

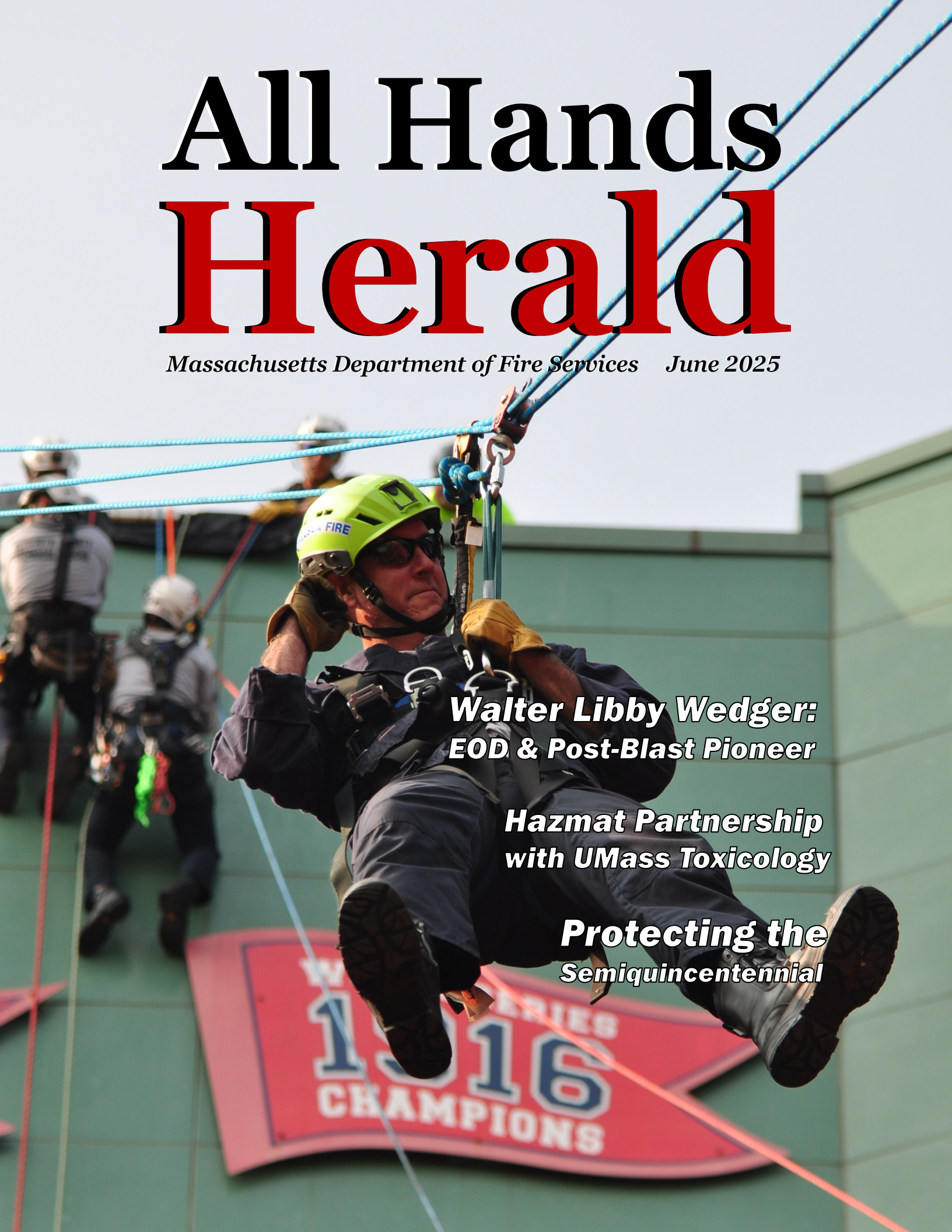
# All Hands Herald

*Massachusetts Department of Fire Services June 2025*

**Walter Libby Wedger:**  
**EOD & Post-Blast Pioneer**

**Hazmat Partnership**  
**with UMass Toxicology**

**Protecting the**  
**Semiquincentennial**



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The *All Hands Herald* is published three times per year by the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services. Our title incorporates the traditional fire service meaning of all hands working to extinguish a fire.

Let us know how you like the *All Hands Herald* and what we can do to make it more useful to the Massachusetts fire service and other interested parties.

If you have suggestions, ideas, or questions — or if you'd like to contribute an article, photograph, or other submission — please contact the editor:

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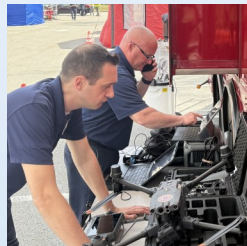
## 4. Walter Libby Wedger: EOD and Post-Blast Investigation Pioneer

Walter Libby Wedger was a pioneer in Massachusetts explosive ordnance disposal and post-blast investigation. His unique expertise made him a valuable resource in the turbulent WWI years. *By Josh Shanley and Jake Wark*



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**On the Cover:** The Massachusetts Association of Technical Rescue Specialists held a day-long training event at Fenway Park last summer, drawing tech rescue teams from across Massachusetts.

**Back Cover:** Save the date! The 30th annual Fire & Life Safety Education Conference will be held in Mansfield on September 17-18.

**Special thanks to:** Dean Babineau, Erick Benoit, Derryl Dion, Tim Gallagher, Kevin Galligan, Josh Shanley, Paul Shea, and Jeff Winn



# From the Fire Marshal

## Home Fire Sprinkler Demos

The Department of Fire Services' side-by-side sprinkler trailer continues to prove its worth while showcasing the power of home fire sprinklers. We had a great turnout at Worcester Polytechnic Institute during the Society of Fire Prevention Engineers – New England Chapter's conference back in March, followed by another event in Easthampton to kick off Home Fire Sprinkler Week. In both cases, spectators saw firsthand how quickly sprinklers can contain or even extinguish a residential fire in its early stages, and how quickly such a fire can present life-threatening conditions in an unprotected home. Are you interested in showing your community how home fire sprinklers save people, pets, and property? We'd love to help! Email [vicky.giguere@mass.gov](mailto:vicky.giguere@mass.gov) for more info.



## Cancer Screening

Firefighters face a greater risk of developing certain types of cancer than the public they protect. They are also more likely to develop it earlier in life, receive a later diagnosis, and – tragically – lose their lives to this terrible disease. To make our free cancer screenings even more accessible to Massachusetts firefighters, we've taken input from stakeholders and further simplified the process to seek a chest CT scan, PSA blood test, ultrasound, or mammogram. Users will no longer have to navigate LMS to take advantage of these opportunities and can instead use an online form to access these vital services. The worst cancer diagnosis is a late one, so visit [www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs) and search for *Cancer Screening* today! As always, I want to thank Governor Healey, Lt. Governor Driscoll, Secretary Reidy, and our partners in the Legislature for funding this lifesaving program.

## NERIS for Massachusetts Fire Departments

Most of us have been using the Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System for our entire careers. That will change this

fall, when the New England states are scheduled to join the rest of the nation in transitioning to the National Emergency Response Information System. Several Massachusetts fire departments are already using NERIS to document their responses, with positive feedback so far. DFS is committed to supporting the Commonwealth's fire departments as we make this change. Turn to p. 11 to learn more.



## Tech Rescue Support at Fire Scenes

On three occasions so far this year, technical rescue teams have assisted State Police fire investigators at the scene of a fatal fire. In North Adams, Wareham, and Pelham, catastrophic fire damage left the structure unsafe for investigators to work in. The Western Massachusetts Technical Rescue Team and Plymouth County Technical Rescue Team aided in these cases by helping to extricate the victim from an upper floor with dignity and respect or by providing the structural support and situational awareness necessary for our troopers to delay debris safely and methodically. I am deeply grateful for the team members' flexibility and rapid response under challenging conditions.



## Fire & Life Safety Education Conference

Save the date! Our annual Fire & Life Safety Education Conference is turning 30 this year, and we want you to help us celebrate. Planning has been underway for months to bring you a great assortment of workshops, featured speakers, networking opportunities, and more. Mark your calendars for September 17-18 and join us in Mansfield for an event three decades in the making!

# Walter Libby Wedger:

## *EOD and Post-Blast Investigation Pioneer*

Explosive ordnance disposal and post-blast investigation are among the core functions of the State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office. Both of these crucial public safety disciplines share a common ancestor – Walter Libby Wedger, the Commonwealth's first State Police chemist, a pioneer in bomb disposal, and a valued resource for the Fire Marshal's office in the early 20th century.

Wedger's personal and professional story began in Boston, where he was born in 1861 to Benjamin Wedger and his wife, Abbie. A prominent pyrotechnician in 19th-century Boston, Benjamin made a name for himself producing elaborate fireworks displays for major events, including the city's Fourth of July celebrations that continue to this day.

The elder Wedger's career was also marked by dangerous accidents and legal battles stemming from his vocation – including one final devastating tragedy. On January 14, 1893, he was working in the finishing shed of his West Roxbury fireworks factory when an explosion erupted as workers capped rockets with explosive materials. The blast was so powerful it was heard miles away. Debris flew through the air, the wooden building quickly caught fire, and a series of secondary explosions followed as its contents ignited.

Benjamin and his foreman, John Tully, attempted to rescue a young worker, Margaret Flynn, who was trapped inside. Despite their efforts, Flynn died in the fire. Benjamin and Tully sustained severe burns. Benjamin died two days later from his injuries. His son, Walter, was left with a haunting firsthand understanding of the risks and consequences of handling explosives. That experience, along with his early exposure to pyrotechnics, would shape his career and cement a lifelong commitment to improving the safety and manage-

ment of explosive materials. In the years that followed, he built a reputation as a capable and knowledgeable expert in fireworks and other explosives. Despite his family tragedy, he followed in his father's footsteps to become superintendent of a fireworks factory in Newton Upper Falls.

Though the State Fire Marshal's office was established in 1894 to investigate the causes of fires and explosions, the position was temporarily abolished in 1902. Its duties were transferred

to the Massachusetts District Police, the predecessor to the Massachusetts State Police, until 1919. For much of this time, the responsibility for fire and explosion investigation was held by Deputy Chief George C. Neal.

Such was Wedger's standing in the pyrotechnical field that Deputy Chief Neal called upon him to help investigate a December 8, 1911, explosion in Weymouth. The blast at the E.S. Hunt & Co. fireworks factory injured nine people, severely damaged the factory's mixing lab, and broke every window in the building (as well as several nearby homes). Wedger's investigation helped establish the cause and ensure the company's compliance with safety requirements. His thorough examination signaled a professional transition from private manufacturing to public service. It also demonstrated the value of post-blast analysis in Massachu-

setts, the first state in the nation to professionalize fire investigation.

Wedger was called into state service again just a few weeks later, as the Bread and Roses Strike of 1912 gripped Lawrence, Massachusetts, and drew the eyes of the nation. District Police were supporting local officials when a local politician tipped law enforcement off that striking mill workers had stockpiled dynamite for nefarious purposes. The dynamite was located and seized, and on January 27 Wedger led a team of District Police officers in detonating three sticks to demonstrate its instability and dangerousness. In a twist, the politician was



*Walter Libby Wedger  
(Boston Globe photo)*



soon accused of attempting to frame the strikers – and later convicted of planting the dynamite himself.

Deputy Chief Neal soon recruited Wedger to a position in the District Police at a salary of \$2,000 per year. He was appointed by Governor Eugene Foss on May 20 “for the purpose of performing certain duties in relation to the enforcement of the statutes relative to explosives and inflammable fluids and compounds.” Wedger reported to Neal, who would go on to become State Fire Marshal when that role was reinvigorated in the new Department of Public Safety in 1919. Wedger’s official title was “expert assistant,” and his appointment marked the beginning of both his tenure as Massachusetts’ first state chemist and the introduction of explosives investigation as a state function.

Wedger quickly proved his value to the interests of public safety. In his first 17 months on the job, Wedger reported conducting 929 inspections, 164 investigations, and 67 specialized tests and analyses of flammable gases, chemical laboratories, explosive devices, and other hazards on behalf of the District Police.

“In addition to the above I have assisted in the compilation of the technical parts of regulations relative to explosive and inflammable fluids and compounds, and also in prescribing the materials and construction of buildings for the storage of such compounds,” he wrote.

In cities across the country, the years preceding World War I were marked by political unrest, labor tensions, and deadly bombings across the United States. In Massachusetts, Wedger played a key role behind the scenes, neutralizing threats and analyzing explosives recovered from various bombings and plots during this tumultuous period. Just as important, his technical skill also allowed him to distinguish intentional explosions from accidental ones.

On New Year’s Eve 1916, authorities discovered a suspicious wicker suitcase near a basement entrance to the Massachusetts State House. The device, tied with a rope to the door handle, was found to contain iron pipes packed with dynamite. Wedger transported the device to a quarry in Brighton for disposal. He safely detonated the bomb using a controlled charge of dynamite, performing a render-safe procedure that was highly effective for its era. His analysis of the device revealed that it was well-constructed, and that only a faulty fuse had prevented it from functioning as intended. Wedger concluded that the bomb-maker had a solid understanding of explosives but lacked professional skill. The investigation did not result in any arrests, but Wedger’s decisive action foiled what could have been a devastating attack on a government building, prevented any injuries, and provided intel on the

tactics and strategies of future bombers.

The very next day, an explosion at the New England Manufacturing Company’s plant in Woburn caused \$75,000 in damage – more than \$2 million in today’s dollars. The blast

was traced to the trinitrotoluol (TNT) section of the facility. Police and the public were primed to attribute the blast to anarchists or saboteurs, but Wedger determined that a chemical imbalance in the production process had led to the explosion. The company president was able to dismiss rumors of sabotage, and Wedger’s report underscored the need for stricter controls and safeguards in wartime chemical manufacturing.

Wedger’s expertise was also called upon after a bombing at St. Stephen’s Catholic Church in Framingham in October 1916. The dynamite bomb caused significant damage but fortunately resulted in no injuries. At the scene, Wedger identified fragments of cast iron and a tin of sodium peroxide, an additive that increases combustion by boosting the oxygen levels that feed a fire. His analysis indicated that the perpetrator possessed

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*Josh Shanley Photo*

*Walter Libby Wedger was a forerunner of today’s State Police bomb technicians and post-blast investigators.*



## DFS Hazmat Division Partners with UMass Division of Medical Toxicology

It's not unusual for Massachusetts Hazmat teams to respond to incidents involving people who have been transported to local hospitals following an exposure. If first responders and hospital staff are unaware of incident specifics, the results can be poor communication, delays in definitive patient care, hospitals diverting other patients, and other unintended outcomes.

To support patient care and protect our hospitals from contamination in cases like these, district Hazmat teams have initiated a program of sending a hazardous materials technician to the hospital to act as a liaison between hospital staff and personnel at the incident scene. This project has also included briefing EMS personnel at the incident on the materials involved, routes of entry, and specific hazards.

Designating a Hospital Liaison on these calls has been very well received, with two important benefits. First, it has improved incident scene intelligence by providing information and conditions of exposed patients back to the on-scene Hazmat Team Leader. It's also improved patient care at the hospital by providing the attending medical professionals with actual scene conditions, intelligence, and findings.

To advance this program and further improve patient out-



comes, the Department of Fire Services' Hazardous Materials Response Division has established a partnership with the UMass Division of Medical Toxicology. The UMass Toxicology program is the largest toxicology program in New England and is the reach-back resource for Poison Control.

Through the partnership, Massachusetts Hazmat techs in the Hospital Liaison role have been granted access to a program that is typically intended for emergency room physicians to call when in need of toxicology advice. The primary goal is to complete the communication circle between medical professionals treating the patient, trained medical toxicologists, and hazmat technicians on the scene to achieve the best possible treatment outcomes.

UMass Toxicology and the DFS Hazmat Division had their first joint training in December 2024. It consisted of reviewing the medical response to hazardous materials emergencies, including toxicology, decontamination, treatment, and transport. The training also included "Medical Toxicology Rounds," where UMass toxicologists reviewed patient exposures from previous hazmat responses. This training provided excellent insight for both agencies to better understand each other's capabilities and experience, and all participating parties quickly saw the benefits to the partnership.

While still a new program, the system has already proven to be successful. In February, an elderly man was found unconscious in his garage from what appeared to be an accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. Atmospheric metering indicated over 500ppm of CO. The unconscious patient and two police officers were transported to the local hospital due to the exposure.

A Hazmat technician who had attended the December training was at the incident and contacted UMass Toxicology. He gave a brief report and requested a Toxicology consult. A toxicologist provided advice to the Hazmat tech, and that advice was

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# Seasonal Safety Spotlight: Grilling

Spring and summer are full of baseball games, road trips, and dinners cooked on the grill. And while most of the hot dogs, hamburgers, and steaks served up outdoors end up on the plate without much drama, Massachusetts fire departments report grilling-related fires every single year.

Nearly 850 grill fires were reported in Massachusetts between 2015 and 2024, causing 32 injuries to residents and firefighters as well as more than \$8 million in damages.

Two-thirds of these incidents took place between May and August, and 75% took place on residential properties – most often one- and two-family homes. Gas grills are by far the most likely to be involved in a fire, accounting for more than eight times as many reportable incidents as electric grills, charcoal grills, and other types combined.

After steadily increasing from a low of 37 in 2003 to 107 in 2014, grill fires have been trending generally downward to 74 of them last year, according to preliminary data. That's good news. As we enter the time of year when these incidents are most likely to occur, fire prevention officers, educators, and others can remind residents to stay safe when cooking outdoors.

## For all grills:

- Grills should only be used outdoors.
- Grills must be 10 feet from the side of a building.

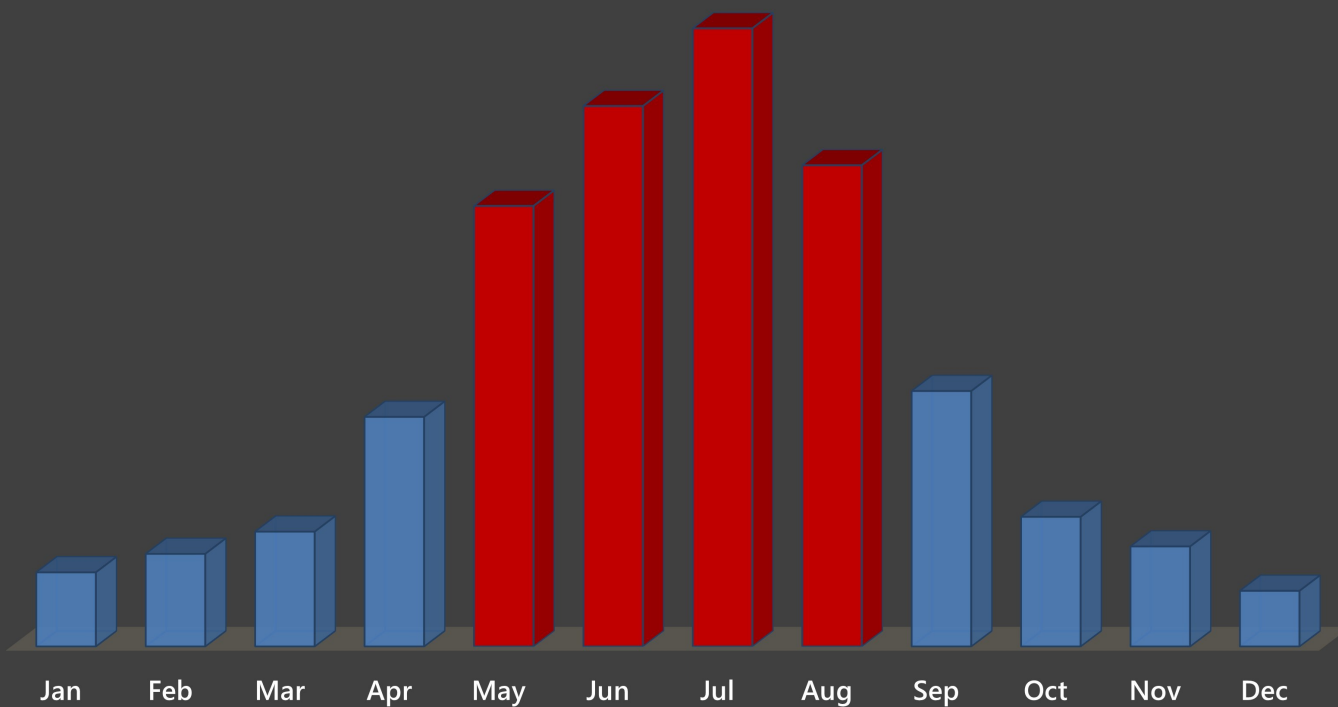
- Be sure grills are not underneath overhanging branches.
- Grills must not be used on a porch, balcony, or deck with a roof, overhang, or wall (other than the exterior of the building).
- Grills must not be used on fire escapes.
- Grills may be used on an open first-floor porch, deck, or patio if there is an outdoor stairway to the ground, or the porch is at ground level.
- Never leave a burning grill unattended.
- Keep all matches, lighters and lighter fluid away from children.
- Keep children and pets at least three feet away from grills.

## For gas grills:

- Follow the instructions in your owner's manual for the care and maintenance of your gas grill.
- Open the grill lid when you light it. Propane can build up inside and if ignited could blow the lid off.
- If you smell gas while cooking, turn off the grill and get away. Call 9-1-1 from a safe location.
- Do not move the grill.

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## Massachusetts Grill Fires by Month, 2015-2024



# Celebrating The Shot Heard 'Round the World

## *DFS Supports Semiquincentennial and Tough Ruck*

From April 18-21, 2025, the Department of Fire Services joined local, state, and federal partners to ensure safe celebrations for the 250th anniversary of the first battles of the American Revolution, as well as the 2025 Tough Ruck in honor of fallen veterans and first responders. The safe, successful events in four communities over three consecutive days leading up to the Boston Marathon reflected more than a year of preparation, seamless interagency cooperation, and scores of DFS personnel committed to the highest standards of public service. With large crowds and high visibility expected for each of these events, their primary missions were to provide direct operational support and CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High Yield Explosive) protection for the host cities and towns.

In the weeks and months leading up to the Patriot's Day weekend, the state's CBRNE Working Group met repeatedly to scale up the concept of operations developed each year for the Marathon. Comprised of representatives from the DFS Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Division, State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit, Massachusetts National Guard Civil Support Team, and FBI, the CBRNE Working Group tailored that concept to address the unique risks and needs posed by so many communities hosting such high-profile events in so short a span of time.

Also during this period, the DFS Active Shooter / Hostile Event Response group held an accelerated training for Na-



*Scott Cluett photo*

*Police and fire personnel trained for active shooter scenarios in advance of Semiquincentennial celebrations.*



*Erick Benoit photo*

tional Park Service Police and members of the Concord, Lexington, and Lincoln fire departments. The integrated curriculum allowed law enforcement and fire/rescue personnel to train together on Rescue Task Force operations to stop the killing and stop the dying in the event of an attack at one or more of the weekend's events.

The DFS operational phase began on April 18, as members of the State Police Bomb Squad and Hazmat technicians on the DFS Joint Hazard Incident Response Team swept and secured areas in Concord and Lexington as well as along the Boston Marathon route. Meanwhile, DFS Special Operations staff began staging Rehab 4, Rehab 7, the Incident Support Trailer, two drones, a lighting trailer, a Zumro tent, an HVAC trailer, and utility vehicles in various locations in Concord, Lexington, and Stow so they would be ready for the weekend's events.

That evening, State Police and JHIRT personnel supported the Salute to Valor gala in Concord, where three Medal of Honor recipients were recognized, and worked with JHIRT techs to sweep and secure high-traffic sites in that town and Lexington.

In the early morning hours of Saturday, April 19, thousands of spectators descended on Lexington's Battle Green to watch a re-enactment of the skirmish between Minutemen and British Regulars that marked the beginning of the American Revolu-







*Erick Benoit photo*

tion — and a turning point in world history. Meanwhile, members of the State Police Bomb Squad and Fire Investigation Unit, DFS Hazmat Division, and partner agencies from every level of government were on hand at the Unified Command Center in Lexington and in the field supporting local officials in Concord, Lexington, and Lincoln.

Their coordinated activities reflected a holistic approach to public safety that included constant communication, inter-agency collaboration, and interdisciplinary capabilities to assess and mitigate any potential threat. This included Bomb Squad personnel for explosive ordnance disposal, Tier 1+ Hazmat and JHIRT assignments in Concord and Lexington, and Hazmat's Technical Support Unit in Lincoln.

As if to demonstrate the team's ability to meet any need at any time, a damaged pipe at the Hudson Department of Public Works caused a significant chemical spill and leak shortly before 8:00 am. The substance was identified as sodium hydroxide — an extremely caustic base — and injured several firefighters, prompting a Tier 2 Hazmat response. With numerous techs from Hazmat Districts 2 and 3 already assigned to the ongoing historical observances, personnel and apparatus from District 6 were mobilized to assist and worked the scene for about six hours before bringing it to a successful conclusion.

Following many more events through the day, including an address by Governor Maura Healey and a demonstration by the US Army's Golden Knights parachute team, DFS personnel

were released at about 8:00 pm and caught a few hours' rest before standing up again the next morning.

As dawn broke over Concord's North Bridge on the morning of April 20, State Police and Hazmat personnel were staffing the UCC and in the field preparing for the day ahead. Team assignments would bring technicians to Arlington for a reenactment of the Battle of Menotomy and parade, to Lincoln for their alarm and muster reenactment, and to Bedford and Concord for the 26.2-mile Tough Ruck in support of fallen veterans and first responders. It was staffed with a Tier 1+ Hazmat assignment, an Operational Response Unit, and JHIRT technicians moving along the route.



*Eric Desrochers photo*

*DFS Hazmat leadership and State Police assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office helped staff the Unified Command Center during the weekend's events.*

Some of these techs had the privilege of meeting SP5 James "Doc" McCloughan, a US Army medic who repeatedly risked his life to rescue and treat wounded members of his infantry company during the Vietnam War, despite being seriously injured himself. Special Operations staff were also on Bedford with Incident Support Unit 1 to provide incident commanders with communications, conferencing, and mapping ca-

pabilities in the field.

The weekend's historical events wrapped up by Sunday evening. The work was not yet done for Hazmat, State Police, and Special Ops personnel, with the 129th Boston Marathon taking place the very next day, but their efforts were successful by every measure — protecting and supporting what were by far the largest, longest, and best attended celebration of Revolutionary history Massachusetts has held in decades.





# Fire Investigation NEWS



*Paul Shea photo*

**Worcester:** In the early morning hours of May 14, 2022, the Worcester Fire Department responded to reports of heavy fire in a six-family triple-decker at 2 Gage Street. The fire quickly went to three alarms and later a fourth, causing catastrophic damage to the building. Four occupants were injured, including one who jumped from an upper story window; Marcel Fontaine, Joseph Garchali, Christopher Lozeau, and Vincent Page perished, unable to escape the flames.

The origin and cause of the fire were investigated by the Worcester Fire Department, Worcester Police Department, State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office, State Police detectives assigned to Worcester County District Attorney Joseph D. Early's office, and ATF. They were supported by the Department of Fire Services' Code Compliance & Enforcement Unit. That joint investigation determined that the fire had been intentionally set, and further efforts identified a suspect who had previously been a tenant of the building. On April 7, 2025, that suspect pleaded guilty to four counts of second-degree murder and related charges rather than proceed to trial. She was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole after 20 years.

**Springfield:** At about 5:15 am on October 16, 2023, Springfield Fire & Emergency Services responded to a structure fire at 118 Grover Street and rescued two people. One of them, 18-year-old Janayrah Rivera, died of her injuries. The investigation was led by Springfield Fire, Springfield Police, State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office, and State Police assigned to Hampden County District Attorney Anthony Gulluni's office with assistance from the Department of Fire Services' Code Compliance & Enforcement Unit. That investigation revealed that the fire

had been intentionally set. In the weeks and months that followed, they identified a suspect and on January 23, 2025, arrested that man on a warrant charging arson of a dwelling, murder, and four counts of attempted murder. He has since been indicted by a Hampden County grand jury and remains held without bail.

**Braintree:** On the morning of February 22, 2024, the Braintree Fire Department responded to 60 Brookside Road for a residential fire with one reported injury. The investigation by Braintree Fire, Braintree Police, and State Police fire investigators determined that the fire began in the basement near a furnace and extended to the first floor. Members of the Department of Fire Services' Boiler & Pressure Vessel Safety Program also responded to examine the heating system, finding no signs of failure that could have contributed to the fire. The investigation that followed identified the injured occupant as the responsible party. At the time of the fire, he had a pending arson charge in an unrelated case. On April 1, 2025, that man pleaded guilty to arson of a dwelling and was sentenced to two years in a house of correction.

**Yarmouth:** On the evening of November 3, 2024, the Yarmouth Fire Department responded to Route 6A for a massive fire at a vacant restaurant. Local and mutual aid firefighters battled the wind-fed blaze through the night and into the next morning until it was fully extinguished. Nearly the entire building collapsed during those operations. The origin and cause of the fire were investigated by the Yarmouth Fire Department, Yarmouth Police detectives, and State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office, who collectively determined that the fire had been intentionally set. They continued to work the case in the weeks and months that followed, identifying two suspects and arresting them on



*Continued next page*



March 24, 2025, on warrants charging them with burning a building, breaking and entering, and related offenses.

**Westford:** The Westford Fire Department and EMS responded to a Pine Ridge Road home on the afternoon of January 17 for a person injured by an explosion. Based on his traumatic injuries statements, they requested assistance from the State Police Bomb Squad and Fire Investigation Unit. Bomb technicians entered the residence and found a large quantity of energetic, reactive, and precursor materials, as well as unknown but suspicious substances. After clearing the area of any imminent explosive hazards, they requested the DFS Joint Hazard Incident Response Team to assist in identifying the unknown substances. Technicians and investigators safely recovered, seized, and/or disposed of numerous fireworks and complete or partially complete explosive devices, as well as several pounds of bagged, bottled, and loose powders. The resident was charged with seven counts of possession of an incendiary device and other related offenses.

**Lynn:** On the afternoon of February 28, the Lynn Fire Department responded to find fire showing from a five-story apartment complex on Magner Road. The fire went to two alarms, with no injuries reported but significant property damage. Personnel from Lynn Fire, Lynn Police, and State Police Fire Investigation Unit determined that the fire began on a couch, and that the sole occupant of the unit had intentionally set it. That occupant was charged with burning a building.

**Fall River:** The Fall River Fire Department responded to the vacant Silvia School on the afternoon of March 1, 2025, after a passerby reported seeing smoke. Firefighters found heavy fire on arrival and began attacking the fire inside until structural damage put them at grave risk. Sections of the roof collapsed and firefighters battled the four-alarm blaze well into the night. The origin and cause of the fire were investigated by the Fall River Fire Department, Fall River Police Department, and State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office. Based on evidence at the scene, witness interviews, and other evidence, they determined that the fire was intentionally set, and they soon identified a group of juveniles as suspects. The continued investigation supported charges against four youths, all of whom were charged in Juvenile Court with burning a public building, breaking and entering, and other offenses.

**Chicopee:** The Chicopee Fire Department responded to an Edgewood Avenue fire that quickly went to two alarms on the morning of March 1. No injuries were reported, but all residents were displaced. Chicopee Fire, Chicopee Police, and State Police fire investigators determined that the fire had been intentionally set and identified a resident as the responsible party. She was taken into custody at the scene

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# NERIS is Coming!

After 50 years, the National Fire Incident Reporting System is being decommissioned – and so is our state system, MFIRS. Starting this year, the National Emergency Response Information System will take its place as our new fire data collection and reporting platform. The Department of Fire Services is committed to supporting Massachusetts fire departments as we make the transition to NERIS.

## What Is NERIS?

Today's firefighters do much more than fight fires. NERIS is their new tool for gathering, reporting, and analyzing all -hazards incident data that focuses on risk, deployment, and performance.

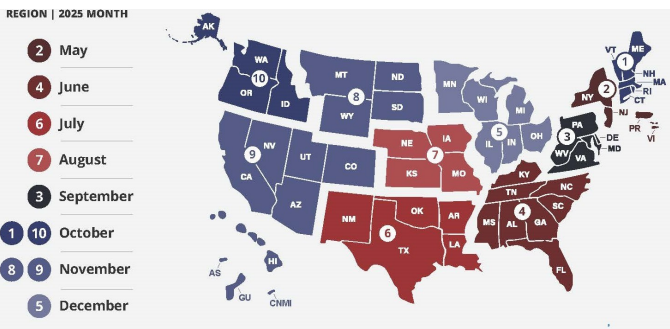
NERIS was designed to provide fire service users with incident response data in near real-time, allowing them to make informed decisions that will enhance safety for firefighters, residents, and communities. As a flexible, scalable, interoperable tool that can adapt to reflect emerging issues, it will integrate information from CAD systems, GIS, and other sources to provide detailed analytics anywhere, anytime, on smartphones, tablets, and desktops.

## When Will NERIS be Implemented?

NERIS is already being rolled out regionally in the United States. Fire Departments in Massachusetts and New England will come onboard beginning in June 2025 and continuing through October 2025, with a small group of early adopters starting earlier. The full transition from NFIRS to NERIS is expected to be complete by December 31, 2025.

## What Resources are Available?

The DFS Fire Safety Division is supporting local departments as they prepare for the transition. Chiefs and their designees can contact Research Analyst & MFIRS Manager Derryl Dion at [derryl.dion@mass.gov](mailto:derryl.dion@mass.gov). DFS has also launched a web page that collects and updates NERIS-related materials from the US Fire Administration and UL Fire Safety Research Institute on an ongoing basis. Visit [www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs) and search for NERIS.





# Over 300 Fire Departments Share \$3.2 Million in Fire Safety Grants

In April, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey, Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, Secretary of Public Safety & Security Terrence Reidy, and State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine announced more than \$3 million in fire safety grants to more than 300 local fire departments.

"Massachusetts firefighters do much more than fight fires – they're our first line of defense in any emergency," said Governor Healey. "These grants will help firefighters protect themselves from injury and illness, rescue people in danger, and keep our most vulnerable residents safe from fires and other hazards at home. We are proud to be able to support these vital first responders who never hesitate to answer a call for help."

The awards are drawn from three grant programs coordinated by the Department of Fire Services.

The Firefighter Safety Equipment Grant Program reimburses local fire departments for purchases of turnout gear, hazardous gas meters, SCBA components, accountability systems, thermal imaging cameras, and more. This round of grants will provide \$1.63 million in funding to fire departments in 266 communities. In many cases, the reimbursed purchases will help them attain compliance with Occupational Safety & Health Administration or National Fire Protection Association safety standards.

This was the second round of safety equipment grants distributed in Fiscal Year 2025. The awards were drawn from a small amount of funding that went unspent or unallocated during the five previous grant cycles.

"Firefighters train tirelessly for every conceivable emergency so that they can be prepared to help those in need," said Lt.



DFS staff photo

Governor Driscoll. "Through this program, we acknowledge that tremendous commitment by investing in the equipment they need to be safe in any situation."

The Student Awareness of Fire Education (SAFE) Grant Program funds firefighter-educators who deliver age-appropriate fire and life safety education to school-age children. Since the grants' inception in 1995, the number of Massachusetts children who die in fires has dropped to historically low levels, from two dozen or more per year to zero for nearly three consecutive years. This year's awards will deliver more than \$1.1 million to 204 local fire departments.

"For 30 years, the SAFE grants have delivered life-saving lessons to Massachusetts' kids and teens through our local firefighters," said Secretary Reidy. "This is just one of the powerful local-state partnerships that make Massachusetts one of the safest places in the nation to live, work, and raise a family."

In 2014, DFS launched the Senior SAFE Grant Program, which is geared toward another vulnerable population – older adults, who face a disproportionate risk of death or serious injury in a fire. Nearly \$485,000 will support alarm installation, fire safety education, fall prevention strategies, and other resources delivered by 203 local fire departments in partnership with local senior centers, councils on aging, and other community partners.

"People aged 65 and older are at greatest risk of death or serious injury in a fire at home," said State Fire Marshal Davine. "The Senior SAFE grants make a difference by sending trained firefighters to conduct home safety assessments, install or replace smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and help our seniors age in place safely and independently."





# DFS Transitions



*Julie Weinstein*

The January edition of the *All Hands Herald* was the last one to benefit from **Julie Weinstein's** expertise as a graphic artist. Julie retired from the Department of Fire Services that month after 12 years of service to every branch of the agency, from creating forms and flyers to developing conference materials and public education tools to turning this magazine from stark, black-and-white, and mostly-text into a flashy, full-color, and truly professional publication. Her commitment to fire safety for all our communities, especially vulnerable and underserved residents, helped us reach the public in nearly a dozen languages. Many of the products she created have been seen by thousands of people who will probably never know who to thank – but we will always be grateful.

It was a day of old friends and good memories at the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy in Bridgewater as Instructor **Rick Goddard** celebrated both his 50th anniversary at the MFA and his well-deserved retirement. Academy staff, former colleagues, area chiefs, and fire service leaders past and present stopped by to thank Rick for sharing the lessons of his experience and helping to build up the capabilities of the Springfield and Bridgewater campuses. State Fire Marshal Jon Davine presented him with a 50-year service pin (you don't see those every day), and Governor Maura Healey sent a certificate that read: "In recognition of 50 years of dedicated service to the Mas-

sachusetts Firefighting Academy and its campuses in Stow, Springfield, and Bridgewater. We commend your enduring contributions to firefighter training in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and thank you for inspiring generations of recruits. We wish you the very best in retirement."



*Rick Goddard*

After more than 10 years leading the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy's Call/Volunteer Recruit Firefighter Training Program, Program Coordinator **Christopher Norris** and Assistant Coordinator **Michael Dupuis** stepped down from their roles in March. "Their experience on call and volunteer departments helped shape the program," State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine said during a recent graduation ceremony. "Their leadership brought it to new heights. And their commitment has inspired nearly 2,000 Call/Vol recruits who completed the curriculum during this time. Even in their demanding roles as fire chiefs in Easthampton and Leicester, they have continued to put in the time on nights, weekends, and days off to support and nurture this curriculum, which is so vital to public safety in Massachusetts." Thank you, Chris and Mike, and welcome to Barre Fire Chief **Robert Rogowski**,



*Mike Dupuis (left) and Chris Norris (right)*

*Continued on p. 19*



# Massachusetts Firefighting Academy Recruit Graduations



Class #326



Class #S39



Class #327



Class #BW33



Class #328

## Career Recruit Firefighter Training

The Massachusetts Firefighting Academy's 50-day Career Recruit Training Program provides students with classroom and practical instruction in all basic firefighter skills. Recruits practice first under non-fire conditions and then in controlled, live-fire scenarios. 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 mailbox fires to multiple room or multiple-floor structure fires. Upon successful completion of the Career recruit Program, all students have met the requirements of NFPA 1001, *Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications*, and are certified to the levels of Firefighter I/II and Hazardous Materials Operational Level Responder. The Career Recruit Training Program is delivered at the MFA's campuses in Stow, Springfield, and Bridgewater.

**Class #326** graduated at the Stow campus on December 20, 2024. The 33 graduates represent the fire departments of Acton, Amesbury, Andover, Arlington, Bedford, Belmont, Chelmsford, Dudley, Gardner, Hingham, Lexington, Littleton, Nantucket, Plainville, Weston, Wilmington, and Winchester. Firefighter Eric Randell of the Wilmington Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

**Class #S39** graduated at the Springfield campus on January 6, 2025. The 20 graduates represent the fire departments of Amherst, Chicopee, Dalton, Monson, Northampton, Palmer, Pittsfield, South Hadley Fire District 1, Springfield, Ware, and Westfield. Firefighter Dylan Sliech of Springfield Fire & Emergency Services was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

**Class #327** graduated at the Stow campus on January 31, 2025. The 29 graduates represent the fire departments of Ashland, Auburn, Boxborough, Charlton, Douglas, Gloucester, Ipswich, Maynard, North Reading, Randolph, Salem, Tewksbury, Truro, Wakefield, Wayland, Winchester, and Woburn. Firefighter Joseph Gello of the Salem Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

**Class #BW33** graduated at the Bridgewater campus on February 14, 2025. The 18 graduates represent the fire departments of Barnstable, Dennis, East Bridgewater, Hull, Kingston, Milton, New Bedford, Sandwich, West Bridgewater, Whitman, Wrentham, and Yarmouth. Firefighter Christopher Palin of the West Bridgewater Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

**Class #328** graduated at the Stow campus on March 7, 2025. The 33 graduates represent the fire departments of Acton, Arlington, Ashland, Burlington, Dracut, Fall River, Holden, Lit-

*Recruit class photos by Christina Mitchell*



tleton, Lowell, Melrose, Methuen, Milford, Natick, Plainville, Watertown, Westborough, and Wilmington. Firefighter Michael Bodio of the Milford Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

**Class #S40** graduated at the Springfield campus on March 14, 2025. The 12 graduates represent the fire departments of Athol, Chicopee, Easthampton, Holyoke, Longmeadow, South Hadley Fire District 1, Southbridge, and Uxbridge. Firefighter Conor Lordan of the Athol Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

**Class #329** graduated at the Stow campus on April 11, 2025. The 36 graduates represent the fire departments of Arlington, Ashland, Chelmsford, Devens, Framingham, Lakeville, Leominster, Lynnfield, Maynard, Millville, Nantucket, Natick, Northbridge, Plymouth, Shrewsbury, Sudbury, Wellesley, and Westminster. Firefighter Zachary Hays of the Ashland Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

**Class #BW34** graduated at the Bridgewater campus on May 2, 2025. The 15 graduates represent the fire departments of Dennis, Eastham, Franklin, Hopedale, Marshfield, Norwood, Raynham, Sandwich, Somerset, and Whitman. Justin Bernoskevich of the Raynham Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

### Call/Volunteer Recruit Firefighter Training

The MFA's 15-week Call/Volunteer Recruit training Program delivers a standard recruit training curriculum, meeting national standards, on nights and weekends. This schedule accommodates the needs of recruits who work or attend school full time but still want to serve their communities. Making this training more accessible means more interested candidates can receive the training that will help them protect themselves, their communities, and their fellow firefighters.

**Class #117** graduated at Lynnfield Middle School on March 4, 2025. The 21 graduates represent the fire departments of Essex, Hamilton, Haverhill, Lincoln, Lynnfield, Nahant, Newburyport, Topsfield, and Wenham. Firefighter Ryan Wentworth of the Haverhill Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

**Class #116** graduated at the Stow campus on March 5, 2025. The 37 graduates represent the fire departments of Carlisle, Dover, Grafton, Harvard, Holliston, Hopedale, Lancaster, Mendon, Millis, Millville, Norfolk, Northbridge, Pepperell, Sherborn, and Sterling. Firefighter Christopher Watson of the Norfolk Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.



Class #S40



Class #329



Class #BW34



Class #117



Class #116

*Continued on p. 20*



# 2024-2025 Chief Fire Officer Management Training Program



On January 22, more than three dozen fire service leaders from across Massachusetts graduated from the 30th class of the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy's Chief Fire Officer Management Training Program.

The four-month program for new chief officers and chief officer candidates is delivered jointly by the MFA and the University of Massachusetts Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management. Through classroom instruction, out-of-class assignments, and student presentations, the course delivers intensive training in the managerial aspects of leading a municipal fire department.

"The Chief Fire Officer program is a tremendous opportunity for new chiefs and rising officers," said State Fire Marshal Jon Davine, who graduated from the program in 2016. "The rigorous instruction in such a wide variety of topics will help these graduates provide the leadership that their departments and communities deserve. Completing the program is a major accomplishment and I want to congratulate all of them on their initiative and dedication to professional development."

The Chief Fire Officer Management Training Program covers a spectrum of topics considered essential for effective public sector management. It includes human resource management, ethics, executive leadership, governmental and organization structures, information management, customer-focused strategic planning, legal issues, budgets and public finance, community awareness, and labor relations.

The curriculum is intended to help fire officers improve their ability to lead and manage personnel, understand employees' needs and problems, communicate effectively to a variety of audiences, and leverage inter-agency cooperation.

This year's graduates represent urban, suburban, and rural departments serving communities across Massachusetts. They are:

**Acton:** Deputy Chief Chris Sammet  
**Bellingham:** Deputy Chief Robert Provost  
**Bondsville:** Interim Chief Michael Germaine  
**Boylston:** Deputy Chief Matthew Ronn  
**Braintree:** Acting Chief Frederick Viola  
**Bridgewater:** Deputy Chief Glen Grafton  
**Centerville-Osterville-Marstons Mills:** Chief Patrick Hill  
**Chelmsford:** Deputy Chief Ryan Houle  
**Edgartown:** Assistant Chief Joshua Baker  
**Fitchburg:** Assistant Chief Patrick Haverty  
**Framingham:** Deputy Chief Will Gingras  
**Franklin:** Battalion Chief William Blanchard  
**Georgetown:** Chief Matthew McKay  
**Holden:** Chief Christopher Montiverdi  
**Holliston:** Assistant Chief Brian Kelley  
**Hudson:** Deputy Chief Brian Harrington  
**Lexington:** Assistant Chief Donald Chisholm  
**Longmeadow:** Deputy Chief John Rigney  
**Marlborough:** Assistant Chief Jeffrey Gogan  
**Medford:** Chief Todd Evans  
**Nahant:** Chief Austin Antrim  
**Newbury:** Chief David Evans  
**Plainville:** Acting Chief Robert Skinner  
**Plymouth:** Battalion Chief Brian Baragwanath  
**Reading:** Chief Richard Nelson  
**Rutland:** Deputy Chief Ryan Quinn  
**Seekonk:** Chief Shaun Whalen  
**South Hadley-District 2:** Chief Ryan Moore  
**Springfield:** District Chief Miguel Rivera  
**Sutton:** Deputy Chief Robin Dresser  
**Three Rivers:** Chief Stephen Nodurf  
**Tisbury:** Chief Patrick Rolston  
**Turners Falls:** Chief Todd Brunelle  
**Webster:** Deputy Chief Jeffrey Saad  
**Westborough:** Deputy Chief Stephen Doucet  
**Westwood:** Deputy Chief Christian Pierce  
**Wilbraham:** Deputy Chief Mathew Walch



# Massachusetts Firefighting Academy Earns Five-Year Pro Board Reaccreditation

On March 29, the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications — better known as the Pro Board — granted reaccreditation to the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy following an intensive 18-month review process.

“The Pro Board is the world’s leading fire service accreditation organization,” said State Fire Marshal Davine. “The Academy’s reaccreditation reflects our commitment to the highest standards of firefighter training and development at every level of experience, from recruits to veteran officers.”

The Massachusetts Firefighting Academy is a division within the Department of Fire Services. It is also the operational arm of the Massachusetts Fire Training Council, which is the sole certifying authority for Massachusetts fire service training. Certification is based on a student’s knowledge, understanding, and execution of job performance requirements promulgated by the National Fire Protection Association.

The Pro Board examined and validated the training, exam development, and testing processes that the Academy uses

when assessing firefighters for more than 40 levels of professional certification. This entailed a comprehensive review of the job performance requirements for everything from fundamentals such as Firefighter I/II to specialized disciplines such as Hazardous Materials/WMD Technician.

It also included a two-day site visit by members of the Pro Board Committee on Accreditation from Florida, Hawaii, and Texas, who met with Academy staff and DFS leadership, observed on-campus training, and examined testing materials.

The reaccreditation period will run for five years.

“Pro Board accreditation is the gold standard for agencies like ours and I want to recognize the staff whose efforts led to this recognition,” said State Fire Marshal Davine.

He praised the professionalism of Academy instructors and administrative personnel, highlighting in particular the contributions of Deputy State Fire Marshal Maribel Fournier, Dr. Sara Praguski Walsh, Certification Coordinator Kevin Robinson, and Assistant Certification Coordinators Scott MacArthur and Vashon Robinson.



*Left to right: Deputy State Fire Marshal Maribel Fournier; MFA Assistant Certification Coordinator Vashon Robinson; Pro Board representatives Martinez Jacobs, Matt Sherwood, and Daniel Smith; MFA Registration Coordinator Kevin Robinson; and Dr. Sara Praguski Walsh, the MFA’s instructional design and curriculum development specialist*

## State's Fire Chaplains Honor DFS Special Operations Staffer



*Michael McLaughlin and his family with State Fire Marshal Jon Davine (left) and Chief Fire Chaplain Bruce Arbour (right)*

DFS Special Operations Planning Coordinator Michael McLaughlin received the Mychal Judge Award at the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains' May 6 Harris Conference.

Since 2016, McLaughlin has been the liaison between DFS and the Corps, supporting the chaplaincy's vital work through training, communication, and other assistance. Reverend Bruce Arbour, the state's chief fire chaplain, said the award – named for the FDNY chaplain who lost his life assisting firefighters at Ground Zero on the morning of September 11, 2001 – is the highest honor the Corps can bestow.

Rev. Arbour handed the award plaque to McLaughlin's son, Capt. Gregg McLaughlin of the Marblehead Fire Department, to present.

After thanking the chaplains for their work with the fire service, State Fire Marshal Jon Davine lauded Mike's contributions over more than 50 years. He has worked as a firefighter in Lancaster, fire chief in that town and in Stow, and since 2013 helping to coordinate direct operational support to local fire departments through the DFS Special Operations team.

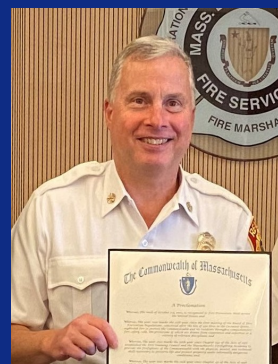
"Mike's decades of experience in the fire service make him an asset to DFS and our local partners," he said. "But his quiet commitment to helping others, and his determination to support their wellbeing, make him a truly special friend to us all."



*State Fire Marshal Davine swears in the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains leadership at their annual conference.*

## Changing of the Guard at the Fire Service Commission

On April 18, the Massachusetts Fire Service Commission recognized former Reading Fire Chief Gregory Burns for nine years of service to the Commission, including six years as chair. Chief Burns retired in May after a career of nearly 40 years at the Reading Fire Department and almost 25 years as chief.



*Reading Fire Chief (ret.) Gregory Burns*

Chief Burns was honored for his leadership of the Commission during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which he successfully navigated unprecedented challenges and leveraged new technology to keep the important statewide body running. He also led the search for a new state fire marshal in 2023, leading to Marshal Davine's appointment.



*Belchertown Fire Chief John Ingram*

Following Chief Burns' announcement that he would be retiring, the Commission voted unanimously to elect Belchertown Fire Chief John Ingram as chair. Leverett Fire Chief Brian Cook was elected as vice chair, succeeding outgoing Lakeville Fire Captain Michael McCollough. Congratulations to all!

The Fire Service Commission was established in 1996 by the same legislation that created the Department of Fire Services. By statute, it includes the Secretary of Public Safety & Security; representatives of the Fire Chiefs Association of Massachusetts from career, call, combination, and District 13 fire departments; and representatives of the Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Call/Volunteer Firefighters Association, and the insurance industry.

Among other duties, the Commission appoints the state fire marshal, credentials fire chiefs, and consults with the Fire Training Council to develop standards for fire investigation and certification.



*The Fire Service Commission recognized Chief Burns at his final in-person meeting on April 18, 2025.*



who is stepping into the Call/Vol Program Coordinator role.

In February, **Capt. Michael Riley** and **Lt. Tom Berteletti** of the State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit retired from state service. Captain Riley served as the commanding officer for the section, which comprises the State Police Bomb Squad and Fire Investigation Unit, and Lt. Berteletti was its operations officer after serving for many years as the Fire Investigation Unit's South Team leader. Collectively, they represented the State Fire Marshal's law enforcement presence for nearly three decades, directing and supporting thousands of investigations and hundreds of criminal cases. Congratulations to both Mike and Tom on their retirements! **Capt. Eric Desrochers** was promoted to a position at the Commonwealth Fusion Center, where he will oversee FEIU among other State Police teams and remain a valued friend and partner. **Lt. Marc Reidy** is stepping up as commanding officer supported by **Lt. Michael Rogowski** as executive officer.



*Lt. Tom Berteletti (left) and Capt. Mike Riley (right)*

In February and April, DFS welcomed three new members of the Fire Safety Division's Code Compliance & Enforcement Unit. **Joseph Townsend** has been assigned to the South Region, which includes the South Shore and Cape Cod, after 14 years with the Nantucket Fire Department. He was most recently a captain in the department's Fire Prevention Division. **Michael Reilly** will work in the Central Region following a 30-year career with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, & Firearms. **Marc Oddo** comes to DFS from the Charlotte, NC, Fire Department, where he worked as a fire investigator and fire inspector. He will handle the northeast region. Prior to their arrival, Compliance Officers **Matthew Murray** and **John Wood III** had for several months been handling code compliance, enforcement, and inspection duties for the entire state – we want to recognize those efforts as we welcome Mike, Joe, and Marc to the team.

Other notable transitions: We also want to recognize **Andrew Carrigan's** promotion to Flammable Gas Instructional Program Coordinator at the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy; **Shawn Green's** promotion to Special Operations Program

Coordinator; and **Derek Hirons'** hiring as the Hazmat Division's Education & Training Coordinator.

Finally, MFA Assistant Program Coordinator **William "Bill" Barry** passed away on February 27 after nearly 40 years in public service. This includes 33 years on the Methuen Fire Department, where he retired as deputy chief; 22 years in the US Navy Reserve; 15 years at the Academy; and a career teaching Fire Protection & Safety at Bunker Hill Community College. Bill taught just about every discipline the MFA offers, and he was a dedicated participant in the Firefighter Cancer Screening Program.

"Bill Barry was humble and unassuming, but when he walked in the room he had everyone's attention," Deputy State Fire Marshal Maribel Fournier said before leading a moment of silence in his honor at a recent recruit graduation. "Whether you were a good friend or a total stranger, he always made you feel welcome."

We extend our heartfelt condolences to Mr. Barry's family and loved ones, especially his wife and children.



*MFA staff photo*

*William "Bill" Barry, 1962-2025*

# Academy Staff, Crib Support, and CISM Team Recognized for Lifesaving Medical Response



*Some of the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy instructors and support staff who were recognized for providing immediate care to a recruit who suffered a severe medical emergency on January 29. State Fire Marshal Jon Davine (center) honored them at the Department of Fire Services' annual Performance Recognition Awards ceremony on February 5.*

The Department of Fire Services' annual Performance Recognition Program ceremony highlights the contributions of DFS staff to the agency's mission. This year, it also recognized members of the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy's instructor staff and support branch, who took immediate action when a recruit experienced a severe medical emergency at the MFA's Stow campus on January 29.

"In the span of just a few moments, the recruit lost consciousness and went into cardiac arrest," State Fire Marshal Jon Davine said at the ceremony. "Fortunately, the instructors and support staff immediately went into action. They got the recruit's pulse back, and he was conscious and alert when he was transported to an area hospital."

State Fire Marshal Davine issued certificates of recognition to Assistant Coordinator David Ryan; the Officer of the Day, Paul McPhail; EMS Officer Joseph DeSisto; Instructors Joel Abreu, Benjamin Arnold, Jeff Cote, Jeremy Coupal, Kevin

Cronin, David DeMarco, Paul Duquette, Mike Dwyer, Jackson Lowbridge, Tony Marfongelli, Ed Morrissey, Jim Puleo, Andrejs Sterns, and Chris Stevens; and support staff members Kevin Holstrom and Paul Pavone. All of them are active or retired firefighters; several who were able to attend the ceremony were joined by the chiefs of their fire departments.

The DFS Critical Incident Stress Management Team activated to debrief with recruits and staff after the incident, and they too were presented with a certificate.

"Medical emergencies are part and parcel of a firefighter's day-to-day work," he said. "But a crisis like this is different for recruits who are still getting their bearings on the job, and it's different when the patient is someone entrusted to your care. I really appreciate the CISM team mobilizing to help them, and I hope the certificate in their name reflects how grateful we are."

*Continued next page*

## **MFA Graduations, continued from p. 15**

Among the graduates of Call/Volunteer Class 116 was none other than Deputy State Fire Marshal Maribel Fournier, who represented the Sterling Fire Department. Deputy Fournier, who served as acting director of the Academy from 2021 to 2023, was no stranger to the Recruit program's physical demands — she has run the Tough Mudder, Spartan Race, and several other major obstacle course races.

"Graduating from the Academy is a tremendous accomplishment for all our graduates," said State Fire Marshal Davine. "I'm especially proud of Deputy State Fire Marshal Fournier, who completed the program while helping to manage the day-to-day operations of our agency."



*Deputy State Fire Marshal Maribel Fournier and Sterling Fire Chief David C. Hurlbut, Jr.*



Recognized for outstanding performance were:

- **JoAnne Caruso**, who provided crucial assistance on data cleanup, formatting, and migration in support of a new cloud-based inventory management program;
- **Timothy Moore**, who went above and beyond in helping to manage more than \$15 million in fire service grants and legislative earmarks;
- **Dr. Sara Praglusi Walsh**, who launched an immersion program for vocational school students to support fire service recruitment at a time when interested candidates are declining – all on her own initiative and in addition to her assigned duties; and
- **Robert Escott** and **William Scheutze**, who took on the responsibility of reviewing the MFA's Recruit Firefighter program to ensure that its instruction, documentation, and teaching staff adhered to the latest edition of NFPA 1001.

**Fire Investigation News, continued from p. 11**

and charged with burning a dwelling.

**Gloucester:** On the night of March 14, a fire in a local supermarket prompted a second-alarm response as staff and shoppers evacuated. Firefighters found two separate fires inside the building and knocked them both down within about 40 minutes. An examination of the scene and a review of video evidence from store surveillance cameras led Gloucester Fire, Gloucester Police, and State Police fire investigators to determine that the fire was intentionally set. Following interviews and additional investigation, that man was placed under arrest on March 20 for burning personal property and attempting to burn a building.

**Chelsea:** A small explosion near a Chelsea apartment building brought the Chelsea Fire Department, Chelsea Police, and the State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit to a walkway off of Revere Beach Parkway on the afternoon of April 6. Evidence at the scene suggested an M-class or similar device had been detonated. Investigators gathered video evidence, interviewed witnesses, and identified a suspect. Based on the weight of the evidence, they obtained a warrant for his arrest and tracked him to Dorchester, where the man was taken into custody for possession of an incendiary device, as well as other offenses related to the placement and use of an incendiary device. In a brief ceremony on April 18, Lieutenant Colonel Marc Lavoie of the State Police Division of Homeland Security & Preparedness presented the lead investigator, Trooper Mark Parr, with the Impact Award to recognize his efforts. Trooper Parr was quick to share credit with his partners on the State Police Fire Investigation Unit, State Police Bomb Squad, and Chelsea Police Criminal Investigation Division, calling it “a team effort all the way around.”

**Attleboro:** In the early morning hours of November 18, 2022, State Police fire investigators assigned to the State

passed on to the attending physician at the local hospital. This advice helped formulate the patient care plan and the patient was transported by helicopter to a Boston Hospital for hyperbaric treatment.

The patient survived and recovered thanks to effective treatment informed by the rapid, professional communication – which would not have been possible without cooperation among the local fire department, Hazmat, the local hospital, UMass Toxicology, Mass General Hospital, and MedFlight.

“This was an incredible call and use of the toxicology partnership,” said a Hazmat technician who operated on the CO call. “The information that I gained during the toxicology rounds, and the guidance during the call absolutely had a significant impact on the patient's outcome.”



*Lt. Col. Marc Lavoie (left) and Trooper Mark Parr (right)*

Fire Marshal's office were requested at a residential structure fire at 30 Division Street. They found the single-family home catastrophically damaged. The sole occupant, 80-year-old Judith Ann Henriques, was deceased inside. In concert with the Attleboro Fire Department, Attleboro Police investigators, and State Police assigned to the Bristol County DA's office, they determined that the fire began at the right rear corner of the home.

In the days and weeks that followed, their investigation led to an Attleboro man who was first charged with robbery and assault. In May 2023, a grand jury returned indictments charging him with first-degree murder, arson, and other offenses in connection with Ms. Henriques' homicide. The man pleaded guilty to those charges on May 8, 2025, rather than face trial. He will serve life in prison without the possibility of parole.

significant knowledge of explosive materials. A note found nearby hinted at political motives.

Based in part on Wedger's findings, authorities concluded that the attack was part of the wave of anarchist bombings that plagued the state in the early 20th century – including a massive blast outside a police station on Salutation Street in Boston's North End on the morning of December 17, 1916. It was, Wedger proclaimed, the largest explosion of its kind in Boston's history, powered by as many as 20 sticks of dynamite.

On March 16, 1917, an explosion inside the Suffolk County Courthouse – a stone's throw from the State House and not far from the North End – killed a janitor and a courtwatcher and injured several others. The blast originated in a second-floor lavatory, causing panic and severe structural damage. After analyzing the destruction and debris, Wedger determined that the bomb had been fabricated from an iron pipe filled with nitroglycerin, a highly sensitive and destructive substance. Those findings, along with additional evidence gathered by local, state, and federal investigators, linked the courthouse bombing to the Salutation Street bombing and a set of pipe bomb blueprints discovered in a Rowe's Wharf train station.

By 1919, bomb threats, explosions, anarchist protests, and riots were increasing in Massachusetts and across the country. That was the year Wedger was brought in to investigate one of Boston's most infamous industrial disasters – the Great Molasses Flood. On January 15, a massive storage tank filled with over two million gallons of molasses burst in the North End. The wave of molasses killed 21 people and injured over 150 others. While structural failure was the primary focus of the inquiry, Wedger's role was to determine whether an explosion had contributed to the disaster. After careful examination of the debris, damage to the surrounding area, and chemical residues at the scene, he concluded there was no evidence of explosives being used. His findings helped rule out sabotage as a cause, although public speculation about anarchist involvement had been widespread, and

the incident brought the inspection of large aboveground storage tanks under the State Fire Marshal's purview.

In January 1924, after 14 years as the state's leading chemist and explosives expert, Wedger retired from his unique and trailblazing position. He accepted a position with the Central

Railway Signal Company, overseeing the production of torpedoes and fuses at facilities in the U.S. and Canada. Although he left state service, Wedger continued to assist Massachusetts authorities with bomb investigations and provided expert testimony in court cases involving explosives.

One of his most significant investigations came in response to the 1928 explosion at the Preble Box Toe Company in Lynn. The disaster claimed 20

lives and raised serious questions about the storage of volatile materials near residential areas. Wedger, working with federal agents, identified unsafe storage practices involving pyroxylin, acetone, and naphtha. He criticized the lax safety standards at the factory even as his old boss, State Fire Marshal Neal, initially downplayed the risks. The disagreement between the two highlighted ongoing debates over industrial safety and the regulation of hazardous materials.

Even in retirement, Wedger remained committed to public safety, delivering lectures and demonstrations to firefighters and chiefs. His lively presentations focused on the hazards of explosives, flammable liquids, and materials like mercury and early motion picture film stock. He emphasized the limitations of traditional firefighting methods when dealing with chemical fires and stressed the importance of specialized training.

Walter Libby Wedger passed away at age 75 on June 5, 1936, at his home in Belmont. His contributions to public safety, law enforcement, and explosives management left a lasting legacy in Massachusetts and beyond, forecasting today's effective partnership between the law enforcement and fire service personnel assigned to fire and explosion investigation and mitigation.





# MFA Offers New Lithium-Ion Battery Training Program

## *Online Awareness-Level Course Now Available*

Lithium-ion batteries power countless devices that we use at home, at work, and at school every day. As their use has grown, so have the number of battery-related fire incidents reported by Massachusetts fire departments.

Recognizing this emerging hazard, the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy has launched a new online awareness-level training for first responders. This hour-long course, *Lithium-Ion Batteries Awareness Level*, is a tool for fire service professionals across the Commonwealth to enhance their knowledge of lithium-ion batteries and their attendant risks. It provides fire service personnel with critical

knowledge of lithium-ion battery construction, failure mechanisms, and associated fire hazards. The course explores risk reduction strategies and response considerations for incidents involving devices, vehicles, and energy storage systems powered by lithium-ion battery technology.

This online course is the latest effort by DFS to help fire departments grapple with fires caused by lithium-ion batteries.

It follows the creation of a lithium-ion battery investigative checklist that has vastly improved our understanding of the battery fire problem, as well as a day-long lithium-ion battery symposium that was recorded and is available on the

DFS YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/dfsosfm](http://www.youtube.com/dfsosfm).

Throughout 2024 and continuing in 2025, DFS has also offered a four-hour in-person class focusing on lithium-ion batteries' function and associated hazards. This includes household products, micromobility devices (scooters, e-bikes, etc.), electric vehicles, and battery energy storage systems.

We encourage fire service personnel to build their knowledge of Li-ion battery hazards using these resources, which are all available at no cost to Massachusetts firefighters or their departments. You can find the schedule of upcoming in-person courses and take the new online course by visiting the MFA's Learning Management System and searching for the keyword *Lithium*.



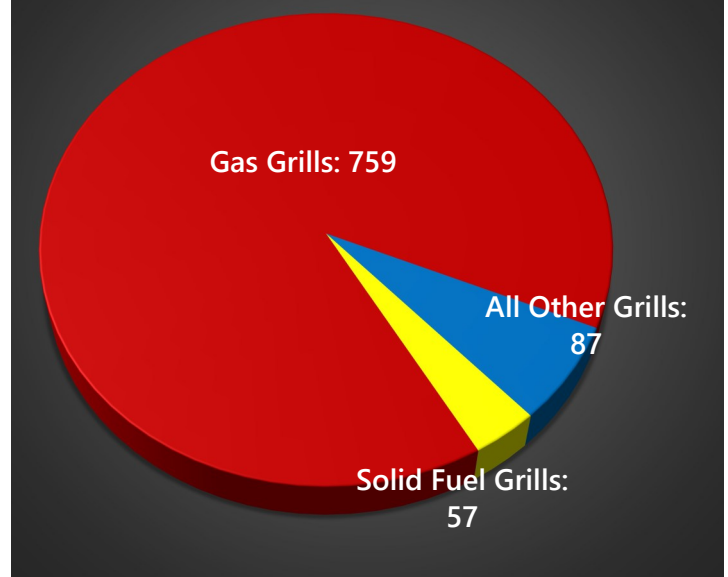
### *Grilling, continued from p. 7*

- Always turn off the burners and close the propane cylinder when done cooking.

#### **For charcoal grills:**

- Use only charcoal starter fluid. Gasoline and kerosene should not be used to start a fire in a grill. Never add lighter fluid to burning briquettes or hot coals. Doing so may cause a flash fire and result in serious burn injuries.
- Burning charcoal briquettes give off carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless gas that can be deadly. Always use charcoal grills in a well-ventilated area. Never use charcoal grills indoors.
- For proper disposal of ashes, allow the coals to burn out completely and cool for 48 hours before disposal.
- If you must dispose of ashes before they are completely cooled, thoroughly soak them in water before putting them in a metal container.

Massachusetts Grill Fires By Fuel Type  
2015-2024



# Save the Date!

Join us September 17-18 for the 30th Annual  
Public Fire & Life Safety Education Conference

*For three decades, the Public Fire & Life Safety Conference has brought firefighters, educators, service providers, and others together to share successful strategies, develop new skills, build strong partnerships, and make Massachusetts a leader in effective fire and life safety education. Join us in Mansfield this fall as we stay the course together!*



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