



All Hands Herald

Massachusetts Department of Fire Services

January 2025

Unprecedented Fall Fire Season *4,000 Acres Burn in Just Two Months*

35th Annual
Firefighter of the Year Awards

NFPA 3000 Update

January is Firefighter Cancer
Awareness Month

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The *All Hands Herald* is published three times a year by the Department of Fire Services. Our title incorporates the traditional fire service meaning of all hands working to extinguish a fire. In this publication, all hands is DFS staff providing information, training, and assistance with issues that affect all levels of the fire service.

Let us know how you like the *All Hands Herald* and what we can do to make it even more useful to you – our dedicated fire service members and customers.

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From the Fire Marshal

Fall Wildfires

Much has been said about the wildfires that broke out across Massachusetts this past fall, but it bears repeating that the fire service rose to a remarkable challenge with tremendous professionalism. Whether by the number of fires or the acres that burned, more than a year's worth of firefighting was packed into just a few weeks. Firefighters on the ground worked tirelessly to contain these fires and protect people, homes, and communities from the danger they posed. I am deeply grateful to the DFS staff for assisting local officials with Special Operations missions, fire mobilization support, statutory and regulatory guidance, and more. I would also like to recognize the resources brought to bear by our colleagues at the Department of Conservation & Recreation, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, National Guard, State Police, and other agencies that stepped up in a time of crisis. Read more about last year's fires on page 2.

Cancer Screening Eligibility

According to the Firefighter Cancer Support Network, cancer is the leading cause of death for firefighters. The worst cancer diagnosis is a late one, so early detection screening is vital to firefighters' health, safety, and survival. To increase access to these important programs, the Department of Fire Services has adjusted the eligibility requirements for the free cancer screenings we offer. Firefighters are now eligible for chest CT scans, PSA blood tests, ultrasounds, and mammograms if they meet a minimum age requirement *or* a length of service requirement instead of both. Read more in our Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month feature on page 8.

PFAS-Free Firefighter Gear

Last summer, Governor Maura Healey signed legislation that will phase out the use of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in firefighting gear sold in Massachusetts.

This important step forward for firefighter health and safety will require planning and investment for local fire departments. I look forward to working with the Legislature and the Administration to support the fire service as Massachusetts works to outfit our firefighters with safe, durable alternatives to traditional turnout gear in the months and years ahead. In the meantime, you can read about a new firefighter who recently completed the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy's Career Recruit

Program in PFAS-free gear provided by the Chelmsford Fire Department on page 15.

Secondary Egress Requirements

In November 2024, an arson at a Plainville apartment building displaced about 20 people—but no serious injuries were reported. Fire Chief Robert Skinner attributed that in part to a secondary egress that allowed residents to escape safely from the second and third floors that were filling with smoke. This was just one of countless incidents in which firefighter entries, successful rescues, and safe escapes were effected through back stairways.

However, a recent report from *Boston Indicators* now recommends doing away with the secondary egress requirement for *buildings as high as six stories*. While this recommendation was doubtless made with the best of intentions during a housing crunch, it would present a serious life safety hazard to occupants and first responders in a fire or other emergency. Unfortunately, the push for single-egress residences is gathering steam, not just in Massachusetts but elsewhere in the United States and Canada. A recent NFPA symposium and associated report highlight the concerns associated with this vulnerability.

By striking the fire sprinkler requirement that appears in the model code on which the Building Code is based, Massachusetts already allows substandard housing to be built, sold, and occupied. Modern homes and furnishings burn faster than ever before: removing yet another fundamental life safety requirement from the regulations intended to keep us safe would be a short-sighted and potentially deadly decision.

Waltham Sprinkler Demonstration

Speaking of home fire sprinklers, I would like to thank Bentley University, the Waltham Fire Department, and the National Fire Sprinkler Association for delivering yet another successful demonstration of our Side-by-Side Sprinkler Trailer last month. On a brisk December morning, elected officials, students, news media, and others watched as sprinklers fully extinguished a small fire



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2024 Fall Wildfires

4,000 Acres Burn in Just Two Months

From October through November of 2024, Massachusetts experienced an unprecedented number of wildfires that burned about 4,000 acres—more than the state usually sees in two full years.

A combination of historically low precipitation and unseasonably warm, bright, breezy weather this fall had many residents enjoying themselves outdoors just as surface fuels were dryer than ever. Outdoor cooking, careless disposal of smoking materials and fireplace ashes, power equipment use, and other activities always present a modest fire hazard, but the weather and fuel conditions allowed even the smallest fire to spread quickly and beyond control.

“Traditionally, Massachusetts’ brush and wildland fire season is in the spring, after the snowpack recedes and before new leaves, grass, and other vegetation comes in,” said State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine. “Precipitation usually keeps the fall fires in check, but 2024 turned that pattern upside down. We went from below-average numbers to breaking records in the span of a few weeks.”

The Butternut Fire in Great Barrington was by far the largest of the season. Steep, remote, densely wooded terrain allowed the fire to grow from a few hundred acres to more than 1,100 acres overnight from November 19 to 20. By the time Fire Chief Scott Turner declared it under control nearly two weeks later, it had been mapped at 1,670 acres and drawn about 400 firefighters to the scene.

The Butternut Fire was one of more than 660 fires reported in October and November. At a time of year when 15 to 20 fires per month usually burn less than 10 acres combined, there were hundreds of acres burning on any given day—with fires in North Andover, Lynn, Salem, and Middleton each ranging from 130 to 400 acres.

The number of new fires each day and the rate at which they grew kept just about every fire department in the state active in their own communities, as mutual aid, or both. Hundreds of fire chiefs used their authority under

the Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code to issue temporary restrictions on any outdoor fires, urging residents to use caution and common sense with any ignition source.

“Beyond the direct hazard posed by an out-of-control wildland fire, every firefighter battling a preventable outdoor fire is a firefighter who cannot respond to an unrelated structure fire, motor vehicle crash, medical call, or other emergency,” wrote Foxborough Fire Chief Michael Kelleher, president of the Fire Chiefs Association of Massachusetts, in a letter from the FCAM Board of Directors to its membership.

About two dozen requests for support through the Statewide Fire Mobilization Plan activated more than 30 fire district responses in the span of a month, said Sterling Fire Chief David Hurlbut, the Mobilization Plan’s state coordinator. These activations moved forestry, structural, tender, and hand crew task forces across the state’s fire districts to support local departments so no cities or towns—or their mutual aid partners—were overwhelmed.

“On average, we may activate Fire Mobilization six times a year for single events that average two days in duration,” Chief Hurlbut said. “We have not had large scale response like this since the Lawrence Gas Explosion incident in September 2018.”

DFS Special Operations staff were also in the field almost every day from late October to late November. They conducted 16 drone missions, 18 Rehab missions, 23 Incident Support Unit missions, and 23 Gator and UTV missions from late October to late November. This is more than quadruple the runs they handled during the same period in 2023, and it far exceeds any month in the spring

and summer of 2022, when Massachusetts last had wildfires approaching these numbers. Personnel and assets from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Conservation & Recreation's Bureau of Forest Fire Control and Forestry were likewise out every day supporting local fire departments and their communities. The Massachusetts National Guard and State Police ran frequent water drops over some of the larger fires. Wildland firefighters from Maine, New Hampshire, and even Quebec crossed the border to assist.

On November 12, with 50 new fires reported in just 24 hours and Red Flag warnings in effect for the seventh time since late October, Governor Maura Healey held a press conference in Middleton with Fire Chief Douglas K. LeColst, Executive Office of Public Safety & Security leadership, and others. Chief LeColst thanked Middleton firefighters and their brothers and sisters from dozens of communities, who had been battling the 242-acre Middleton Pond fire for 17 days straight.

"Please use common sense," Gov. Healey said after urging residents to conserve water amid the critical drought conditions that were exacerbating the fire hazard. "Do not contribute to the risk. No fire pits. No outdoor grilling. No burning leaves. Nothing that can send sparks or embers into the air. Firefighters are working hard and making sacrifices to battle these fires on our behalf. Let's do all we can to avoid making their jobs any harder."

At the same event, State Fire Marshal Davine emphasized the importance of firefighter safety.

"Please be careful out there," he said, speaking directly to the fire service. "As you know better than anyone else, these are labor-intensive events. Effective rehab is going to be vital to your health and safety. Stay alert to the environmental hazards like snag trees. We've been getting reports of trees and limbs falling at a lot of these fires and unfortunately we've heard of several firefighters being injured by them. Tragically, a forest ranger in New York lost his life this way over the weekend. And a Connecticut firefighter died last month in an ATV crash while responding to a wildfire—a reminder of the hazards we face when operating in remote, off-road environments."

Chief Fire Warden David Celino of the Department of Conservation & Recreation's Bureau of Forest Fire Control & Forestry explained how weather conditions, and drought in

particular, contributed to the stratospherically high number of fires and acres burned.

"At the end of August, we saw a shift in the weather pattern," he said. "We started to see dry periods work themselves in, and not much rain in the month of October. A lot of fire activity ramped up by the middle of October, and the fire behavior changed. It started to burn deep into the organic soil. And every single day we go without precipitation the situation gets worse."

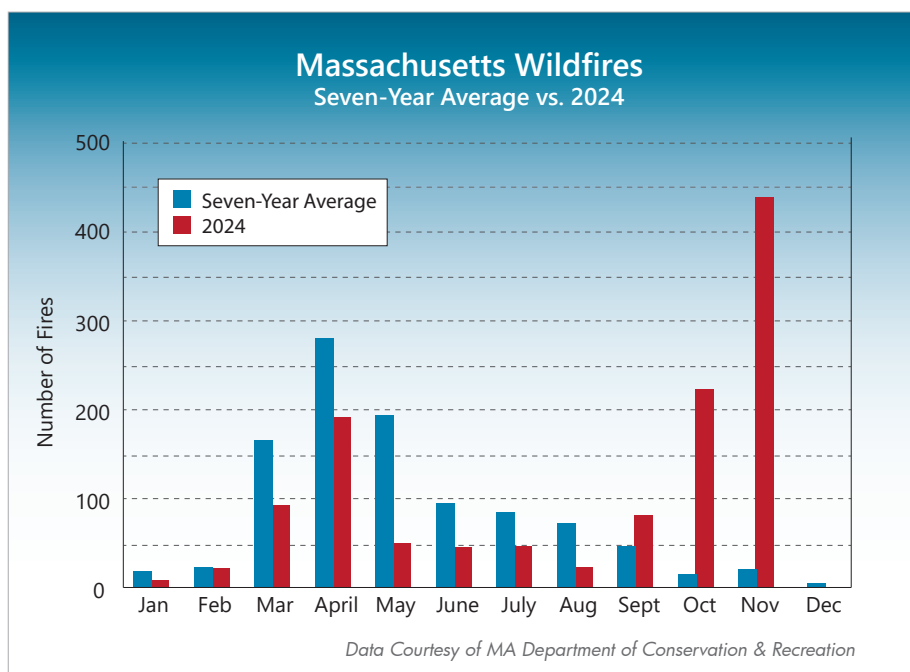
Chief Celino also addressed the toll that the fires were taking on firefighters and incident commanders alike.

"I'm concerned about firefighter safety," he said. "We work long operational periods into the night. Every day, the fatigue factor increases. And when the fatigue factor increases, decision-making becomes a challenge. . . . So keep the firefighters in your thoughts and prayers as we go through this."

Finally, in the third week of November, substantial rain began to move into Massachusetts—and for the first time in more than a month, there were no new fires reported in a 24-hour period. That rain didn't extinguish any of the larger fires, but it was the beginning of the end of the breakneck pace that had kept firefighters battling new ignitions every day. Fire expansion slowed dramatically and containment rates picked up through the remainder of the month.

On December 1, Chief Turner declared the Butternut Fire in Great Barrington under control, marking the unofficial end of the record-breaking statewide fire event. His message to the community was a commentary on one fire,

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Stephen D. Coan Fire Marshal Award recipient
Dep. Chief Edward Williams of Brockton.



Governor Maura Healey.



Medal of Valor recipient FF Sean Murphy.
Group Citation for Meritorious Conduct
recipient FF Justin Pike of Worcester.

35th Annual Firefighter of the Year Awards

Firefighters Recognized for Bravery, Heroism and Service



The 35th Annual Firefighter of the Year Awards recognized 139 firefighters from across Massachusetts.

On November 18, 2024, Governor Maura Healey, Secretary of Public Safety & Security Terrence Reidy, and State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine recognized outstanding acts of bravery, heroism and service at the 35th Annual Firefighter of the Year Awards ceremony.

“Over the past several weeks, Massachusetts residents have seen firefighters heroically working to protect their communities from an unprecedented wildfire season,” said Governor Healey. “But the truth is that our firefighters demonstrate brave action, selfless compassion, and deep commitment to their cities and towns every single day. The Firefighter of the Year Awards are a way to celebrate the heroes who never hesitate to answer a call for help.”

“The powerful stories behind these awards remind us of the danger that Massachusetts firefighters encounter every time they go to work,” said Lieutenant Governor Kim

Driscoll. “No matter what new challenge or unexpected hazard arises, they are always there to help. We know the sacrifices they and their loved ones make to perform this difficult, dangerous work, and we are deeply grateful.”

“The Firefighter of the Year Awards honor the extraordinary bravery and dedication of our firefighters, who protect and serve Massachusetts communities with unmatched skill and selflessness,” said Secretary Reidy. “These honorees exemplify the courage and professionalism that define the fire service. On behalf of the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, I extend heartfelt gratitude to these heroes and their families for their remarkable service and sacrifice.”

“Being a firefighter isn’t just a job—it’s a calling,” said State Fire Marshal Davine. “It puts us on ladders, ropes, hose lines, and rescue boats. It takes us to classrooms and

senior centers. The dozens of scenarios behind this year's awards reflect the depth and variety of the fire service mission. And the recipients all reflect extraordinary courage and determination to serve others regardless of the danger to themselves."

This year's awards were presented to 139 firefighters from 22 communities across Massachusetts. They reflect individual, group, and off-duty responses at two dozen emergency scenes and included four individual citations for meritorious conduct, 18 group citations, and 15 medals of valor for extraordinary rescues involving downed firefighters and trapped residents.

The Stephen D. Coan Fire Marshal's Award was presented to Deputy Chief Edward Williams of the Brockton Fire Department, recognizing his passionate advocacy for fire safety, prevention, and protection during a 35-year career in the fire service. Norman Knight Awards for Excellence in Community Service went to Cotuit Firefighters Christian Gardiner and Brian Lee for a community wellness program they created to support older adults and to Barnstable Fire Captain Brian Tyson for his leadership in Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention programming on Cape Cod.

Medals of Valor

- Falmouth: Lt. Timothy Bailey, FF Damian Boyar, FF Casey Reed
- Lowell: Lt. Daniel Eaton, FF Pannel Davis, FF Michael Santos
- Orange: Acting Capt. Timothy Matthews
- Worcester: Capt. Jessie Verdolino, Lt. Patrick Moran, FF David Brotherton, FF Steven Brotherton, FF Giuliano Conte, FF Kyle Green, FF Sean Murphy, FF Daniel Roy

Individual Citations for Meritorious Conduct

- Brockton: FF Joseph Hanley, FF Helio Lima
- Plymouth: FF Joshua Daubert
- Salisbury: Chief Scott Carrigan, Lt. Daniel Souliotis, FF/Paramedic Matthew Nichols, FF Christopher Stiles
- Worcester: FF Ryan Magee

Group Citations for Meritorious Conduct

- Amesbury: FF/Paramedic Justin Kane, FF/Paramedic Carl Rizzo
- Attleboro: Capt. Scott Godin, Capt. Steven Stellakis, FF Ryan Bielawa, FF Jessie Lee, FF Nicholas Mangonello, FF Jason Mayer, FF Brian Sweeney
- Chicopee: Dep. Chief Peter Jerusik, Lt. Joshua Provost, Lt. Matthew Zabik, FF Nathan Carvalho, FF Steven Laurin, FF Laura Rousseau, FF Benjamin Souza, FF Patrick Strepka
- Dartmouth Fire District 1: Asst. Chief Timothy Lancaster, Capt. Ryan Cabral, Capt. Jeffrey Costa, Lt. Joshua Ferreira, Lt. Skott Gerald Rebello
- Falmouth: Chief Timothy Smith, Dep. Chief Scott Thrasher, Dep. Chief Chad Absten, Capt. Ryan Gavin, Lt. Christopher Brown, Lt. Jeffry Waggett, Lt. Benjamin Wellington, FF Nathan Desrochers, FF Jake Hanafin, FF Randy Koslowsky, FF Barry Lima, Jr., FF Daniel Lopes, Jr., FF Christopher McEntee, FF Jeffrey Meau, FF Stephanie Melanson, FF Dallas O'Brien, FF Mackenzie Wyman, FF Nicholas Zimmerman
- Hyannis: FF Theodore Duchesney, FF Andrew Hennessy, FF/Paramedic Brendan Macdonald, FF Chester Coggeshall, FF Jeffrey Erving
- Lawrence: Lt. Joseph Murphy, FF Gabriel Fraval, FF Patrick Sweeney
- New Bedford: Acting Lt. Brandon Medeiros, FF Steven Holzer
- Newton: Capt. Karl "Gus" Svartstrom, Lt. Joseph DeLuca, FF Richard Busa, FF Ryan Doherty, FF Michael Pohlman, FF Lawrence Quinn, FF Andrew Sbordone, FF Joseph Yerardi
- North Attleboro: Asst. Chief/Paramedic George McKinnon, Superintendent/Paramedic James Kern, Lt./Paramedic Shawn Brillon, Lt./Paramedic Diego Dasilva, Lt./EMT Curt Chretien, FF /EMT Cameron Cornetta, FF/Paramedic Aaron Braga, FF/Paramedic Matt Schafer, FF/Paramedic Mike Smith

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Medal of Valor recipients Lt. Daniel Eaton, FF Pannel Davis, and FF Michael Santos of Lowell.



Medal of Valor recipient Acting Capt. Timothy Matthews. Group Citation for Meritorious Conduct recipients FF/Paramedic Nino Rodriguez, Lt./EMT Jason Rushford, and Lt. Phillip Dupell of Orange.



NFPA 3000 Update



The Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, Department of Fire Services, Municipal Police Training Committee, and C3 Pathways last summer delivered the Active Shooter Incident Management (ASIM) course to more than 60 public safety and emergency management professionals from across Massachusetts.

Over the course of three full days, subject matter experts presented case studies, delivered lecture-style presentations, and led numerous scenario-based exercises that started with Active Shooter/Hostile Event Response in a single location and escalated to complex coordinated attacks at multiple sites. Students drawn from leadership positions in law enforcement, the fire service, emergency management, and public safety telecommunications applied Incident Command System, National Incident Management System, Rescue Task Force, and related principles to simulated attacks as they unfolded.

In 2022, Public Safety and Security Secretary Terrence Reidy directed the state's public safety training academies to adopt NFPA 3000, *Standard for an Active Shooter/Hostile Event Response Program*, as the framework for all ASHER instruction. NFPA 3000 emphasizes integrated response by law enforcement and fire/rescue personnel to stop the

killing and stop the dying in an active shooter event. More than 1,000 Massachusetts police officers and firefighters from every rank have received responder- or instructor-level training. The ASIM course focused on a different need: training the incident commanders who will direct resources at a large-scale, long-term, or multi-location active shooter event.

The ASIM students were primarily officer-level personnel representing 20 Massachusetts fire departments, 22 police departments, five Public Safety Answering Points, and three emergency management agencies, along with public information officers from EOPSS, DFS, and State Police. The scenarios ran just as a real incident would, with telecommunicators dispatching police and fire to an evolving incident. The first arriving law enforcement personnel used a computer-based simulation to join contact teams and engage the shooter(s). As law enforcement and fire/rescue supervisors arrived, incident command was transferred and unified command was established. This allowed the law enforcement branch to coordinate tactical, perimeter, and investigative assets side-by-side with the medical branch as it coordinated triage, treatment, and transport operations.

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Enhancing Search and Rescue

The Role of Drones in Locating People with Special Needs

In the Search and Rescue (SAR) world, every second counts—especially when locating a vulnerable child or adult. The challenge becomes even more significant when the missing person has special needs, as they may exhibit behaviors that place them at greater risk. The Department of Fire Services' Special Operations team can deliver drones with certified pilots that can be a game-changer in these critical situations.

Any wide-area search poses a challenge, but certain circumstances significantly raise the stakes. Children with special needs, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder, often display patterns of behavior that can complicate search efforts. Wandering is one such behavior that can pose major challenges for searchers and rescuers, and the danger can be exacerbated near bodies of water: according to researchers at the Center for Injury Epidemiology and Prevention at Columbia University, children with autism are 160 times more likely to die from drowning than children overall. Children who are nonverbal, or who are afraid to call out, will be much harder to find.

Older adults are also at risk. According to the Alzheimer's Association, about 60% of patients with Alzheimer's or dementia will wander at least once during their illness. Critical wandering—a phenomenon in which patients are unaware of their location—is particularly dangerous. Wandering into a wooded area, even one near home, poses a serious risk of falls, injuries, exposure, hypothermia, and drowning. One study found that only about half of

wandering patients found after 24 hours survived.

Traditional ground search teams will always be part of the SAR operation, but can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, particularly in vast, remote, or hard-to-reach areas like lakes, rivers, and dense woods. In circumstances like these, drone technology offers a safe, rapid, efficient tool for locating the at-risk subject.

How Drones Enhance Search and Rescue Operations

Rapid Deployment

Drones can be deployed quickly, often within minutes of arriving on the scene. This speed is crucial when a child is missing, as the first few hours are critical in SAR operations. With a drone, search teams can quickly cover large areas that would take hours or even days to search on foot.

Aerial Perspective

Drones are a force multiplier for any SAR operation. The aerial view provided by drones can cover a wider area than any ground team, providing real-time video footage that allows search teams to quickly scan areas for signs of the missing child. This is particularly beneficial in rural or wooded areas where visibility on the ground is limited.

Infrared and Thermal Imaging

DFS drones are equipped with infrared or thermal imaging cameras. These tools are especially useful during night searches or in densely wooded areas where visual identification is challenging. The thermal imaging capabilities can detect body heat, helping to spot a missing person who is afraid, nonverbal, or badly injured.

Water Surveillance

Given the tendency of some children with special needs to be drawn to water, drones can be indispensable for monitoring lakes, ponds, and rivers. They can quickly scan these areas, identifying potential hazards and even detecting the presence of a person in the water. This allows rescue teams to prioritize high-risk areas and respond more swiftly.

Cost-Effective and Resource-Efficient

Drones are a cost-effective addition to SAR operations. They require fewer personnel to operate, reducing the overall cost and time spent in search efforts. They also reduce the risk to search personnel by allowing them to operate from safer locations while the drone covers hazardous environments from above. DFS drone units are deployed at no cost to the local fire department.



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January is Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month

New Eligibility Criteria Make Screening More Accessible

Occupational cancer is the leading cause of death in the fire service, and January is Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month. Firefighters are more likely to develop cancer, to develop it at younger ages, and to receive a late diagnosis. To address this grave risk to firefighter health, the Department of Fire Services delivers a robust cancer awareness, prevention, and early detection program for firefighters through the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy.

The *Taking Action Against Cancer in the Fire Service* presentation details the scope of cancer's effect on the fire service, details the best practices for reducing occupational risk factors, and supports them with current research. The program was developed by the Firefighter Cancer Support Network and has been updated to include information on early cancer detection through heightened awareness to subtle changes in baseline health and making use of cancer screenings.

Taking Action Against Cancer in the Fire Service is available both online and at local fire departments: you can check the current schedule on the MFA's Learning Management System or request a delivery by submitting a course request form. Visit www.mass.gov/dfs, search for *MFA Course Request*, and use course code "422."

The best way to deal with cancer is to prevent it, but the nature of a firefighter's job means they can't avoid every carcinogenic exposure. The worst cancer diagnosis is a late one—so early detection through cancer screening is vitally important. Early cancer detection leads to early cancer treatment and better outcomes in survivability and quality of life.

DFS offers a wide array of cancer screenings to active and retired call, volunteer, and career firefighters free of charge. To increase access to these potentially life-saving tests, the MFA recently updated the eligibility criteria:

Shauna Rice, Dermatology Resident and Volunteer

Dermatology resident and former EMT Shauna Rice explains the motivations for her career and for her time volunteering to screen firefighters for skin cancer with the Department of Fire Services.

My father was a firefighter in Marblehead for 30 years. He retired as a Captain. Most kids idolize their dads growing up. I did, and still do. From the day he placed his oversized, ashy helmet on my head as I sat in the front of the firetruck pretending to be him, I knew he was more than just my hero. He was the person whose unwavering dedication to service, despite the risks to his own health and safety, first inspired my desire to care for others.

Visiting my father at the fire station over many years, I witnessed his fellow firefighters develop devastating cancers and other health conditions from accumulated smoke and toxic exposures on the job. My interest in medicine grew as I pondered this link between a person's environment and their health, and how I could care for the heroes who dedicate their lives to others.

Initially, I became an EMT. After working in the field for a while, I entered medical school and am now a second-year Dermatology resident. I've seen firsthand how a person's environment impacts their skin conditions, and it inspires me to create better care for vulnerable populations such as our firefighters.

My goal as a physician is to build a clinical career that incorporates public service and advocacy. Organizing and volunteering for firefighter skin cancer screenings now and in the future is a major part of that. Caring for those who put others first will always be my priority.



Retired Captain Daniel Rice with his daughter Shauna Rice.

Chicopee Fire Captain Zachary Vozella's Story

Back on the Job After Successful Surgery

Captain Zachary Vozella of the Chicopee Fire Department wasn't experiencing any symptoms when he signed up for a free ultrasound through the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy, but he knew that firefighters are at higher risk of developing occupational cancer. This is his story.

I read about the screening in an email and it seemed like a good idea. I met the criteria. I'm 43, I've been on the job for 12 years, and I knew the screenings were available through the Academy. So I figured, why not?

I contacted the MFA, filled out a questionnaire, and got a phone number for Mercy Medical Center in Springfield, where I set up an appointment. It was a very easy process. Mercy did my intake over the phone, set up the appointment, and I showed up and did it. It was totally painless.

I got the results the same day through Mercy's patient portal. I was shocked. They said the ultrasound showed something concerning, a neoplasm, and that I should get it checked out. I was scared. It was nerve-racking. I got an appointment at my doctor's office the next day.

A week later, I had a CT scan and saw a specialist. He told me it was cancer based

on the imaging and behavior of the growth. He told me I was really lucky I had the screening when I did. I had no symptoms, and I probably wouldn't have had symptoms until it grew and spread and started causing problems. It could have ended up killing me.

They got me in pretty quickly. I had surgery to remove my left kidney on July 30, about four weeks after the screening. The pathology report after the surgery showed the cancer was stage 1B chromophobe renal cell carcinoma. I'm so grateful for the support I got from my family and the Chicopee Fire Department during this ordeal.

I'm back at work now and I urge my brother and sister firefighters to recognize the risk of occupational cancer, discuss the risk with doctors, and put your health front and center.



I found that many doctors are not aware of the dangers we face, as far as cancer goes. So many people I've talked to asked why I even got checked. They have no idea what we're exposed to, and they're not going to know unless we talk about it. So it's really important to be an advocate for your health. You have to take the initiative. Sign up for the free cancer screenings today!

For an **ultrasound, CT scan, or PSA blood test**, you must meet these criteria:

- Be a Massachusetts resident;
- Be at least 40 years old, *or* have been a Massachusetts firefighter for at least 10 years;
- Have attended a skin cancer screening *or* a *Taking Action Against Cancer in the Fire Service* class in the past three years;
- Provide the MFA with the name, phone number, and fax of your primary care provider (PCP);
- Answer questions truthfully; and
- Electronically sign a waiver.

For a **mammogram** you must meet these criteria:

- Be a Massachusetts resident;
- Be at least 35 years old, no matter how many years in the fire service;
- Have attended an MFA skin cancer screening *or* a *Taking Action Against Cancer in the Fire Service* class in the past three years;

- Provide the MFA with the name, phone number, and fax of your primary care provider (PCP);
- Answer questions truthfully; and
- Electronically sign a waiver.

After approval, you make an appointment with our vendor and print a voucher from the LMS to give to the vendor. The cancer screenings are provided at no cost to the firefighter or their fire department.

The leadership and staff at the MFA, DFS, and Executive Office of Public Safety and Security realize that increased cancer awareness, prevention, and early detection through increased participation in cancer screenings will result in fewer firefighter cancer deaths. Take advantage of these free, lifesaving benefits—make a plan today and get screened!



Massachusetts Honors Local Hero

on 75th Anniversary of Montana Wildfire Disaster

On August 5, 1949, 15 smokejumpers and a fire guard on the ground set out to fight a major wildfire in Montana. Only three survived.

Thirteen others lost their lives fighting the Mann Gulch Fire, a deadly inferno on a blazing mountainside in what is now Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest. According to historical reports, the group was overtaken when the fire suddenly spread below them and raced uphill. One of those who perished was Joseph Baron Sylvia, a native of Plymouth, Massachusetts. On August 4, 2024, Sylvia was honored in a memorial ceremony at St. Joseph's Cemetery in Plymouth.

Sylvia was born on October 10, 1924, and grew up in Plymouth. When he graduated from high school in 1942, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. He served in the Pacific during World War II and remained in the Marine Corps Reserve while attending the University of Minnesota, where he majored in forestry. Sylvia trained as a smoke-jumper in the summer of 1948 in Missoula, Montana. It was his second season as a smokejumper when the Mann Gulch disaster occurred. Sylvia is survived by his younger brother, Alton, and a son.

About 30 people attended the Plymouth ceremony, which was held by the National Smokejumper Association in honor of his sacrifice and that of the dozen other men who perished. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts presented the Association with a citation signed by Gov.

Maura Healey, recognizing Sylvia's connection to the local community and honoring his service and sacrifice on behalf of our nation.

Among the ceremony participants was Eastern Region cooperative fire specialist Helene F. Hochholzer, who served as an official representative for the region.

"I was honored and humbled to be there," Hochholzer said. "The story of Mann Gulch is well known in the wildland firefighting community, and much has been learned from the events of that day. It changed the way the agency approached wildfire suppression. Every time there is any wildland fire fatality, it reminds us of the inherent risk in fighting wildfires."

The Massachusetts ceremony was one of 13 Mann Gulch memorials honoring the fallen firefighters that took place across seven states in August 2024.



Participants at the memorial for Joseph Sylvia on August 4, 2024, in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Photo courtesy of Roger Archibald.

Unprecedented Fall Fire Season, *continued from page 3*



but much of it applied to the entire Commonwealth's experience.

"The Great Barrington Fire Department would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our members, the mutual aid companies that worked the fire lines, and covered our town and other towns while their resources were committed to this fire," he wrote on the

Great Barrington Fire Department's Facebook page. "We also want to thank all the agencies that sent personnel and resources. Your work containing this fire was unprecedented. We urge you to look back and reflect on what you accomplished and be proud. At the same time none of this would have been as successful without the support of all those who stepped up to ensure that the boots on the ground had all that they needed. This ranged from the management of the teams and communications to ensuring that the firefighters were nourished and hydrated."

Massachusetts will head into its traditional fire season this spring. The fire risk will depend on many factors, not the least of which is this winter's precipitation.

Suddenly, a few blizzards don't sound so bad.

Firefighter of the Year, continued from page 5

- Orange: Acting Capt. Timothy Matthews, Lt. Phillip Dupell, Lt./EMT Jason Rushford, FF/Paramedic Nino Rodriguez
- Springfield: Capt. Angel Caquias, Lt. Craig Fallon, Lt. William LaPalm, FF Anthony Basile, FF Melquan Bland, FF Luis Cruz, FF Dominic Grilli, FF Raushaun James, FF Korry Laboy, FF Jason McClendon, FF Christian Ramos, FF Eric Xavier Smith
- Westborough: Lt. Christopher Dubois, FF Sean Doherty, FF David Dutton, FF Patrick Sheridan, FF Chris Weinwurm
- Whitman: FF Zachary Baldwin, FF Russell Lucas, FF/Paramedic Jerry Thompson, FF/Paramedic Justin Everson, FF/Paramedic Joseph Lasko
- Woburn: Lt. Robert Gerety, FF Shawn Courtney, FF Douglas Masse
- Worcester: Lt. Matthew Kane, Lt. John Ushinski, Lt. Patrick Chviruk, Lt. Matthew Johnson, Temp. Lt. Brian O'Connor, FF Michael Berube, FF Timothy Brotherton, FF Patrick Flibbert, FF Matthew Foley, FF Timothy Fontaine, FF Dana Ford, FF Edwin Paulino, FF Andrejs Sterns, Lt. Patrick Loughnane, FF Jeremy Horan, FF Justin Pike, FF Jordan Rutherford



Stephen D. Coan Fire Marshal Award

- Brockton: Dep. Chief Edward Williams

Norman Knight Award for Excellence in Community Service

- Barnstable: Capt. Brian Tyson
- Cotuit: FF/Paramedic Christian Gardiner, FF/Paramedic Brian Lee

Since their inception in 1990, the Firefighter of the Year Awards have grown from a simple ceremony to the premier annual event for the Massachusetts fire service, honoring the Commonwealth's firefighters and recognizing their invaluable contributions to all our communities.

NFPA 3000 Update, continued from page 6

As the simulations grew, students planned and conducted press briefings, established a reunification branch, and more. The final scenario put students to a challenging test with a complex coordinated attack involving explosives and gunmen at multiple major transport hubs.

Response to the ASIM course was overwhelmingly positive, and based on feedback DFS will offer it again in 2025. In the meantime, the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) Center offers a four-hour Active Attack Incident Management e-Learning course among other ASHER-related trainings. Visit <https://elearning.alerrt.org/course> to learn more.

Massachusetts' position as a national leader in state-wide ASHER preparation and training was acknowledged by two outside organizations last year. In September, DFS ASHER director Scott Cluett and Massachusetts Firefighting Academy Multi-Agency Public Safety Program Coordinator Rich Craven delivered "Active Shooter/Hostile Event Response (ASHER): Introduction to NFPA 3000" at the EMS & FIRE PRO Expo in Connecticut. In

October, Deputy State Fire Marshal Maribel Fournier was joined by EOPSS Senior Advisor for Law Enforcement Jeff Farnsworth and ALERRT Assistant Director John Curnutt to present "The Adoption, Implementation, and Future of ASHER Training in Massachusetts" at the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference in Boston.

Finally, the Department of Fire Services and the Municipal Police Training Committee continue to deliver responder- and instructor-level training for fire/rescue and law enforcement personnel in the Active Attack Integrated Response course, which is consistent with NFPA 3000 principles. Courses were held in more than a dozen cities and towns across the Commonwealth last year, and more are planned for 2025. Classes can be held in any community, ideally in an unoccupied building with classroom-style rooms and wide hallways. Closed or vacant schools have worked very well. If you or your department are interested in hosting a class, visit www.mass.gov/dfs and search for *MFA Course Request*. Fill out the request form using course code "33B" to bring this vital training to your city, town, or region!

West Brookfield

On March 1, 2018, West Brookfield Police conducted a well-being check at a home on Old Warren Road and found the lifeless bodies of Sara Bermudez and her three young children, Madison, James, and Michael. They had been brutally murdered and there was evidence of a past fire. Among many other investigators, State Police assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office responded to the scene. They determined that diesel fuel had been used to start a fire that later self-extinguished. A suspect was later charged and indicted for the murders.

On November 8, 2024, Worcester County District Attorney Joseph D. Early's office called Sgt. Gregory Spahl and Trooper David Fleming as prosecution witnesses in a four-week trial. They testified to the origin and cause of the fire, the alert of an ignitable liquid detection K9 at the scene, and the testing of samples from that area. The trial ended a week later with convictions on four counts of first-degree murder, armed burglary, aggravated rape, and arson.

North Andover

On July 1, 2024, an explosion with property damage was reported at the Village Green apartment complex in North Andover. Based on the investigation into the incident, local officials identified the person responsible as a resident with prior convictions for possessing firearms, explosives, and narcotics.

On July 2, members of the State Police Bomb Squad assisted North Andover officials with the execution of a search warrant at the suspect's home. After the suspect surrendered to a SWAT team, bomb technicians donned the appropriate personal protective equipment and entered his apartment. They located precursor materials, containment vessels, explosive powders, explosive devices, numerous firearms, and other grave hazards. Members of the DFS Joint Hazard Incident Response Team, State Police Fire Investigation Unit, ATF, and others responded to assist in documenting the evidence and safely disposing of excess energetic materials.

On December 11, the suspect pleaded guilty in federal court to unlawful possession of a machine gun, unlawful possession of explosives, and being a felon in possession of firearms and ammunition. He faces sentencing in April, 2025.

Yarmouth

In the early morning hours of August 1, 2024, the Yarmouth Fire Department responded to a residential fire with one person trapped. Firefighters observed smoke on arrival

and made entry to search for the missing party. They located and rescued that party, who was transported in critical condition. A second occupant escaped and was also transported. Firefighters located the seat of the fire in the basement and extinguished it with no further injuries.

The investigation by Yarmouth Fire, Yarmouth Police, and State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office determined that the fire had been intentionally set. Continued investigation identified the suspect, who was arrested and arraigned on December 19. She was sent for a mental health evaluation and is being prosecuted by Cape and Islands District Attorney Robert J. Galibois' office.

Peabody

On the night of August 9, 2023, the Peabody Fire Department responded to a Lowell Street apartment building for a fire that displaced all residents and injured two of them. State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office and Peabody Police supported the investigation, identifying multiple points of origin within one apartment. An ignitable liquid detection K9 alerted to accelerants inside and outside that unit. Based on additional evidence gathered in the investigation, one suspect was identified, arrested, and charged with arson and domestic violence offenses.

In November 2024, Trooper Brett Blanciforti and Sgt. Roland Cormier were key witnesses at the defendant's trial. After a week of evidence and testimony led by Essex County District Attorney Paul F. Tucker's office, a Superior Court jury found the defendant guilty of arson of a dwelling, assault with intent to murder, kidnapping, and other offenses.

Bellingham

The Bellingham Fire Department responded to a report of an explosion with injuries at a gas station on South Main Street on the night of August 30, 2024. On arrival, they located four contractors with burn injuries that ranged from minor to severe.

The investigation by Bellingham Fire, Bellingham Police, and State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office revealed that the contractors were using a reciprocating saw to replace a motor and pump inside an underground gas tank. Sparks from the saw ignited gasoline vapors that caused a flash fire, injuring the workers but not spreading further.

Code compliance officers from the Department of Fire Services also responded. Their review found that the gas

station was in compliance with all requirements. They also found that the contractors, who had been cutting metal with a tool that generated sparks, had not obtained the necessary hot work permit. The company was issued a notice of violation.

Millbury

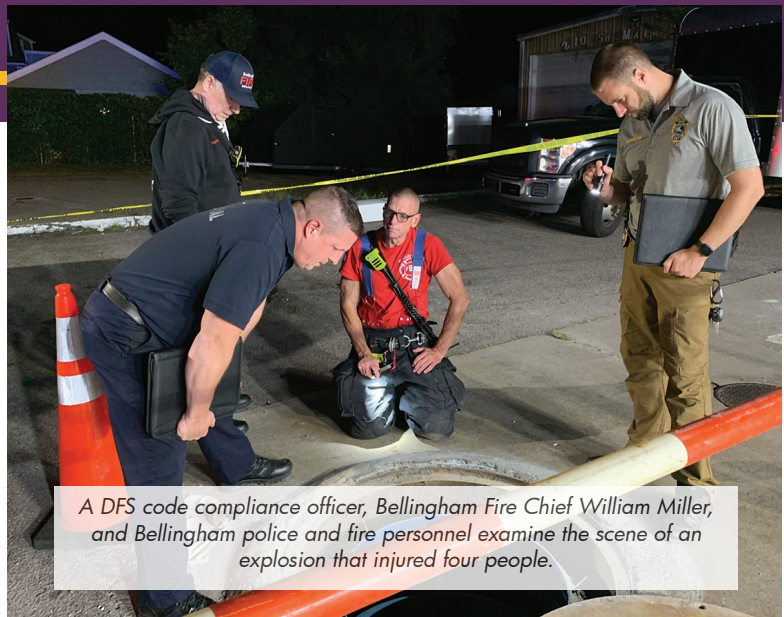
On the night of October 26, 2024, just as the fall wildfire season was ramping up and surface fuels were extremely receptive to ignition, a State trooper observed a brush fire off the Blackstone River Bikeway near Route 146. After attempting to extinguish the fire, the trooper observed an unresponsive woman in the area. The Millbury Fire Department responded and fully extinguished the fire.

State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office responded to support the origin and cause investigation. With local officials, they determined that the scene had been an encampment used by homeless people. They identified multiple potential causes, and while they could not narrow them down to a single cause they determined that the fire was not intentionally set.

The victim, a 49-year-old woman who was homeless, was pronounced dead at the scene. Her death was the only fatality associated with the fall wildfire season.

Plainville

At about 5:15 am on November 18, 2024, the Plainville Fire Department responded to a Messenger Street apartment



A DFS code compliance officer, Bellingham Fire Chief William Miller, and Bellingham police and fire personnel examine the scene of an explosion that injured four people.

building for a report of a fire with residents possibly trapped. Firefighters contained the fire to one apartment, but smoke and water caused significant damage to the rest of the units. Fortunately, a secondary egress had been added to the second and third floors of the building in recent years, a change that made a significant and positive difference in the outcome of the event.

The investigation by Plainville Fire, Plainville Police, and State Police assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office determined that the fire had been intentionally set. Based on an examination of the scene and witness interviews, investigators further identified the sole occupant of the fire-damaged apartment as the person responsible. She was soon located in North Attleborough and charged with arson and related offenses. A judge ordered her held for a mental health evaluation.

Enhancing Search and Rescue with Drones, *continued from page 7*

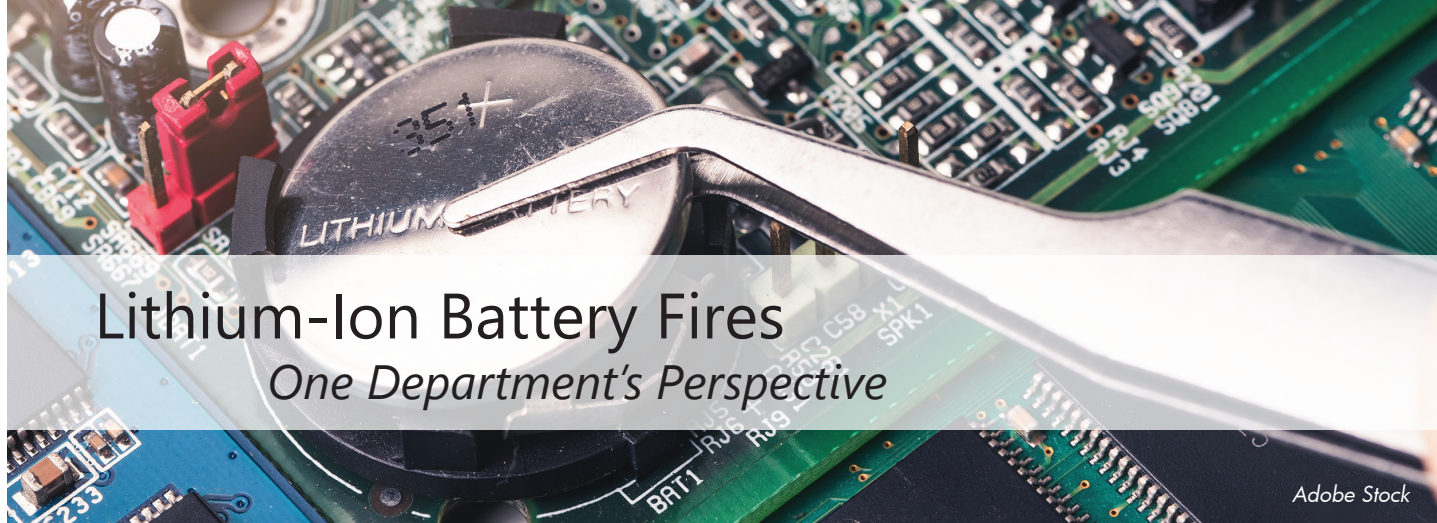
Real-Time Data Sharing

Drones provide live video feeds that can be shared with multiple agencies and command centers—like the DFS Incident Support Units—in real time. View screens can be set up at an impromptu command post, ensuring that incident commanders have up-to-date information no matter where they are, improving coordination and decision-making.

As drone technology advances, its role in search and rescue operations will only grow. DFS is committed to expanding our drone program and providing the Massachusetts fire service with access to the latest support tools. Local fire chiefs should feel welcome to request these assets anytime—but especially when they can help locate a missing person with special needs or vulnerabilities.

For immediate Special Operations response, call 508-820-2000. You will be asked for basic information on the requested resources, the location where they're needed, and contact information. For more information and to book resources for scheduled events, please call the Special Operations Office at 978-567-3171.





Lithium-Ion Battery Fires

One Department's Perspective

Adobe Stock

Lithium-Ion batteries are everywhere, powering everything from personal electronic devices to full-size electric vehicles to grid level energy storage systems. As their use has grown, so have the hazards—in Massachusetts about 130 lithium-ion battery fires were reported between January and December of 2024.

The Brockton Fire Department was an early leader in researching the risks, identifying mitigation strategies, and providing direction to its members in handling lithium-ion battery incidents. Through State Fire Marshal Jon Davine and the Department of Fire Services, Chief Brian Nardelli recently shared the department's Lithium-Ion Battery Standard Operating Guidelines with fire chiefs across the state to help other fire service professionals understand and confront this emerging issue.

"Our goal was to provide clear direction to every one of our members to provide for their safety and for successful incident mitigation," Chief Nardelli said. "Deputy Chiefs Kevin Galligan and Jeffrey Marchetti quickly realized that lithium-ion battery incidents require the resources and cooperation of more than just the fire department. Our SOG includes the Department of Public Works for storage and recycling of batteries, as well as the Police Department and local tow companies for towing and storage of damaged vehicles."

The Standard Operating Guidelines address prevention, dispatch, response, mitigation and incident termination. As with every incident, it all begins with dispatch. Departments should provide dispatchers with an understanding and guidance on how to handle these emergencies. Unlike every other incident, incident termination is a serious challenge with lithium-ion batteries. These devices present a significant rekindle and health hazard, so they cannot be simply discarded or left on scene.

In cooperation with Brockton Police, the Brockton Fire Department established strict guidelines for towing and storing damaged electric vehicles. The fire official on scene determines if the electric vehicle poses a continuing fire hazard following a fire or collision. If the vehicle poses

About 130 lithium-ion battery fires were reported in Massachusetts between January and December of 2024.

an ongoing fire hazard due to potential battery damage, it is towed while covered with a fire blanket and an engine company follows it to the tow lot, where the vehicle is stored under fire department guidelines.

In cooperation with the Department of Public Works, which was already collecting and recycling end-of-life batteries, the Brockton Fire Department established a joint protocol for emergency overpacking and storage of lithium-ion devices. Firefighters perform emergency overpacking of damaged, defective, recalled batteries at the incident scene. The device is then transported to the isolation area at the DPW, and the DPW provides replacement emergency overpack materials to the fire department. The DPW then has the option and ability to recover the costs of materials from the device owner.

An important consideration for incident commanders is understanding when the incident is beyond their scope. Utilizing the Department of Environmental Protection lithium-ion certified contractor list should be considered when a department is dealing with more batteries than they can handle. Establishing a continuous fire watch and maintaining control of the scene is necessary.

Best practices for resolving lithium-ion battery fires are continuously changing as we learn more about the devices and their associated hazards. It is important for every department to provide their members with clear guidelines to safely and effectively mitigate these incidents. This process may require the participation of multiple agencies across different disciplines, so establishing roles and responsibilities ahead of time is essential to successful incident mitigation.

For a copy of the Brockton Fire Department's Lithium-Ion Battery SOG, contact Brockton Deputy Fire Chief Kevin Galligan at kmgalligan@cobma.us or Department of Fire Services PIO Jake Wark at jake.wark@mass.gov.

Chelmsford's Newest Firefighter

Trains in PFAS-Free Gear

The Chelmsford Fire Department's newest firefighter is believed to be the first to complete the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy in a set of gear manufactured without PFAS, the "forever chemicals" that can increase firefighters' risk of developing occupational cancer.

Firefighter Alec Racioppi graduated from the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy's Career Recruit Training Program on December 20. He was one of 33 recruits from 17 local fire departments to complete the 10-week foundational course at the MFA's Stow campus.

"We're very proud of Alec and excited to welcome him back to Chelmsford," said Chelmsford Chief Gary Ryan.

Like all recruits who train at the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy, Firefighter Racioppi studied and practiced for a wide range of emergencies from carbon monoxide leaks to vehicle crashes. He learned to handle and maintain self-contained breathing apparatus, hoses, and power tools. Through classroom instruction and practical exercises, he learned the science of fire behavior and modern fire suppression tactics from experienced firefighters who also serve as Academy instructors.

Unlike his fellow students, however, Firefighter Racioppi trained for and fought his first fires in turnout gear that does not contain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS. These substances are known as "forever chemicals" because they do not break down in the environment or the human body. PFAS are used in a variety of consumer products, as well as in most structural firefighting gear because of their ability to withstand high heat and repel penetration by water and oil. In recent years, they have been linked to increased cancer risk in humans, and cancer is the most common cause of death in the fire service.

So before he went to the Academy, the Chelmsford Fire Department issued FF Racioppi a set of Morning

Pride TAILS gear with a Stedair Clear moisture barrier that does not contain PFAS.

"This is an investment in firefighter health and safety," said Chief Ryan. "As we come to learn more about PFAS in the fire service, it's become clear that we're all going to transition away from products that contain it. These men and women have signed up to do a dangerous, demanding job. Hazards are part of the job, but occupational cancer shouldn't be one of them."

On August 15, 2024, Governor Maura Healey signed legislation that will phase out the use of PFAS in firefighting gear sold in Massachusetts. Effective January 1, 2025, manufacturers and sellers of personal protective equipment for firefighters containing PFAS chemicals will be required to notify the purchaser that the equipment contains PFAS chemicals, the reason the equipment contains PFAS chemicals, and the specific PFAS chemicals in the product. Effective January 1, 2027, manufacturers and sellers will be prohibited from knowingly selling gear containing PFAS chemicals or products that break down into PFAS chemicals that are intentionally added during manufacturing.



From the Fire Marshal, *continued from page 1*

next to a Christmas tree about one minute after the first flames were visible. Then they watched as an identical fire in an identical room grew to engulf the tree and furniture before going to flashover in two minutes and 15 seconds. Fortunately, Waltham Fire had an engine company on hand to extinguish the blaze immediately. Even in a best-case scenario in the real world, it could have been another minute or two before firefighters arrived and stretched a

line into the home. The fire would have spread, property would have been destroyed, and any occupant who couldn't escape immediately—such as those with limited mobility—would likely be deceased.

We know this because similar scenarios play out over and over again in Massachusetts every year. Of the 36 men, women, and children who died in residential fires in 2024, not one of them was protected by home fire sprinklers.

29th Annual Fire & Life Safety Education Conference and Educator of the Year Award

The Department of Fire Services held the 29th Public Fire & Life Safety Education Conference September 18 and 19, 2024, at the Wellsworth Hotel in Southbridge, Massachusetts. About 250 fire and life safety educators, fire prevention officers, teachers, care specialists, and others gathered to share knowledge, build partnerships, and recognize the Fire and Life Safety Educator of the Year.

The conference included workshops and presentations covering topics from safety for older adults to modernizing all-hazards incident data with the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS). Attendees heard from speakers including Dan Wells, president of C.A.T.C.H. Corp, who discussed behavioral observation as a tool to prevent violent attacks; Tammy Pozerycki, an educator striving to reduce the stigma among first responders seeking mental health and support services; and many more.

Fire & Life Safety Educator of the Year Award

The Fire & Life Safety Educator of the Year Award honors an individual or a team for their commitment to making our world safer from fire and other preventable injuries. It recognizes those who have shown excellence in educating their community and demonstrated outstanding leadership, teamwork, creativity, and perseverance.

This year's award was presented to Holliston Fire Chief Michael R. Cassidy, recognizing nearly three decades in fire and life safety education. "Chief Cassidy has been a passionate advocate for fire safety education, especially when it comes to children and other vulnerable residents," said State Fire Marshal Davine. "He is a local, regional, and national leader in community risk reduction, a reliable



Back row, left to right: Millis Firefighter Jason "Otis" Wilson; DFS Fire Data and Public Education Coordinator Sheryl Hedlund; Barnstable Captain Brian Tyson; Bridgewater Firefighter Jason Anacki; Holliston Fire Chief Michael R. Cassidy; Bridgewater Firefighter Billy Lieb.; and Becky Saucier of Mullein Hill Christian Academy. Front row: Billerica Lt. Sean O'Neil, Firefighter James Sorenson, and Captain William Paskiewicz.

contributor to our annual conference, and one of the most effective, experienced, and respected leaders in our field."

Also nominated for the annual award were:

- Captain Brian Tyson of the Barnstable Fire Department
- Captain William Paskiewicz of the Billerica Fire Department
- Team Billerica from the Town of Billerica
- Captain Jason Malinowski of the Boxborough Fire Department
- The Seniors First Program of the Bridgewater Fire Department
- Firefighter Jason "Otis" Wilson of Millis Fire Rescue
- Ms. Becky Saucier of Mullein Hill Christian Academy in Lakeville

Presenters Wanted for Conference 2025

DFS is recruiting workshop presenters for the 2025 conference. Are you or someone you know interested in sharing your knowledge and experience with fire and life safety educators from across the Commonwealth? Visit www.mass.gov/dfs and search for *Annual Fire and Life Safety Education Conference* to submit your proposal.



Winter Home Heating Safety Resources

for Fire & Life Safety Educators

Home heating equipment is the leading source of carbon monoxide incidents and the second-leading cause of residential fires. Winter is a great time to educate your community about home heating safety and fire prevention.

Massachusetts fire departments reported nearly 6,000 fires related to home heating equipment in the past five years. These fires claimed eight lives, caused 139 injuries to residents and firefighters, and contributed to more than \$42 million in property losses. Fires that began with solid fuel heating equipment such as fireplaces, wood stoves, and their chimneys represent about half the total, while gas, oil, and electric appliances made up the other half.

Carbon monoxide is a hazard all year long, but especially in the winter when heating equipment is in regular use. Firefighters encountered carbon monoxide hazards at more than 24,000 calls over the past five years, most of which took place in the colder months.

Fire and Life Safety Education Tips to Teach

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

- Install smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms on every level of a home.
- Test alarms monthly to be sure they're working.
- Replace alkaline batteries twice a year when you change your clocks.
- Replace smoke alarms after 10 years and CO alarms after 5, 7, or 10 years depending on the make and model.

Fireplaces, Wood Stoves, and Pellet Stoves

Solid fuel heating appliances including fireplaces and wood stoves accounted for a rising share of home heating fires in recent years.

- Use only dry, seasoned wood in fireplaces and wood stoves.
- Have chimneys and flues professionally inspected and cleaned each year.
- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from heat sources.
- Use a fireplace screen or keep a wood stove door closed to prevent sparks and embers from escaping.
- After a fire is out, let the ashes cool and shovel them into a metal canister. Douse them with water, cover them with a lid, and place the canister outside on the ground away from the building—not in the trash.

Natural Gas and Oil Heat

- Furnaces, water heaters, and oil burners with pilot lights need a three-foot “circle of safety,” clear of anything that can catch fire.
- Don't store gasoline, painting supplies, or other flammable products in the home. Their vapors can be ignited by a pilot light.
- Have heating systems serviced annually by a licensed professional.
- If you smell gas, don't use any electrical switches or devices. Get out, stay out, and call 9-1-1 right away.

Space Heaters

- Keep space heaters at least three feet from curtains, bedding, and anything else that can burn.
- Plug directly into a wall socket, not an extension cord or a power strip.
- Turn off when you leave a room or go to sleep.
- Purchase a space heater that was tested and labeled by a nationally recognized testing laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL) or Intertek (ETL).
- New space heaters should have an automatic shut-off switch that turns the device off if it tips over.
- Never use portable propane or kerosene heaters.

Heating Assistance

Residents struggling to pay for heating bills or maintenance may be eligible for assistance through the Massachusetts home energy assistance program (HEAP). HEAP helps residents pay their heating bills or maintain a heating system. Encourage all residents to explore eligibility for this free program and apply for assistance: visit www.mass.gov/dfs and search for *Home Energy Assistance*.

Resources for Fire and Life Safety Educators

DFS offers a wealth of home heating safety information to help local fire departments educate their communities. Visit www.mass.gov/keepwarmkeepsafe for safety tips, PSAs, and printable flyers in seven different languages.



KEEP WARM KEEP SAFE

Winter Home Heating Safety
Mantenerse Caliente, Mantenerse Seguro

Massachusetts Firefighting Academy Graduations



Career Recruit Firefighter Training

In the 50-day Career Recruit Firefighter Training program, students receive classroom training in all basic firefighter skills. They practice first under non-fire conditions and then during controlled fire conditions. To graduate, students must demonstrate proficiency in life safety, search and rescue, ladder operations, water supply, pump operation, and fire attack. Fire attack operations range from multiple-floor or multiple-room structural fires to mailbox fires. Upon successful completion of the Recruit Program, all students have met the national standards of National Fire Protection Association 1001 and are certified to the level of Firefighter I and II, and Hazardous Materials First Responder Operational Level by the Massachusetts Fire Training Council, which is accredited by the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications. Training is held at the Stow headquarters of DFS, the Springfield campus, and the Bridgewater campus.

Class #323

On August 30, 2024, members of Career Recruit Firefighter Class #323 graduated at the Stow Campus. The 34 graduates represent the 17 departments of Andover, Attleboro, Belmont, Devens, Dudley, Fitchburg, Maynard, Methuen, Norfolk, North Andover, Northborough, Orleans, Revere, Salem, Shrewsbury, Tewksbury, and Westborough.

Class #BW31

On September 20, 2024, members of Career Recruit Firefighter Class #BW31 graduated at the Bridgewater Campus. The 13 graduates represent the 10 departments of Canton, Franklin, Hull, Kingston, Mansfield, Norton, Norwell, Seekonk, West Bridgewater, and Wrentham.

Class #324

On October 11, 2024, members of Career Recruit Firefighter Class #324 graduated at the Stow Campus. The 32 graduates represent the 16 departments of Auburn, Bedford, Burlington, Chelsea, Devens, Easton, Haverhill, Hopedale, Hull, Lawrence, Lincoln, Maynard, Medford, Natick, Southborough, and Swampscott.

Class #S38

On October 21, 2024, members of Career Recruit Firefighter Class #S38 graduated at the Springfield Campus. The 16 graduates represent the 10 departments of Agawam, Amherst, Douglas, East Longmeadow, Holden, Holyoke, Ludlow, Marblehead, Ware, and West Springfield.



First responders are on the front lines of any crisis and these newest firefighters are needed now more than ever.

State Fire Marshal Jon Davine.

Class #325

On November 18, 2024, members of Career Recruit Firefighter Class #325 graduated at the Stow Campus. The 31 graduates represent the 18 departments of Amesbury, Ashland, Burlington, Concord, Lynn, Maynard, Medford, Melrose, Nantucket, Needham, Newton, Northbridge, Reading, Somerville, Stow, Wakefield, Wellesley, and Westborough.

Class #BW32

On December 2, 2024, members of Career Recruit Firefighter Class #BW32 graduated at the Bridgewater Campus. The 21 graduates represent the 12 departments of Abington, Brewster, East Bridgewater, Fairhaven, Falmouth, Hingham, Middleborough, Provincetown, Truro, Walpole, Wrentham, and Yarmouth.

Call/Volunteer Recruit Firefighting Training

The Call/Volunteer Firefighter Recruit Training Program is unique in that it delivers a standard recruit training curriculum, meeting national standards, on nights and weekends to accommodate the schedule of firefighters in suburban and rural areas. Making the training more accessible means more firefighters can participate and allows them more time to practice training skills with instructors. The MFA, a division of the Department of Fire Services, has offered the program since 2003.

Class #114

On November 7, 2024, members of Call/Volunteer Firefighting Class #114 graduated at the Stow campus. The 23 graduates represent the 16 fire departments of Athol, Berlin, Boxborough, Carlisle, Grafton, Holliston, Hubbardston, Lincoln, Lynnfield, Middleton, Millis, Paxton, Pepperell, Phillipston, Westminster, and Weston.

Class #115

On November 12, 2024, members of Call/Volunteer Firefighting Class #115 graduated at the Stow campus. The 22 graduates represent the 11 fire departments of Avon, Berkley, Dartmouth Fire District 1, Dartmouth Fire District 2, Dartmouth Fire District 3, Dighton, Freetown, Kingston, Lincoln, Plympton, and Swansea.



Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains

Celebrates 25th Anniversary



A few years after the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building bombing claimed 168 lives, a group of Massachusetts fire chaplains attended a meeting of the Federation of Fire Chaplains in Oklahoma. One of the lectures focused on the role that chaplains played in the response to the tragedy, and it got the Massachusetts delegation thinking about how they could best meet the needs of their departments and communities in the event of a disaster.

Chaplains have been a vital resource to the Massachusetts fire service for more than 100 years, but in those days there wasn't even a list of which fire departments had chaplains, much less an administrative process to mobilize them for a large-scale emergency. That changed in 1999, when a core group of chaplains worked with then-State Fire Marshal Stephen P. Coan, the Fire Chiefs Association of Massachusetts, Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Call/Volunteer Firefighters Association, and Critical Incident Stress Management teams to identify and organize their colleagues statewide. Those efforts culminated on October 21, 1999, with the inauguration and installation of the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains at the Department of Fire Services in Stow.

The timing was sadly opportune—just six weeks later, the Corps would be called to serve in Worcester, where their support and compassion were a lifeline for a fire department, a community, and the families of six firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty. In the months and years that followed, the Corps would support firefighters in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001; the Station Nightclub fire in 2003; the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013; and countless other tragedies—whenever and wherever their compassionate, spiritual presence has been needed. In addition to their pastoral duties, many members attend classes at the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy to better understand and handle the demands on today's firefighters and fire chaplains.

To celebrate 25 years of faithful partnership, and to honor former members who have retired or passed away after ministering to firefighters and loved ones, the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains held an anniversary dinner on October 21, 2024, at the Wayside Inn in Sudbury. Among the laity who spoke that evening were Leominster Fire Chief (Ret.) Fred LeBlanc, who was liaison to the chaplains for 10 years; former State Fire Marshal Coan; and current Deputy State Fire Marshal Maribel Fournier, who presented the Corps with a plaque on behalf of State Fire Marshal Jon Davine and the Department of Fire Services. It read:

*In Times of Sorrow and Celebration,
The Commonwealth's Fire Chaplains Are
Trusted, Valued, Indispensable Partners
In our Mission to Support the Fire Service*

The Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains is available to support local fire departments 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

For Immediate Response

If your fire department has an appointed chaplain, contact your chaplain directly. If your department does not have an appointed chaplain, or if your chaplain is not available, contact the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency at 508-820-2000. You will be asked for the nature of the incident; the city/town and street address where the fire chaplain(s) should respond; and a contact name and number. Once a response has been activated, the requesting agency will be contacted with an estimated time of arrival.

For Further Information or a Scheduled Event:

Contact the Chief Fire Chaplain at 413-883-3051 or visit the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains website at www.massfirechaplains.com.

2025 License Examinations

Contact the FSD Licensing Division

Contact the Fire Safety Division Licensing Office at: **DFS.FSDLicensing@mass.gov**. The former address (DFS.Licensing@state.ma.us) is no longer in use.

Fire Safety Division

The Department of Fire Services' Fire Safety Division issues licenses, permits, and certificates of competency (licenses) to people and companies engaged in fireworks, blasting, explosives, special effects, cannon and mortar firing, commercial cooking exhaust system cleaning and inspection, hood cleaning, special hazard systems, portable fire extinguishers, marine fueling facilities and above ground tanks. Register for exams and see detailed information at www.mass.gov/dfs. Search for *DFS Licensing*. For

questions, contact the Licensing Desk at 978-567-3700 or at DFS.FSDLicensing@mass.gov.

Boiler and Pressure Vessel Program

The Boiler and Pressure Vessel Program offers monthly license exams for oil burner technician and all classes of fireman and engineer licenses. Register for exams and see detailed information at www.mass.gov/dfs. Search for *BPV Exams*. For questions contact the Boiler & Pressure Vessel Program at (978) 567-3780 or at BPV.Exams@mass.gov.

Licensing Status

To see the licensing status of an individual or company, visit the DFS License Look Up at <https://madfs.mylicense.com/verification/> or go to www.mass.gov/dfs and search for *DFS licensing*.

Examination Schedule	Examination Dates	Deadlines for Applications
FSD Exams	Exams Start at 10:00 am	
Fire Suppression and Commercial Hood Cleaning	January 22, 2025 March 12, 2025 May 14, 2025 July 16, 2025 September 17, 2025 November 12, 2025	December 27, 2024 February 14, 2025 April 18, 2025 June 20, 2025 August 22, 2025 October 17, 2025
Cannon/Mortar, Fireworks and Special Effects, Blasting and Blasting R&D	February 12, 2025 April 16, 2025 June 11, 2025 August 13, 2025 October 15, 2025	January 17, 2025 March 21, 2025 May 16, 2025 July 18, 2025 September 19, 2025
BPV Exams	Exams start at 9:00 am	
Oil Burner, Fireman & Engineer (all classes)	January 29, 2025 February 26, 2025 March 26, 2025 April 30, 2025 May 28, 2025 June 25, 2025 July 30, 2025 August 27, 2025 September 24, 2025 October 29, 2025	December 27, 2024 January 31, 2025 February 28, 2025 March 28, 2025 April 25, 2025 May 30, 2025 June 27, 2025 July 25, 2025 August 29, 2025 September 26, 2025



Department of Fire Services
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
978-567-3100

www.mass.gov/dfs

DFS Legal Quick Reference Guide

Fire Department Authority for Adverse Weather

The Department of Fire Services' General Counsel's office has issued the latest in a series of quick reference guides for the fire service. This guide addresses local fire departments' statutory and regulatory authority for scenarios that may arise during extreme weather.

Subjects include prohibiting open flames in drought conditions; closing forest land during dry conditions; storage, delivery, and removal of explosives in foggy weather; log storage during dry weather; fireworks during windy conditions; and other topics. Visit www.mass.gov/dfs and search for *Quick Reference Guides*.

