar to pharmaceutical companies and airports – could ports have their own private fire departments. Without getting into detail, Director Mikutsky answered that this has been a topic of discussion as well.

The next meeting of the Training & Education Advisory Council is scheduled for December 19th at the Burlington County Emergency Services Training Center.

3. Statistics and Information Advisory Council

Commissioner Gerard Naylis spoke about the transitional process of moving from the NFRIS system to the newly implemented NERIS reporting system that is coming from the United States Fire Administration. Commissioner Naylis is beginning to get training information on NERIS and the anticipated rollout is supposed to begin around June 2024 – with USFA's goal being that everyone on the NERIS system by the start of 2025.

Commissioner Naylis also spoke about, with the end of the year approaching, the importance of fire departments submitting their NFIRS data. With so much talk about the need for funding for training, equipment, etc., fire departments need to be submitting their data in order to be eligible for much of the funds available.

4. Master Planning and Research Advisory Council

Commissioner Raymond Heck reported that he needed to collaborate with Commissioner Lawrence Wood on the next meeting of the Master Planning and Research Advisory Council, and provided detail regarding the Council's agenda going forward.

Commissioner Heck spoke about the focus on training and education being paramount to the health and safety of the state's fire service, and he commended new NJDFS Training and Certifications Supervisor Greg Kirkham on being out-front and accessible to the fire service. Commissioner Heck also spoke about the need to fight, politically, to the funding needed for training for public safety. That will be their focus in 2024.

5. Public Education Advisory Council

Commissioner Paul McGrath reported that the Public Education Advisory Council met on October 5th at Union County Fire Academy in Linden.

Commissioner McGrath spoke about the importance of all the topics discussed at today's meeting being important and the need to educate the public – not only on fire safety messaging – but what the fire service does as a whole.

The Public Education Advisory Council is focused on a number of areas – including the growing problem of lithium-ion battery fires, the development of a Statewide Risk Assessment for New Jersey, and the growing of existing public education initiatives that are already in place at the NJDFS. Commissioner McGrath expressed the need for more members and more participation for the Public Education Advisory Council, and asked that Commission members send anyone who may be interested his way.

The next meeting of the Public Education Advisory Council is scheduled for December 13th at Union County Fire Academy in Linden.

6. Firefighter Safety and Health Advisory Council

Commissioner Richard Blohm reported that the minutes from the last Firefighter Safety and Health Advisory Council had been provided to the Fire Safety Commission at the previous meeting in Wildwood Crest in September. The Council has a meeting scheduled for January 16th at 10AM at Middlesex County Fire Academy.

7. Youth Firesetting Prevention Advisory Council

In the absence of Commissioner Kathleen O’Leary, no formal report was given. Chairman Krushinski referred to Director Mikutsky’s report under NJDFS Activities regarding the upcoming New Jersey Youth Firesetting Intervention Conference.

The next meeting of the Youth Firesetting Prevention Advisory Council is scheduled for January 11th at Monmouth County Fire Academy in Freehold.

G. Committee Reports

1. Residential Sprinkler Committee

Commissioner Gerard Naylis spoke about the Townhouse Sprinkler Bill that had been reintroduced and made a motion that it be supported by the Fire Safety Commission. The motion was seconded by Commissioner John Wisniewski and passed unanimously.

2. Ad-Hoc Committee on Legislation

Commissioner Kevin Bellew reported that the Ad-Hoc Committee on Legislation had also been discussing Senate Bill 281 that Commissioner Naylis spoke about during his committee report. Commissioner Bellew made a motion that a letter be sent to legislators from the Fire Safety Commission urging they support this bill. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gerard Naylis and passed unanimously. Fire Safety Commission Secretary Charles Lavin will work with David Kurasz on this and provide a letter to Chairman Krushinski as soon as possible.

3. NJ Statewide Utility Safety Team

In the absence of Commission Steve O’Gorman, no formal report was given.

4. Cannabis Committee

Assemblyman Kevin Rooney reported that there was no update to be given by the Cannabis Committee at this time.

H. Old Business

Chairman Kevin Krushinski asked if anyone had any Old Business to bring before the Commission. Commissioner Gerard Naylis thanked Secretary Charles Lavin for composing and sending the letter from the Fire Safety Commission to the Governor’s Office regarding the Christmas Tree Burning Bill.

With no additional Old Business to be discussed at this time, the meeting was moved to New Business.

I. New Business

Chairman Kevin Krushinski thanked the New Jersey Fire Prevention & Protection Association for hosting today's meeting, as well as City Fire and Commissioner Paul McGrath for providing coffee and refreshments.

Chairman Krushinski thanked Assemblyman Kevin Rooney for his years of hard work and dedication on the New Jersey Fire Safety Commission. This sentiment was echoed by all present members of the Commission.

Chairman Krushinski noted that a proposed Meeting Schedule for 2024 had been distributed in today's meeting packets. Commissioner Blohm expressed concern that the northern part of the state had been neglected and offered to host the March 2024 meeting at Bergen County Fire Academy. The Commission members agreed to this change and the meeting schedule was finalized as follows:

- January 17 – NJ State Firemen's Association (Wall Twp)
- March 20 – Bergen County Fire Academy
- May 15 – NJ State Firemen's Association (Wall Twp)
- July 17 – Surf City Volunteer Fire Department
- September 12 – Wildwood Crest Volunteer Fire Department
- November 20 – Atlantic City Convention Center

Commissioner Paul McGrath made a motion that Ryan LaVigne be added to the Public Education Advisory Council and provided Mr. LaVigne's resume to the Fire Safety Commission for their review. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gerard Naylis and passed unanimously.

There being no further New Business to conduct at this time, the meeting was moved to Public Comment II.

J. Public Comment II

Chairman Krushinski opened up the meeting for members of the public to comment for the second time. Vincent Corsaro from Jefferson Township thanks Director Mikutsky for following up with him on his request at the last meeting for additional data. Mr. Corsaro also spoke about the importance of reporting on electric vehicle fires and the need for firefighters to be instructed on how to report this. Mr. Corsaro also recommended looking at offering college credits for classes that are being offered at the eligible organizations (towards fire science degrees, etc.).

NJ Fire Prevention & Protection Association President Tom Pizzano spoke about the need for there to be a code aspect to whatever changes/requirements being added as far as shipboard/marine firefighting. He said that of course firefighter safety and training are paramount in dealing with this, but he asked that the issue be looked at from a code perspective as well.

David Kurasz from the NJ Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board thanked Assemblyman Rooney for all his work on the Fire Safety Commission and this partnership/support of fire safety initiatives in New Jersey. Mr. Kurasz asked Chief Kilmer for some clarification on the contractor's portion of the Dynamics system. Chief Kilmer said there will be a soft start and then after six months their reports will be mandatory. Ultimately, the system is designed so that all reports and information on a given building will be available in one place.

Paul Dansbach spoke about the recruitment and retention issue at the NJ Division of Fire Safety. He said that they are letting recruits/students know locally, educating them on what the NJDFS is and does – but the problem lies with it being an entry level position. He said a discussion needs to be had to elevate the starting salaries for these positions, because if they don't they will continue to lose out on qualified candidates. Ken Schulz added to Mr. Dansbach's sentiment and added that State Police does not have a recruitment/retention problem because they are able to advocate for themselves, often through the data that shows the need. Mr. Schulz added that this can not be put on State Fire Marshal Mikutsky, it is on the fire service to advocate to their government officials to get this changed. Steve Revis from Riverdale added that the recruitment/retention situation for volunteer firefighters is at a critically low level as well.

Eddie Powell from the Newark Firefighter Union made a passionate plea to the New Jersey Fire Safety Commission to advocate for the funding for appropriate training for shipboard/marine fires. He also urged that it be added to the Firefighter 1 curriculum to let recruits know that if they are not prepared and/or trained for a given situation – specifically relative to shipboard/marine fires – they should not go in and fight the fire. The Fire Safety Commission members and NJ Division of Fire Safety leadership offered Mr. Powell and the Newark Fire Department their condolences and wholehearted support.

Chairman Krushinski asked if anyone else from the public wished to comment at this time. There being none, the meeting was moved to Adjournment.

K. Adjournment

With no further discussion requested, Chairman Kevin Krushinski called for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner George Aleu made the motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Gerard Naylis and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:51 AM.

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