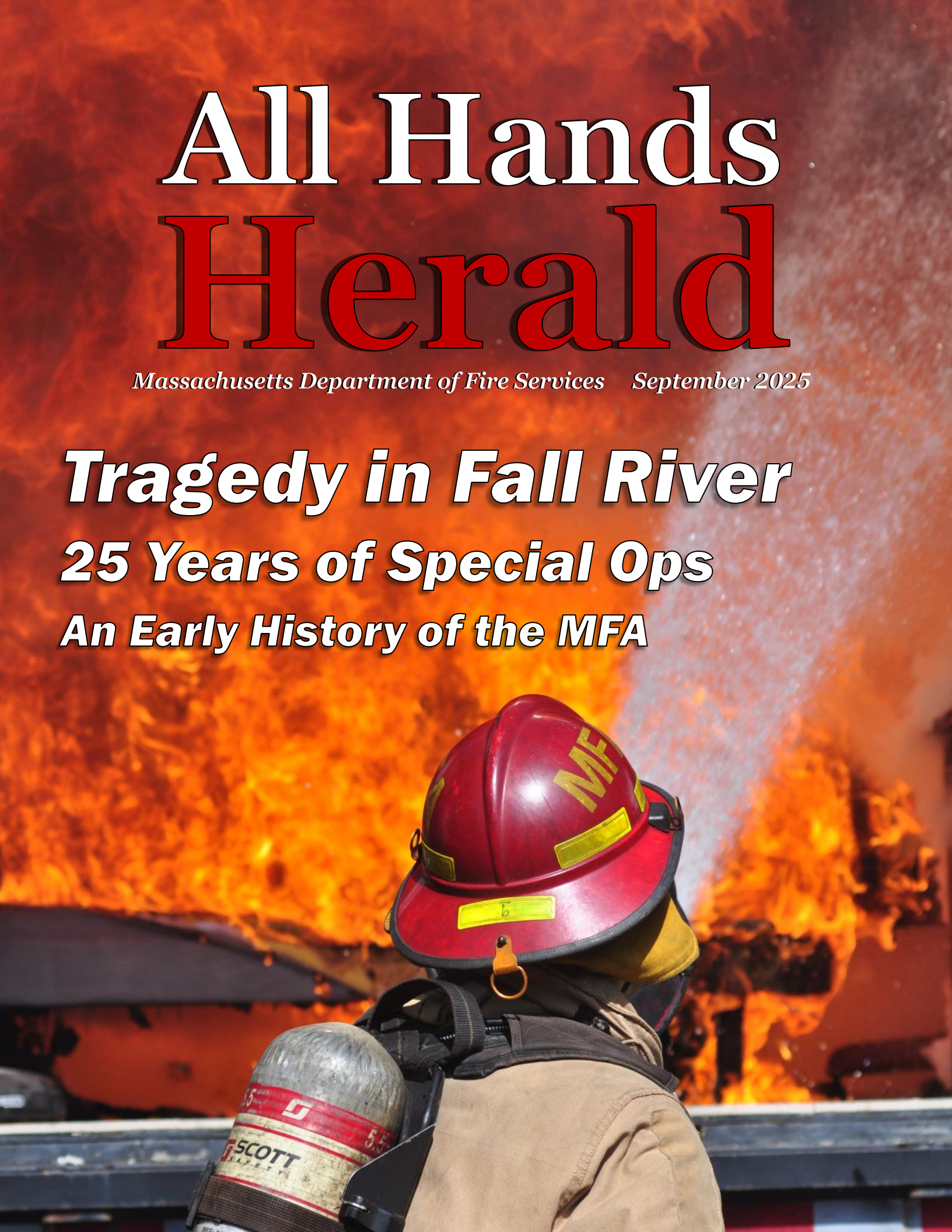
All Hands Herald

Massachusetts Department of Fire Services *September 2025*

Tragedy in Fall River

25 Years of Special Ops

An Early History of the MFA



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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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Back Cover: When you change your clocks, check your alarms! A reminder that many 10-year sealed battery smoke alarms are nearing the end of their useful lifespans.

Special thanks to: Al Beardsley, Scott Cluett, Ed Kawa, Steph DeMarco, Derryl Dion, Shawn Green, Derek Hirons, Tim Howe, Mike Lowe, Rich MacDonald, Christina Mitchell, Mike Peters, Josh Shanley, and Paul Shea

From the Fire Marshal

Tragedy in Fall River: The deaths of 10 residents at the Gabriel House assisted living facility represent a devastating loss to the families involved and the City of Fall River. They shocked the fire service and the fire protection community. And they were a tragic reminder of how vulnerable we still are to fire-related catastrophes. I want to join Fall River Fire Chief Jeffrey Bacon in recognizing the heroism and determination of firefighters who raced to the scene and prevented an even greater loss of life.

Shortly after the fire, I joined Chief Bacon and Bristol County District Attorney Thomas M. Quinn III at a press conference to reveal our preliminary findings on the origin and cause of the fire. You can read about those findings on the next page, but they are not the end of this investigation. As DA Quinn pointed out, this will be a lengthy process.

Code compliance officers responding to the Gabriel House fire

I am deeply grateful for the assistance of his office, the Bristol County State Police Detective Unit, our own State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit, the DFS Code Compliance & Enforcement Unit, and our fire protection engineering staff for their ongoing efforts to establish all the facts and circumstances surrounding Massachusetts' worst fire loss in more than 40 years.

2025 Fireworks Season: It will be several months before we have a full accounting of fires, explosions, and injuries attributed to illegal fireworks in Massachusetts this year, but we know that they contributed to the tragic death of an older adult in Wareham on the night of July 4.

Scene from the first Deadly White Powder symposium

Fireworks are inherently dangerous, and all the more so when they involve the large numbers of professional-grade pyrotechnic devices used for municipal displays. That's why our code compliance officers crisscross the Commonwealth each year to inspect as many fireworks setups as possible. During the 2025 season, they examined 103 of the 113 permitted displays for compliance with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code. That's an inspection rate of more than 91% — the highest on record! These inspections provide a significant fire and life safety benefit to shooters, fire departments, and the viewing public, and on behalf of all these stakeholders I want to recognize the Code Compliance & Enforcement Unit's accomplishment.

Deadly White Powder Symposiums: Each year in Massachusetts, illicit drug overdoses claim more lives than all homicides, suicides, motor vehicle crashes, and fires combined. To address this deadly hazard at the intersection of public safety and public health, DFS partnered with the Executive Office of Public Safety & Security and the Municipal Police Training Committee to deliver the first Deadly White Powder Symposium at Gillette Stadium on November 15, 2024. After a very positive reception, we delivered five more regional symposiums through 2025, making them accessible to participants from fire/rescue, EMS, law enforcement, corrections, clinical care, community health, and policymaking positions across the state.

Like the Lithium-Ion Battery Symposium we held a year earlier, these events brought subject matter experts from a variety of disciplines together to share their knowledge with stakeholders. The Deadly White Powder Symposium speakers represented law enforcement and criminal investigation, clandestine lab response, hazardous materials, the medical profession, and

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"UNFATHOMABLE TRAGEDY"

10 Perish in Fall River Fire; Worst Loss in Over 40 Years

A box alarm at 9:38 pm was the first signal of disaster.

It was July 13, 2025, and within two minutes on that warm summer night, the PSAP at the Fall River Police Department was flooded with 9-1-1 calls reporting a fire at the Gabriel House assisted living facility – home to nearly 70 older adults and people with limited mobility.

Within an hour, nine residents had perished. More than 30 were transported for medical care, as were five Fall River firefighters who were injured while effecting dozens of rescues over ground ladders and through the burning building's interior. A tenth resident died of her injuries in a Rhode Island hospital five days later. It was Massachusetts' worst fire-related tragedy since the Elliott Chambers rooming house fire in Beverly, where 15 people lost their lives more than 40 years earlier.

Bristol County District Attorney Thomas M. Quinn III identified the victims as Rui Albernaz, 64; Ronald Codega, 61; Brenda Cropper, 66; Margaret Duddy, 69; Robert King, 78; Halina Lawler, 70; Kim Mackin, 71; Richard Rochon, 78; Joseph Wilansky, 77; and Eleanor Willett, 86.

Every on-duty firefighter in the city responded to the three-story, wood-framed, horseshoe-shaped structure that spanned nearly 43,000 square feet. Dozens more who were off-duty raced to help. Local and regional EMS documented more than 30 runs to nearby hospitals. As news of the incident began to spread, municipal agencies coordinated to set up a family notification center in the chapel of St. Anne's Hospital nearby.

Speaking to news media in the early morning hours of July 14, Fall River Fire Chief Jeffrey Bacon called it an "unfathomable tragedy" and credited firefighters' heroic efforts with saving an untold number of lives.

"Every firefighter at the scene that night gave 100% and then gave more to preserve as many lives as they could under catastrophic conditions," he later recounted. "We have a philosophy in the fire service – you risk a little to save a little, and you risk a lot to save a lot. And they risked everything in hopes that others might live."

Fall River Fire Chief Jeffrey Bacon briefs media at the scene

The investigation began in those first few hours and continues today along two primary avenues. One was to determine the origin and cause of the fire – where it started and what started it. The other was to assess the property's compliance with the

Chief Bacon hailed firefighters' bravery at a press conference

Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code, the State Building Code, and other life safety regulations.

The entire South Team of the State Police Fire Investigation Unit joined those efforts, as did the unit's leadership team and Captain Eric Desrochers from the State Police Division of Homeland Security & Preparedness. They worked alongside the Department of Fire Services' Code Compliance & Enforcement Unit, troopers from the State Police Detective Unit assigned to the Bristol County District Attorney's office, the Fall River Fire Department's Fire Prevention Bureau, and the Fall River Police Department. They labored through the night and into the next day to examine the scene, speak with dozens of witnesses, and obtain relevant video footage.

In the days that followed, they were assisted by the State Police Bomb Squad, which conducted x-rays of various items at the fire scene to document and evaluate their internal condition. The State Police Collision Analysis Reconstruction Section mapped the scene using cutting edge cameras and software, enabling investigators to analyze fire and smoke behavior and how it progressed throughout the structure. The State Police Drone Unit provided aerial documentation of the building's exterior through high-resolution photography.

By July 22, the investigative team had reached a level of confidence sufficient to say publicly that the fire did not appear suspicious. District Attorney Quinn held a press conference to outline some of their preliminary findings on origin and cause while the code compliance assessment continued through a patient and exacting review of records against code requirements and observations at the scene.

"We recognize the public interest surrounding this event," District Attorney Quinn said. "We especially recognize the needs of the families for some meaningful information on what we have learned."

In a lengthy account of the investigation to date, State Fire Marshal Jon Davine said investigators determined that the fire began in a resident's room on the left side of the structure's second floor.

"They found no evidence of an intentionally set fire in this room," the Marshal said. "They found no signs that cooking, lighting, heating, electrical outlets, or other appliances contributed to ignition. They found no candles, incense, or related items."

Investigators did locate the damaged remains of an electric scooter, he said, but the damage was inconsistent with the violent deflagration usually seen in lithium-ion battery fires and it appeared to be the result of the fire rather than the cause.

"Investigators also identified an oxygen concentrator and numerous smoking materials in this room," State Fire Marshal Davine said. "Tragically, the occupant was among those who lost their lives on July 13, and we couldn't get an account of the fire in its earliest stages. As a result, the available evidence left them with two possible causes. One was an electrical or mechanical failure involving the oxygen concentrator. The other was improper use or disposal of smoking materials."

The State Police Fire Investigation Unit utilizes NFPA 921, *Guide for Fire & Explosions Investigations*, the internationally recognized framework for developing evidence-based opinions on origin, cause, and other facets of fire investigation. NFPA 921 recommends that fire investigators consider a fire cause undetermined "in circumstances where … two or more hypotheses cannot be rejected." As a result, the Marshal said, investigators have at this time classified the cause of the fire as undetermined with two possible ignition sources, both of which appeared accidental.

"Regardless of the exact cause, there's one additional factor we need to address," State Fire Marshal Davine said. "Investigators believe the presence of medical oxygen

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State Fire Marshal Davine discussing preliminary findings

Shawn Green photo

DFS Special Operations:

Supporting the Massachusetts Fire Service for 25 Years

In the late 20th century, the visionary State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan saw a growing need to provide support to local fire departments during incidents that required resources beyond what was available locally or through mutual aid. Today, a small team of personnel and a single command truck has grown into a multimillion-dollar fleet of custom-built vehicles, a staff of almost 70 dedicated members, and countless success stories of assisting communities in their time of need.

In late 1999, State Fire Marshal Coan established the Incident Support Unit – at that time, a team of personnel rather than the vehicle known as the ISU today. This team's mission was to support local fire departments with Incident Command System functions at large-scale events and operations. The original team was made up of experienced fire service professionals who had developed the knowledge and expertise to help at unique incidents across the Commonwealth – including the inaugural program manager Dave Houghton and retired Brockton Fire Chief Ken Galligan, who was one of the first "Ops Chiefs" and still serves with the Special Operations team today.

Mike Lowe photo

A first-generation DFS Rehab unit works the Boston Marathon

To fully meet the team's communications, conferencing, and support needs, and to best serve the local departments they assisted, the Marshal also commissioned a custom-built command vehicle designated as Incident Support Unit 1 – affectionally known as "The Mothership." It contained state-of-the-art features never before available at emergency scenes: a meeting room, onboard computers with internet access, secure phone lines, multiband radio capabilities, and staff members who could support almost any request the IC may have to mitigate during an incident.

Technology in the 1990s did not yet support the seamless cell coverage we take for granted today. The Incident Support Unit represented a quantum leap in achieving interoperable field communications. It allowed incident commanders to talk across bands to mutual aid partners, have reliable phone coverage, and use computers in a climate-controlled environment no matter where or when the incident unfolded. As of 2025, the fleet of ISUs has grown to three custom-built Incident Support Units and a newly acquired Incident Support Trailer (IST), all of which were designed specifically to support the Unified Command model we now see at many modern-day incidents.

The success of ISU 1 set the stage for DFS to expand its emergency response presence by meeting another vital fire service need: effective rehab. Firefighters have always battled with extreme heat, cold, and overexertion on the fireground, so in 2002, DFS acquired an old MBTA bus to prove the concept of fireground rehabilitation. Many departments had a strong canteen presence providing hydration and nourishment, but firefighters were still getting injured and suffering medical emergencies at fire scenes. With this "new" fireground rehab, department members could now escape the elements to recover physically and, just as importantly, have a place away from the sights and sounds of the incident so they could relax and recharge – physically and mentally. It also provided a degree of privacy for EMS monitoring to ensure their vital signs were at safe levels.

This makeshift rehab was so successful that, in 2005, DFS procured a purpose-built rehab truck that was designed to meet all the needs of true fireground rehabilitation. Demand was so great for this single unit serving all of Massachusetts that more were contracted to better meet emergency needs statewide. As of late 2025, DFS has four full-service Rehab units staged across the Commonwealth with the goal of being on scene to support any community in less than an hour at no cost.

The Special Operations team's Rehab program, including founding members such as Mike Aries, worked with fire chiefs, unions, and medical professionals to come up with guidelines that are now widely accepted and followed. These tested and medically accepted practices have saved countless firefighters from injury or possible death from preventable causes and have put Massachusetts at the forefront of fireground rehabilitation.

Personnel aboard ISU-2 at a 2023 brush fire in Deerfield

After leading the way with the ISU and Rehab programs, DFS kept an eye on emerging fire service trends to anticipate resource requests. In 2004, the agency acquired several mobile lighting plants and two large Whisper quiet generators capable of powering large facilities. These resources quickly became popular, and to this day they're deployed regularly for both emergency and preplanned events. In late 2010, two Utility-Terrain Vehicles were acquired – and soon deployed to transport countless residents and first responders Western Massachusetts after a tornado devastated the area just a few months later . These UTVs have also been proven effective at many preplanned events, being used by local departments to shuttle personnel and equipment in off-road or high-mobility tasks to supplement the department's assets.

Thinking outside the box in the summer of 2012, the agency spec'd out and procured a one-of-a-kind Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning trailer. The HVAC trailer was designed to provide heating and cooling in small spaces for all types of events. Used in concert with the Special Ops inflatable Zumro tent, it's given responders a climate-controlled space where they can set up a command area, medical treatment facilities, and temporary shelters even in harsh weather conditions. This trailer has also been called upon to provide HVAC to smaller dispatch areas and rooms containing important computer equipment when a facility loses its main system.

In 2017, State Fire Marshal Peter Ostroskey took note of an emerging public safety trend that made drones a natural fit for the fire service. The benefit of these tools at a fire scene was clear – but so was the hefty price tag, both for purchasing the drones and for training the pilots. The DFS drone program was born.

This endeavor required drafting standard operating procedures, standardizing training, and developing guidelines for an emerging technology platform. DFS worked with numerous agencies to come up with best practices that could ensure a safe but beneficial drone program. The drone program took off – literally – and became very successful. Early in the program's development the uses for the drones became apparent, incident commanders could now get real-time footage of an incident, including thermal imagery from angles never before available, which greatly improved command, control, and situational awareness. New uses were found including pre-incident surveys, brush fires, hazmat observation, and search and rescue. DFS has fully committed to the drone program, regularly replacing older models with the newest tools available, and the fleet has grown to more than 10 drones ready for rapid deployment across the Commonwealth, including one on each ISU.

Advances such as multi-band radios and wireless internet have put many of the original ISU's groundbreaking tools in every teenager's pocket. As a result, today's mission has shifted into supporting commanders and responders at a wide array of incidents. The full-size trucks allow for a unified command post to be set up, ensuring the proper ICS

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The DFS Special Operations team uses M8 (left) to haul equipment like the HVAC Trailer and Zumro tent

An Early History of the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy

MFA photo

The Massachusetts Firefighting Academy as we know it today was established by the Massachusetts Legislature in 1971. But the legislation didn't create the MFA out of whole cloth: it formalized the dedicated efforts of fire service leaders who for years had been delivering consistent, professional firefighter training to meet a growing need in the fire service.

The long road toward centralized firefighter training in Massachusetts began 60 years ago with Edward "Big Ed" McCormack. McCormack had been the youngest fire chief in Massachusetts when he led the fire department at Framingham's Cushing Hospital, a home for the aged that staffed 16 firefighters to protect the facility and its residents. Now retired from the department, Chief McCormack and fellow fire chiefs from neighboring towns initially proposed plans for a fire academy and called a meeting of more than 50 area chiefs, of whom 40 responded. Shortly afterward, instructors were obtained and the Central Massachusetts Fire Training Academy got its start in 1965, using Cushing's facilities. The recruit course initially ran for four weeks, but the instructors soon determined that more time was necessary to convey all the material.

Under the leadership of Framingham Fire Chief Clyde E. Van Duzer, who chaired the CMFTA's board, and Chief McCormack, who served as coordinator, the comprehensive, six-week course covered a broad spectrum of firefighting skills such as ladder and hose work, first aid, search and rescue, driver training, and the use of breathing apparatus. Additional topics included water supply and hydrants, ventilation, pump theory, building construction, nozzle operation, forcible entry, fire extinguishers, flammable liquids, aerial ladder theory, liquid and natural gases, car rescue, sprinklers and standpipes, salvage, overhaul, and arson investigation. Hands-on training scenarios involved controlled burns, oil fires, and the use of specialized equipment, ensuring practical experience complemented classroom instruction. The curriculum also incorporated unique elements such as emergency childbirth training to address a wide range of emergency situations.

Just as they are today, classes were taught by experienced firefighters at every rank, up to and including chief officers, from nearby fire departments who worked part-time at the academy. Engines and ladder trucks were borrowed from surrounding towns. The hospital's facilities offered a centralized location for training and administration, serving as a precursor to the broader vision of a statewide academy. By 1966, the academy marked a milestone by conducting its first intensive training course, and in June of that year, graduating 25 recruits from Framingham, Hopkinton, Natick, Waltham, Marlboro, Winchester, Hudson, Hopedale, Lincoln and the Cushing Hospital Fire Department. This achievement was a significant step toward addressing the long-recognized need for a centralized training institution. Going forward, the academy was called the State Fire Training Academy.

To provide individualized attention, classes were limited to a maximum of 18 students divided into two groups of nine. In February 1967, Pittsfield Fire Chief John E. McDonough Jr. emphasized the need for a centralized academy to support smaller departments lacking their own facilities. Larger cities like Pittsfield already maintained year-round programs, including a full-time drillmaster, but smaller departments greatly benefited from the initiative. Chief McDonough also highlighted the importance of selecting a full-time coordinator for the new academy, which was still in the planning stages. Meanwhile, smaller-scale training programs were conducted at Cushing Hospital.

Academy staff also visited various departments throughout the state and conducted 10-week courses at different locations. In Western Massachusetts, the newly established Western Massachusetts Fire Training Academy conducted seminars at Westover Air Force Base. These programs aimed to provide both basic and advanced training, reflecting the ongoing commitment to enhancing firefighter skills statewide. In 1967, attendees from the Sandisfield Fire Department participated in a seminar covering topics such as flammable liquid fires, hydraulics, and fire

officer training, illustrating the regional focus on improving firefighting capabilities.

In 1969, the State Fire Training Academy temporarily occupied office space in the Framingham Fire Department until it was able to move to a warehouse-like building on a wooded site in Stow which had served as a Civilian Conservation Corps camp in the 1930s. After negotiations with the Department of Natural Resources, the Academy secured a five-year use of the facilities and adapted them to include classrooms and administrative space. Outdoor classes were held in clearings, with pine trees serving as buffers.

In 1970, Chief McCormack delivered an address to vocational school directors at Westfield State College. During this address, he outlined his ambition for the MFA to become a model for a comprehensive, multimillion-dollar firefighter training program across the state. McCormack's plan called for the construction of a central academy with a $5 million budget. This central academy would be equipped with all necessary equipment and provide living quarters for trainees. In addition to this central hub, McCormack proposed establishing a series of smaller training academies distributed throughout Massachusetts. To realize this vision, McCormack proposed involving vocational schools in the training efforts. He believed that vocational school students could participate in the construction of these smaller regional academies. This involvement would provide vocational students with practical experience in construction trades while simultaneously expanding access to training for firefighters across the state.

MFA photo

In the late 1960s, Gov. John Anthony Volpe appointed a study commission to investigate the state of fire training in Massachusetts. Its recommendations proved instrumental in securing funding for firefighter training administration and operations in 1968. This allocation of funds marked a significant shift, signaling the state's commitment to formally supporting fire training. A major turning point came when the Massachusetts Legislature passed Chapter 842 of the Acts of 1971, which formally established the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy. The legislation created the Massachusetts Fire Training Council and a Bureau of Fire Training in what was then known as the Division of Occupational Education. These entities were tasked with unifying training efforts and setting standards for recruit and advanced firefighting education.

While the Academy's operations remained limited during its early years, often relying on temporary facilities such as Cushing Hospital and Horse Pond Road in Sudbury, the groundwork was laid for today's MFA.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Breast Cancer is the Leading Form of Cancer Among Women Firefighters

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. According to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, breast cancer is the second-most common cancer among American women, and the second-leading cause of cancer death in American women.

Firefighters face a greater risk of developing cancer than the public they protect. Tragically, they are also more likely to develop it earlier in life and receive a later-stage diagnosis. Women firefighters are no exception.

Breast cancer is the second most common type of cancer among women, following skin cancer, but it's the most common among women in the fire service. A 2023 study in *Frontiers in Public Health* found that breast cancer accounted for more than 25% of cancer diagnoses among women firefighters who took part in a 2019-2020 survey, making it the most common type of cancer among this cohort. Most cases were discovered when seeking medical care for symptoms rather than during routine or cancer-specific screening. The average age of participants who reported a cancer diagnosis was 39, more than 20 years younger than the average age at the time of a breast cancer diagnosis.

Women firefighters reported breast cancer diagnoses more than 20 years younger than women generally.

To address this urgent issue, the Department of Fire Services in 2023 added mammograms to the free cancer screening programs offered through the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy. More recently, DFS relaxed the eligibility requirements for mammograms and all other screenings to improve access to these potentially lifesaving early detection tools. Massachusetts is one of the only states offering free mammograms to their call, volunteer, career, and retired firefighters.

The worst cancer diagnosis is a late one. Please consider taking advantage of these potentially lifesaving resources — and please use Breast Cancer Awareness Month as an opportunity to remind your friends and colleagues about them. You can find more details on the DFS website: visit *www.mass.gov/dfs* and search for *Occupational Cancer*.

DFS Transitions

On June 15, State Fire Marshal Jon Davine announced the appointment of **JP Seivane** as the director of the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy.

JP spent 17 years with the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District, where he rose to the rank of Battalion Chief in a department serving more than 720,000 residents. He oversaw dozens of fire and EMS personnel on the fireground, in training, and on health, wellness, and professional development matters. His career at the SMFD included years of high-level organizational experience in strategic planning, training development, policy formation, interagency and interdisciplinary partnership, and media relations.

JP also taught part-time at Sierra College in California, where he developed, delivered, and refined paramedic, pre-paramedic and EMT courses for nearly a decade. He is a graduate of the University of California Davis, earned a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Phoenix, and obtained an associate's degree in fire science and certificate in fire technology from Allen Hancock College.

"The instructors and support staff of the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy provide an invaluable service to the state's firefighters, and the benefits extend to every resident of the Commonwealth," JP said. "I look forward to working with these dedicated men and women to continue the high standards they've put in place andwork with our partners in the Massachusetts fire service to meet their needs."

JP Seivane (center)

Jeff Winn (right)

Sheri Auclaire

Holly Bartlett (center)

On May 30, Hazmat Division Director **Jeff Winn** retired after a career of nearly 30 years in public service. After rising to leadership ranks in the Massachusetts National Guard, Jeff was appointed to lead the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy in 2022 and was instrumental in transitioning the MFA out of the COVID era and increasing course deliveries — especially at the new Bridgewater campus.

With an extensive background in interagency collaboration on hazardous materials response, he moved to the Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Division in 2023. Jeff was instrumental in charting a new path forward for the Hazmat Division and Special Operations team, modernizing operations and policy guidelines and reorganizing the Western Massachusetts districts to maximize the efficient delivery of services. Thank you, Jeff!

Also in May, Accounts Payable Specialist **Sheri Auclaire** retired after nearly 34 years with DFS, one of its predecessor agencies, and the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing. A true long-timer who worked for the State Fire Marshal's office at 1010 Commonwealth Avenue, Sheri was the agency's single employee with the primary responsibility of processing accounts payable documents — a key part of the transition from paper-based records to the Office of the Comptroller, to the Massachusetts Management Accounting and Reporting System, and beyond. Sheri built relationships with vendors and municipalities, and was adept at researching and resolving payment discrepancies and responding to payment inquiries. She kept her colleagues laughing with her unexpected outfits, quick wit, and twisted colloquialisms. Farewell, Sheri!

After 20 years in the US Coast Guard and nearly that long serving the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, DFS Boiler & Pressure Vessel Program Coordinator **Holly Bartlett** retired on August 31. Holly started in what was then the Department of Public Safety in 2010, playing a central role in administrating and supporting the Board of Boiler Rules and other state boards. Among many other duties, she supported Chief of Engineering Inspections Ed Kawa and the BPV team with inspector meetings, investigation report reviews, senior staff meetings, supporting the licensing exams for about 1,500 candidates per month, and more. When BPV transferred from DPS to DFS in 2017, Holly joined Ed and the team in Stow.

"Holly, you leave behind not only a record of outstanding service, but also the example of how to lead with dedication, professionalism, and grace," Ed said at an August 20 ceremony. Congratulations, Holly!

Seasonal Safety Spotlight: Thanksgiving

With more residential fires reported on Thanksgiving in Massachusetts than any other day, this uniquely American holiday is the Super Bowl of fire prevention. Now is a great time to start planning your seasonal safety messaging.

Thanksgiving Fire Data

Massachusetts fire departments reported 104 residential fires on Thanksgiving Day last year, holding about steady for the third straight year. Fortunately, no injuries were reported and damages were estimated at about $830,000, about one-third less than the average year. This is a welcome trend after Thanksgiving 2020, when COVID-era chefs — many of whom were likely using new equipment to whip up unfamiliar recipes — contributed to nearly 125 house fires.

On average, about 80% of Massachusetts fires are cooking-related, but over the past 10 years that rate has climbed to about 90% on Thanksgiving. In fact, there are usually about twice as many cooking fires on any given Thanksgiving as on the next highest day of the year — which is usually Christmas Eve. Cooking safety is important all year long, but this particular holiday offers a strong opportunity for fire prevention messaging — along with a built-in news hook.

Cooking Fire Safety Messages

Here are some tried and true cooking safety messages to promote in the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving Day:

Keep it clean:

- Get in the habit of keeping your cooking area clear of anything that can burn.
- Clean up grease spills.
- Keep groceries, food packaging, and other items well away from the stovetop.

Stand by your pan:

- Unattended cooking is the leading cause of kitchen fires.
- Stay by the stove when you're boiling, broiling, or frying food.
- Set a timer if you're baking or roasting in the oven so you don't lose track of time.

Put a lid on it:

- If you've got a fire on the stovetop, cover it with a lid or cookie sheet and turn off the heat. This will smother the flames.
- Never try to move a burning pan or douse it with water – this could spread the flames.
- For a fire inside the oven or microwave, keep the door closed and turn off the appliance.

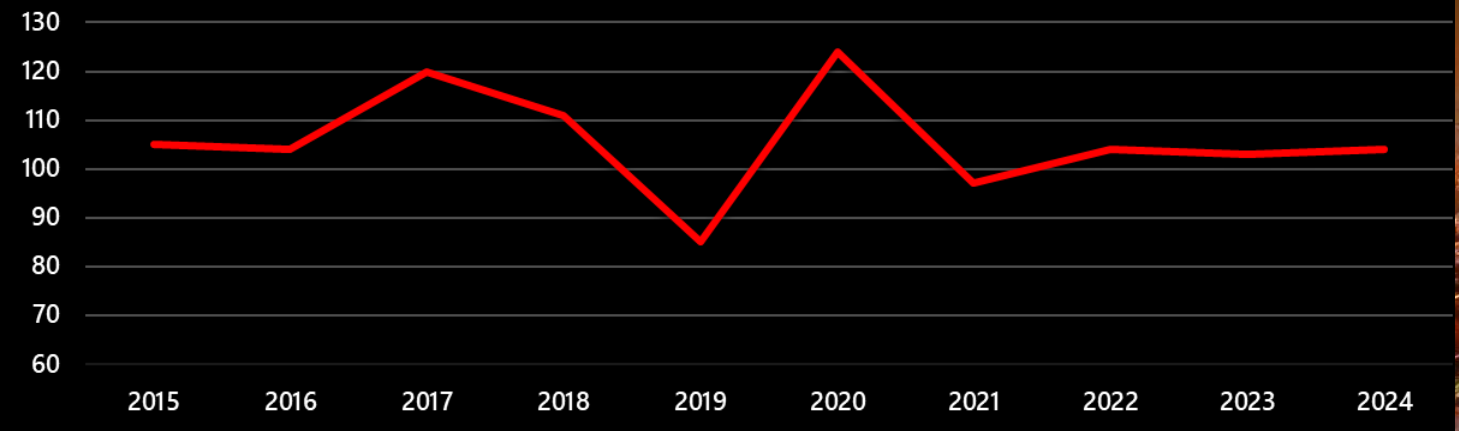
Buy it, don't fry it:

- Nationwide, more than 1,000 house fires are attributed to turkey fryers and other deep fryers each year.
- These fires cause dozens of catastrophic injuries and millions of dollars in property damage as hot oil ignites and explodes.
- The National Fire Protection Association and Consumer Product Safety Commission strongly discourage the use of turkey fryers by consumers.
- Purchasing a fried turkey from a restaurant or grocery store is safer — and easier — than attempting to fry it yourself.

If you can't put a fire out quickly and safely, then get out, stay out, and call 9-1-1. Most cooking fire injuries take place when someone is trying to control a fire.

Finally, if you're drowsy or impaired, tag out for help or order in. Falling asleep with food on the stove could lead to a serious fire, injuries, or worse.

Massachusetts Thanksgiving Day Fires, 2015-2024



Progress at DFS Bridgewater

Six years after the former site of the Massachusetts Alcohol & Substance Abuse Center was transferred from the Department of Correction to the Department of Fire Services, the site at 911 Conant Street in Bridgewater has undergone its most dramatic development yet.

Known as "Package A," this $18 million construction project delivered infrastructure upgrades that will serve the entire campus — including portions that haven't been built yet. By establishing water and electrical service during this stage, Package A will allow subsequent buildings, props, and other features to tap into existing utilities, just as they are in urban development. It also included paving to the far end of the campus and a water reclamation system designed to reduce overall water use.

The most dramatic addition to the Bridgewater landscape is a three-story Class A burn building with 5,400 interior square feet and 11 burn rooms. It also includes several features that replicate some of the most common structure fire scenarios that Massachusetts firefighters encounter, including fires on triple-decker porches, interior fire extension, garage fires, standpipe operations, roof ventilation, and more. Seasoning burns began on August 25 in preparation for the building's regular use. Keep your eyes peeled for a ribbon-cutting ceremony: the building is expected to go into service this fall.

Google Earth photo

Google Earth photo

Mike Peters photo

MFA's New Pump Panel Simulator Prop

As the fire service has evolved into an all-hazards profession, the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy's mission has evolved to deliver the highest standards of training in hazardous materials, technical rescue, Active Shooter / Hostile Event Response, and other specialized disciplines. But the MFA is still deeply committed to teaching the fundamentals – including and especially putting water on fire.

"The pump panel on engines in use across Massachusetts and around the world is an important link in getting water out of the tank, into the hose, and onto the fire," says Program Coordinator Al Beardsley of the MFA's Advanced Fire Skills Program. "The pump operator is critical to its successful use. Training firefighters to become familiar with the panel and utilize it effectively on the fireground is vital to the lives and safety of their brothers and sisters on the line."

Advanced Fire Skills Program Coordinator Al Beardsley demonstrates the new pump simulator for instructors

Toward that end, the MFA's Advanced Fire Skills Program recently took delivery of a new Pump-Ops simulator from FAAC Commercial. The simulator takes pump training to entirely new level for students and instructors, using what is effectively a fully operational pump panel in a freestanding, mobile prop that comes complete with realistic lights, sound, and a section of large-diameter hose.

This new tool will allow new and experienced firefighters to manipulate primers and valve gates, observe the effect as the gauges respond in real time, and utilize all the components of a common pump panel without taking an engine out of service for training. It can be customized to reflect a community's water system, whether it's pressurized municipal water or static sources and drop tanks, and even simulate the apparatus in use locally by changing settings for the pump's gallons per minute, water tank capacity, and the attack line and LDH sizes.

"We can customize the prop to fit a local community's needs in just a few seconds," Beardsley said. "Don't hesitate to ask."

In addition to training for regular use, the simulator will also help firefighters understand the dangers created by pump cavitation, running a pump over-heated, or shifting a power take-off out of pump before disengaging the transmission – all with no damage to apparatus. And even though the prop is life-sized, it's mounted on wheels and maneuverable enough for transport to all three MFA campuses and local deliveries.

Instructors are currently training on the prop and looking at running classes later this year.

Tier 1 Hazmat Response in Charlton Reveals Unusual Cargo Configuration

In the early morning hours of July 8, the Charlton Fire Department called a Tier 1 Hazmat response after a partial rollover involving a tandem trailer. While the first trailer remained upright, the driver reported that it contained a 55-gallon drum of sodium hydroxide.

The driver further reported that the trailer was locked and sealed at pickup, so he had no information on where the drum was located. Responding State Police and Charlton Fire personnel observed the rear doors to be pushed outward. They were concerned that the load might have shifted — and the drum might be leaking a highly corrosive substance.

Derek Hirons photo

Wearing USAR gear and SCBA, District 3 Hazmat technicians gained access to the trailer to assess the hazard. Inside, they found an unusual cargo configuration, with a second level comprised of separated beams running from one side to the other.

The contents had already shifted, and because it was not a solid floor, any further shifting would send the contents of the upper level falling to the lower level. Had the drum been damaged, techs would have had to systematically empty the trailer to mitigate the hazard. Fortunately, it was on

Continued on p. 20

Massachusetts Firefighting Academy


Class #330

Class #BW35


Class #S41


Class #331

Career Recruit Firefighter Training

The Massachusetts Firefighting Academy's 10-week 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 1010, *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 #330 graduated at the Stow campus on May 23, 2025. The 34 graduates represent the fire departments of Acton, Falmouth, Gardner, Haverhill, Lynnfield, Mansfield, Medway, Middleborough, Natick, Norwell, Provincetown, Salem, Waltham, Wayland, and Wellfleet. Firefighter Noah Brush of the Natick Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

Class #BW35 graduated at the Bridgewater campus on July 18, 2025. The 18 graduates represent the fire departments of Belmont, Hyannis, Lakeville, Norwell, Seekonk, Somerville, Walpole, Wrentham, and Yarmouth. Firefighter Nicholas Barrett of the Norwell Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

Class #S41 graduated at the Springfield campus on July 25, 2025. The 19 graduates represent the fire departments of Auburn, Southbridge, and Springfield. Firefighter Riley Whalen of the Auburn Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

Class #331 graduated at the Stow campus on August 8, 2025. The 31 graduates represent the fire departments of Amesbury, Avon, Lexington, Littleton, Lynn, Milford, Nantucket, Salem, Somerville, Stoneham, Waltham, Wayland, Westborough, and Wilmington. Firefighter Christian Fabrizio of the Lynn Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

Recruit class photos by Christina Mitchell

Recruit Graduations

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 their communities, themselves, and their fellow firefighters.

Upon successful completion of the Call/Volunteer Recruit Program, all students have met the requirements of NFPA 1010, *Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications*, and may seek certification to the levels of Firefighter I/II and Hazardous Materials Operational Level Responder. The Call/Volunteer Recruit Training Program is delivered at MFA campuses and at local fire departments.

Class #118 graduated at the Stow campus on May 14, 2025. The 25 graduates represent the fire departments of Avon, Dartmouth Fire District 1, Dartmouth Fire District 2, Duxbury, Freetown, Grafton, Halifax, Hanson, Lakeville, Norwell, Onset, Raynham, and Westport. Firefighter Kayla Kalamajka of Dartmouth Fire District 2 was named the Outstanding Student in this class.

Class #119 graduated at the Springfield campus on June 25, 2025. The 26 graduates represent the fire departments of Brimfield, Gill, Hadley, Hampden, Hatfield, Huntington, Orange, Palmer, South Hadley District 1, South Hadley District 2, Southwick, Spencer, Sturbridge, Three Rivers, Warren, Whately, and Windsor. Firefighter Daniel Hurwit of the Whately Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.

Class #120 graduated at the Stow campus on June 30, 2025. The 31 graduates represent the fire departments of Ashby, Boylston, Carlisle, Douglas, Dover, East Brookfield, Groton, Hamilton, Harvard, Leicester, Lunenburg, Mendon, Merrimac, Millville, New Braintree, Pepperell, Princeton, Shirley, Sterling, Stow, Sutton, and Tyngsborough. Firefighter Christopher Tota of the Harvard Fire Department was named the Outstanding Student of this class.


Class #118


Class #119


Class #120

Fire & Explosion Investigation News

2025 Fireworks Activity: The possession and use of fireworks requires licensing and certification in Massachusetts because these devices are so dangerous. Overall, the law is highly effective: the Massachusetts fireworks injury rate is about one-fifth the national rate. Both injuries and fires held relatively steady in 2024 and reflect a decline from historically high numbers in 2020.

Illegal fireworks led to a tragedy in Wareham on July 4

Locally and nationally, the weeks leading up to Independence Day always see an increase in fireworks-related fires, explosions, and injuries. More than half of last year's fireworks-related visits to Massachusetts emergency departments took place during June and July. These months also accounted for two-thirds of the fires and explosions caused by fireworks during the same five-year period.

Sadly, the 2025 summer fireworks season was marred by a fatal tragedy on the night of July 4. Just after 9:15 pm, Wareham Police received a 9-1-1 call for a report of a person struck by fireworks on Beach Street facing the Wareham River. Wareham Police, Wareham Fire, and EMS responded and located a 70-year-old Wareham man who had suffered severe trauma and was pronounced deceased at the scene.

State Police bomb techs & fire investigators in Mashpee

Wareham officials contacted State Police assigned to the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office, the State Police Bomb Squad, and the Massachusetts Fire Marshal's Office. Once bomb technicians ensured that no further explosive hazards were present, the team assessed the area. Based on an examination of the scene, witness interviews, and other evidence, investigators determined that the man had been setting off fireworks at the beach when one exploded, causing traumatic injuries that claimed his life.

Another major fireworks incident occurred just a few nights earlier in Mashpee. It took place just after 4:30 pm on July 2 as a licensed pyrotechnician was preparing for a permitted display at the New Seabury Country Club. Without warning, nearly the entire setup detonated prematurely, most likely the result of an accidental activation of a fuse while a crew member was squibbing the display. That crew member, who was in close proximity to the ensuing ignition, suffered second-degree burns and was transported to Rhode Island Hospital. A second crew member and a pet dog were transported with less serious injuries. Six other people were evaluated at the scene and declined transport.

As dramatic as the ignition was, the Mashpee Fire Department's pre-planning, site determination, permitting requirements, on-scene presence, and immediate action prevented what could have been a catastrophic event with significant property damage, more serious injuries, or much worse. Mashpee FD had established the setup scene away from structures and kept spectators at a safe distance. They were present the entire time and able to provide both medical assistance and fire suppression immediately — a crucial factor missing from the illegal use of fireworks.

Interviews, scene examination, and post-blast investigation were conducted by Mashpee Fire, Mashpee Police, State Police bomb techs and fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office, and the Department of Fire Services' Code Compliance & Enforcement Unit.

The incidents in Wareham and Mashpee were just the most serious of nearly a dozen fireworks incidents that bomb technicians and fire investigators from the State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit responded to this year. Local police and fire departments are encouraged to contact the State Police Bomb Squad for assistance with seized fireworks and other dangerous devices.

For an administrative pickup, please contact the State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit at 978-567-3310 during normal business hours. For an immediate response, please call your local State Police Troop Duty Office or State Police Dispatch at 508-820-2121 and ask to be connected.

Lowell: Just before 3:15 am on the morning of February 10, 2021, the Lowell Fire Department responded to 90 Westford Street in Lowell, where firefighters effected numerous rescues from the three-alarm fire. The blaze caused catastrophic damage to the three-story, multi-family home and two exposure buildings; displaced dozens of residents; injured three occupants, two police officers, and a firefighter; and claimed the life of 77-year-old Em Chak.

A joint investigation by the Lowell Fire Department, Lowell Police, State Police assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office, and State Police assigned to the Middlesex County District Attorney's office determined that the fire had been intentionally set. As the investigation continued, Julian Boykins, then 20, was arrested and indicted for Em Chak's homicide and other offenses.

On August 13, 2025, Boykins pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter for causing Chak's death, assault and battery with a dangerous weapon for causing injury to a firefighter, and destruction of evidence. He was sentenced to 23 to 25 years in state prison, followed by five years of probation upon his release. Had the case proceeded to trial, State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office would have testified that the fire had started with the application of an open flame to combustible materials at the scene. The case was prosecuted by Middlesex County District Attorney Marian T. Ryan's office.

77-year-old Em Chak died in the 2021 arson on Westford Street in Lowell

West Springfield: On August 9 and 15, 2025, the West Springfield Fire Department responded to two fires involving tractor trailers within half a mile of each other. Both vehicles were parked and unoccupied and both fires took place in the early morning hours. Based on witness observations and video evidence, it was clear both fires were intentionally set. A joint investigation by West Springfield Fire, West Springfield Police, and State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office identified a 42-year-old Northampton man who was charged with arson, destruction of property, and trespassing for the August 15 fire. The August 9 fire remains under investigation.

Pittsfield: On July 22, 2025, the Pittsfield Fire Department was called to a multi-family home on Fourth Street for a reported fire. All residents escaped safely but one cat perished. The investigation by the Pittsfield Fire Investigation Unit, Pittsfield Police, and State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office determined that the fire had been intentionally set on a back porch. It further identified a suspect who had been kicked out of the associated apartment. In an interview, that 23-year-old man allegedly made statements taking responsibility for setting the fire. He was charged with arson of a dwelling.

Clinton: The Clinton Fire Department responded to a Horseshoe Lane home on the night of July 5 after neighbors saw smoke and flames at the front of the structure. They quickly extinguished the fire and observed a gas can inside. The origin and cause were investigated by Clinton Fire, Clinton Police, and State Police assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office, who collectively determined that the fire had been intentionally set. In an interview later that day, a 67-year-old resident allegedly made statements taking responsibility for the fire. She was arrested for arson of a dwelling.

Hopedale: A brush fire caused by smoking materials led to an arrest for possession of an incendiary device after the Hopedale Fire Department was called to a Highland Steet home on June 13, 2025. The fire was reported near a shed at the rear of the home, and first responders observed stump remover and other substances inside the shed. In an interview, the homeowner allegedly made statements that he combined these chemicals to create an explosive powder for use as a propellant. While investigators determined that the fire started accidentally with improperly discarded cigarettes, the homeowner was charged with possessing incendiary materials.

North Adams: A room and contents fire investigation escalated into a Bomb Squad response on the afternoon of June 2, 2025. After extinguishing the fire, the North Adams Fire Department and North Adams Police observed a 37-year-old man acting erratically. This resident allegedly made statements regarding a pipe bomb inside the home. State Police fire investigators and bomb technicians assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office examined the scene and found evidence of an intentionally set fire in a bedroom, but a sweep of the premises did not turn up any explosives. The man was charged with setting the fire and taken into custody.

Chicopee: The Chicopee Fire Department responded to a Belcher Street residence shortly after 3:30 am on June 1, 2025, for a report of a residential structure fire. On arrival,

Continued on p. 20

EOPSS Internship Program Visits DFS

Up close with a Hazmat Operational Response Unit

Each year since 2023, the Executive Office of Public Safety & Security's Internship Program has welcomed a diverse cohort of undergraduate and graduate students interested in rewarding careers in public safety, criminal justice, and homeland security. Participants are embedded within EOPSS agencies and take part in site visits through the summer to observe Massachusetts' public safety infrastructure in action.

As always, DFS pulled out all the stops to give students the best tour of their internship experience. On July 16, agency staff hosted stations across the Stow campus to give about three dozen interns a deeper understanding of the depth and breadth of service that DFS provides to their communities.

At the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy, Recruit Program Coordinator Dean Babineau and Assistant Coordinator Mike Gelinas split the interns into two groups and led them to the Burn Building, where Recruit Class #331 was training on Burn Day 4. Their narration explained the various tasks being completed, from making the hydrant to operating the pump to attacking the fire with handlines.

The groups then made their way to the rear parking lot, where Hazmat Program Coordinator Steph DeMarco and Bill Vecchio gave them an overview of an Operational Response Unit, which stores and transports equipment that Hazmat techs might need at a large-scale, long-term response. After a few hours in the sun, the students made their way over to Rehab 7 to cool off, rest up, and rehydrate with Gatorade (in cans, naturally). Erick Benoit of the Special Operations team then brought them onboard the new Incident Support Trailer to show off its conferencing and communications features. Finally, Trooper Ken Belben and AK9 Starsky gave a demonstration of the State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit's accelerant detection capabilities.

DFS was fortunate to have intern TJ Sahasakmontri return for a second year. Assigned to the MFA in 2024, TJ took on a role with the Hazmat Division this summer. And while he came to EOPSS with an interest in law enforcement, he revealed that he's applied to take the Firefighter Civil Service Test. Great choice, TJ!

Observing training evolutions at the Burn Building

Onboard the Incident Support Trailer

AK9 Starsky takes a break after demonstrating his skills

NFPA 3000 UPDATE:

ASHER Courses Pick Up as School Lets Out

School vacation contributed to a boom in Active Shooter / Hostile Event Response (ASHER) training in 2025. ASHER instructors from Department of Fire Services and Municipal Police Training Committee had their busiest season to date this summer, delivering nearly a dozen courses for hundreds of fire/rescue, law enforcement, EMS, and dispatch personnel across Massachusetts.

Under a 2022 directive from the Executive Office of Public Safety & Security, DFS and MPTC coordinate the ASHER program to deliver in-service training consistent with NFPA 3000, *Standard for an Active Shooter / Hostile Event Response Program*. This training, which most frequently utilizes the ALERRT Center's Active Attack Integrated Response (AAIR) curriculum, is offered in a two-day responder-level course and a five-day train-the-trainer course that allows fire and police instructors to bring the curriculum back to their local and regional departments.

Stop the dying: A Hull firefighter applies a tourniquet

From January to June this year, the ASHER team delivered an average of two to three AAIR courses per month. That rocketed to six in July alone. The summer's courses included trainings in Provincetown, Milton, Salem, Saugus, Harvard, Framingham, Waltham, Westfield, and Hull, with more than 400 first responders certified since May.

Police and fire personnel training in Recue Task Force operations

"One of the biggest challenges in meeting the local demand for ASHER training is finding venues that are suitable for these dynamic courses," said Scott Cluett, the DFS Statewide ASHER Director. "Schools are ideal because the classroom spaces and long, wide hallways can accommodate scenarios and break-out sessions for instructors and students."

The AAIR curriculum brings police and fire personnel together to stop the killing, stop the dying, and perform rapid casualty evacuation. This interdisciplinary training draws from the lessons of past tragedies where delays and siloed responses needlessly cost lives. Despite the lifesaving benefits, however, the ASHER team understands that most communities would rather not have active shooter simulations overlapping with the school day.

Stop the killing: A police officer at a Milton ASHER training

"We couldn't agree more," Cluett said. "We prefer to have the entire building to ourselves so we don't alarm anyone or interfere with school activities. That's why we've made the most of these summer months and packed in the course deliveries."

DFS is committed to delivering consistent, professional ASHER training to every interested community. Fire chiefs, training officers, and other personnel are encouraged to contact the ASHER team for help in setting up a course delivery: email william.s.cluett@mass.gov *for more information.*

Fall River, *continued from p. 5*

played a significant role in the fire's rapid spread and the ensuing tragedy. Oxygen is a necessary component of any fire, and it was present in the area of origin and other locations at Gabriel House."

In an oxygen-rich environment, a fire will ignite more readily, spread more rapidly, and burn at higher temperatures. According to the DFS Fire Safety Division, home oxygen was a known factor in about 20 fire deaths and more than three dozen injuries in Massachusetts from 2015 to 2025, and it was a suspected factor in many more. Most of these incidents involved smoking materials, which are the leading cause of fatal fires here and across the nation. And tragically, just like at Gabriel House, the victims were mainly older adults at increased risk due to health or mobility issues. Local fire departments, caregivers, and service providers are urged to download the DFS oxygen safety brochure and share it in their communities: visit *www.mass.gov/dfs* and search for *Home Oxygen Safety*.

As the press conference concluded, State Fire Marshal Davine recalled Chief Bacon's remarks in the impromptu media briefing outside Gabriel House nine nights earlier.

"He called it 'an unfathomable tragedy.' And that was exactly the right word," the Marshal said. "The loss of life, the centuries of family history and memory that were taken, the fear and the heartache – we can't begin to measure their depths."

Meanwhile, an assessment of the property's compliance with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code, Massachusetts State Building Code, and other fire and life safety regulations is ongoing. That process is being led by the DFS Code Compliance & Enforcement Unit, DFS fire protection engineers, and the Bristol County DA's office.

"Nothing will undo what happened at Gabriel House," State Fire Marshal Davine said, "but we can do everything in our power to understand it and prevent it from happening again."

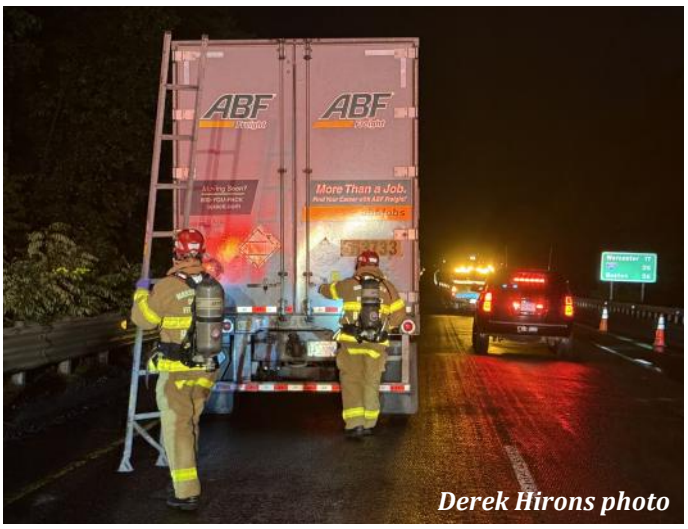
The Gabriel House tragedy "was one of the worst fire-related disasters in the state's modern history," said DA Quinn

Hazmat Response, *continued from p. 13*

the lower level, tightly packed and safe.

After dealing with a similar incident last year, when a trailer had to be unloaded by forklifts on the side of the highway, District 3 techs offered advice for similar events.

"In the future, should any district encounter a similar incident, especially on the highway, consider moving the load to a rest stop or similar location so that the operation can occur in a much safer space," wrote Technician Derek Hirons, the Hazmat Division's Training & Education Coordinator. "Cleanup contractors, Mass Highway, and even some tow companies have access to the equipment needed to complete such a task."



Derek Hirons photo

Hazmat techs approach trailer with sodium hydroxide aboard after a partial rollover

Fire & Explosion Investigation, *continued from p. 17*

they found the three-story, multi-family home well involved and immediately made entry to locate occupants and attack the fire. All residents were able to escape safely. Chicopee Fire, Chicopee Police, and State Police fire investigators determined that the fire began had been intentionally set in a second-floor bathroom. Throughout the day, the ongoing investigation by Chicopee and State Police led to a 40-year-old Chicopee woman who had allegedly been involved in an altercation at the home prior to the fire. They obtained a warrant for her arrest, and she was taken into custody later that evening.

Chicopee: On April 29, 2025, after a 35-year-old Chicopee man posted a social media video of himself pouring gasoline and lighting a fire in his Langevin Street home, a viewer contacted authorities to report the incident. The Chicopee Fire Department, Chicopee Police, and State Police fire investigators responded to the scene to find the fire extinguished, a gas can nearby, and the man nowhere to be found. Chicopee and State Police located and interviewed him the next day after a BOLO and a warrant were issued, and he was arrested for arson of a dwelling.

Special Operations, *continued from p. 7*

structure can be effectively utilized to mitigate natural disasters, wide-area search and rescue, Hazmat incidents, and Active Shooter / Hostile Event Response in addition to the traditional structure and wildland fires. Time and time again, the presence of a solid Incident Command System in a Unified Command setup has proven to effectively mitigate the incident and the ISUs have delivered a place for this to happen.

DFS resources are not just for emergency situations, however. Every year, Special Operations supports hundreds of communities at preplanned events from local road races to SEAR 1 events. Cities and towns across the Commonwealth can and do pre-stage ISUs, Rehabs, drones, and UTVs in anticipation of a large event that will overwhelm their available resources. Professional Special Operations staff such as founding member Mike Lowe will set up assets according to the host community's needs and have them ready for the incident commander. DFS drones are all flown by FAA Part 107 certified pilots, and UTVs are staffed with drivers familiar with the transportation demands placed upon the fire service. In fact, most members of the Special Ops team are active or retired firefighters.

The Special Operations team has evolved to meet the needs of the fire service over the last 25 years and will continue to grow over the next 25 years. Its members would like to thank the dedicated team of technicians, team leaders, and coordinators as well as the many past employees that supported the Special Operations mission through the decades.

DFS Special Operations resources are available around the clock at no charge. They can be activated for emergencies by calling the MEMA Dispatch center at 508-820-2000. Resources for planned events can be reserved by calling the Special Operations office at 978-567-3171 during normal business hours.

Special Ops Gators and UTVs provide off-road transportation for personnel, equipment, and injured patients

Young Heroes in Fairhaven!

DFS Fire Safety Division Director Brian Ingram, Bella, Adriel, and Fairhaven FD SAFE Educator Maggie Rocha

On July 18, 2025, young siblings Adriel and Bella helped rescue a two-year-old boy from potentially life-threatening danger at a pool in Fairhaven. In recognition of their instinct to help using the skills they learned in the Student Awareness of Fire Education program, Fairhaven Fire-EMS nominated them for DFS Young Hero Awards.

On August 20, Fire Safety Division Director Brian Ingram joined local and state officials in Fairhaven to recognize the duo for their actions. The kids both received Young Hero t-shirts, certificates, and citations from the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Well done, Adriel and Bella!

Do you know a SAFE Young Hero? Share their story and recognize their accomplishments! Contact DFS Fire Data & Public Education Program Coordinator Sheryl Hedlund at *sheryl.hedlund@mass.gov*.

Fire Marshal, *continued from p. 3*

the human factor — the families who have been torn apart by this insidious epidemic.

All told, more than 700 attendees took part in the symposiums in Foxborough, Hyannis, Southbridge, Waltham, Holyoke, and Mansfield. They left with a deeper understanding of the issue, along with fentanyl and xylazine test strips, Narcan, gloves, and cards and magnets to help them keep vital overdose information close at hand.

We hope to have at least one more of these events in the months ahead. In the meantime, I want to recognize the outstanding work of the DFS Hazmat Division, especially Program Coordinator Stephanie DeMarco, in collaborating with our local, state, federal, and non-profit partners to bring these valuable presentations to Massachusetts' public safety professionals.

Fire Prevention Week is October 5-11, 2025

This Year's Theme Tackles Lithium-Ion Battery Hazards

Fire Prevention Week will be observed from October 5-11, 2025, and this year's theme is "Charge Into Safety: Lithium-Ion Batteries in Your Home."

It's a timely topic. Lithium-ion batteries power the devices we use every day, including countless consumer products found in almost every household. Because they have a high energy density — meaning they pack a lot of power into a small device — damaged, defective, or recalled lithium-ion batteries can fail rapidly and violently, releasing sparks, flames, burning cells, and toxic, flammable gases.

This year's Fire Prevention Week observance will educate residents on buying, charging, and recycling lithium-ion batteries safely to prevent fires and explosions. The National Fire Protection Association, which coordinates Fire Prevention Week each year, offers these tips to help local fire departments educate their community's residents:

A lithium-ion battery explodes under controlled conditions at the New Bedford Fire Department's training facility

- **Buy only listed products.** When buying a product that uses a lithium-ion battery look for a safety certification mark from an independent lab such as UL or Intertek/ETL. This means it meets important safety standards.
- **Charge devices safely.** Always use the cords that came with the product to charge. Follow the instructions from the manufacturer. Buy new chargers from the manufacturer or one that the manufacturer has approved. Charge your device on a hard surface. Don't overcharge your device. Unplug it or remove the battery when it's fully charged.
- **Recycle batteries responsibly.** Don't throw lithium-ion batteries in the trash or regular recycling bins because they could start a fire. Recycle your device or battery at a safe battery recycling location. Visit www.*call2recycle.org* for a recycling spot near you.

Visit *www.fpw.org* for educational tools and social media graphics to support your fire prevention mission.

In late 2023, the Department of Fire Services launched a data collection tool to help officials track the extent of fires, explosions, and other lithium-ion battery incidents. This investigative checklist is used by the State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit, and local fire investigators are encouraged to use it as well. While previous reporting through the Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System suggested about 20 lithium-ion battery fires per year, the new tool identified that many in its first two months. Nearly 135 lithium-ion battery fires were reported in Massachusetts last year, and even that number is believed to be a significant undercount.

DFS held a lithium-ion battery symposium in 2023, bringing subject matter experts together with fire service leaders to discuss hazards, strategies, investigations, medical concerns, and other aspects of the lithium-ion battery issue that firefighters are confronting across the country and around the world. A recording of that symposium, along with public education materials to share with residents, is available at the Department of Fire Services' website. Visit *www.mass.gov/dfs* and search for *lithium-ion batteries*.

NERIS Update

The first major update to fire incident reporting in 25 years is finally coming to Massachusetts. For the first time since 2001, when we converted to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) v. 5, the United States fire service is converting to a totally new concept in incident reporting — the National Emergency Response Information System, or NERIS. Massachusetts and New England are scheduled to onboard to NERIS during October.

NFIRS and our state-side tool, the Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System, are being decommissioned as of January 1, 2026. Every fire department will have to migrate to NERIS for incident reporting by this date! The Department of Fire Services and our partners at NERIS are committed to assisting local departments through this transition.

The onboarding process is the first step to transitioning from NFIRS/MFIRS over to NERIS. In addition to the chief, each department should have at least two administrators in NERIS (this is separate from your RMS). Staff at the Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI), which was contracted to create and host NERIS, have coordinated with DFS and will be sending out emails to all chiefs and identified administrators in early October. Please be on the lookout for these emails and check your spam or junk folders! If you would like to pre-approve any administrators for your department, please email their names, ranks, and email addresses to Derryl Dion, State NERIS Lead, at *derryl.dion@mass.gov.*

NERIS Initial Invite & Department Information

The FSRI emails will be invitations asking you to log into NERIS for the first time using a temporary password and then to create a new password. Once that process is complete, the system will ask the chief or administrators to go through the department information and make any necessary changes, updates, or additions to your department's address, services, stations and apparatus, jurisdictional boundaries, population protected, and other details.

Live Incident Reporting to NERIS

Once the above actions are completed, you have successfully onboarded your department in NERIS. The next step is to go live with incident reporting.

Once you start reporting live data to NERIS, you cannot go back to NFIRS/MFIRS. If at all possible, DFS and FSRI are asking all departments to start reporting to NERIS on the first of a month – November, December or January. This is for compliance tracking and analytics and because NFIRS and NERIS are not backwards compatible. Once you start reporting, please notify Derryl Dion at *derryl.dion@mass.gov* with the date your department went live and the first incident number logged in NERIS. If you are using a third-party vendor RMS system, you will have to check with them about going live with your data. All vendors that have been approved to submit data to NERIS via their application programming interface will have a "NERIS Compatible" vendor badge.

NERIS is designed to send data directly from your RMS to the federal database. You'll be able to choose the frequency at which your incidents are submitted. You will not have to create monthly files and submit them to DFS anymore!

No RMS? Use the NERIS App Directly

If your department does not use third-party vendor software compatible with NERIS, then you'll have to use the NERIS app itself. Once you login and your department information has been confirmed, please send a request to the NERIS help desk to turn on "Direct Incident Logging." There are no paper forms in NERIS and DFS personnel won't be able to enter your incidents, so all incident reports have to be entered directly into the NERIS app by department staff. The chief or any administrators will have to invite department members into NERIS and assign them the roles of SuperUser or User to be able to enter incident reports.

If this applies to your department, please email Derryl Dion at *derryl.dion@mass.gov* as soon as possible to set up training for your department and its members. There is also a training department site that will allow you to create "dummy" incidents and work in NERIS without affecting the live data side.

Records Retention – Keeping MFIRS Reports

According to the Massachusetts Municipal Records Retention Schedule, local fire departments and fire districts must keep their incident reports for at least 10 years. For this reason and for analytical purposes, many third-party RMS vendors are keeping the NFIRS side available for indefinite periods. If you switch vendors at any time, you can obtain your historical NFIRS records from the DFS Fire Data & Public Education Unit by requesting them from Derryl Dion or MFIRS.Firesafetydivision@mass.gov. DFS will create the files in the standard NFIRS format and send them to you to forward to your new RMS vendor.

The DFS Fire Data & Public Information Unit is ready to support your department with the transition to NERIS. If you or any of your staff have any questions, please contact Derryl Dion at Derryl.Dion@mass.gov *or 978-567-3382.*

Daylight Saving Time Ends on November 2.

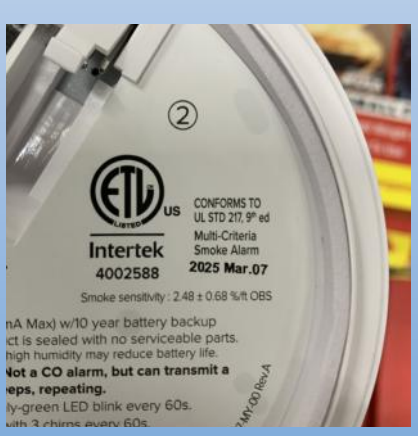
When You Change Your Clocks,

Check Your Alarms!

The 2015 edition of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code required that new replacement smoke alarms be equipped with a 10-year, sealed battery and a "hush" feature. This provision was intended to prevent users from disabling the alarm because of nuisance alarms caused by cooking or to use the alkaline batteries in another device.

Alarms purchased to meet this requirement 10 years ago are nearing or have exceeded their useful lifespan and must be replaced. As we approach the end of Daylight Saving Time on November 2, 2025, use the annual "Change Your Clocks, Check Your Alarms" message to remind residents that smoke alarms have a 10-year lifespan. Residents should check the manufacturing date printed on the back of their alarms and replace them with new alarms if necessary. In alarms that still use alkaline batteries, the batteries should be replaced.

When choosing a replacement smoke alarm, the Department of Fire Services' Fire Safety Division recommends that residents and property owners select devices that conform to **UL 217, 8th Edition or later**. Look for this language on the packaging or in the product specifications. These alarms use the latest multi-criteria detection technology to prevent nuisance alarms caused by cooking smoke. Fire protection experts hope that this will further reduce the risk of residents disabling these vital life safety tools after a nuisance alarm.



Choose smoke alarms or combination smoke and carbon monoxide alarms that conform to UL 217, 8th Edition or later

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