

## OPENING STATEMENT

**The Honorable Ben Quayle (R-AZ), Chairman**

Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation

*Working for a Fire Safe America: Examining United States Fire Administration Priorities*

May 17, 2012

Good Morning. I would like to welcome everyone to today's hearing reviewing the fire service community's priorities for the future of the United States Fire Administration (USFA).

The USFA was established following the 1973 report of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, *America Burning*, which recommended the creation of a federal fire agency to provide support to state and local governments and private fire organizations in their efforts to reduce fire deaths, injuries, and property loss.

The USFA has a substantial public safety mission. Although the country's fire death rate continues to decline, it is higher than more than half of the industrialized countries.

The USFA prepares first responders and health care leaders to react to hazard and terrorism emergencies. It supports the efforts of state and local governments by providing training for first responders, educational programs and targeted outreach for communities, and conducting and coordinating the research and development of technologies for the fire service. The USFA also assists with data collection, analysis, and the dissemination of best practices for the nation's fire prevention and control, and emergency medical services activities.

In recent years, there has been an escalation of severe wildfires resulting in home and property loss. This can be attributed to expanding development in wildland areas -- which include an abundance of burnable brush and trees. 2011 was an exceptional year for wildfires in the United States, and major blazes affected my home state of Arizona. In late May 2011, the Wallow Fire raced across eastern Arizona, forcing the evacuation of thousands of residents and burning more than 469,000 acres, making it the largest in Arizona's history. The fire is believed to have started after a campfire blew out of control and spread quickly due to dry weather and fierce winds.

Over 4,000 firefighters were assigned to the Wallow Fire. Currently, there are hundreds of firefighters working to contain at least four blazes in central and eastern Arizona. This represents just a fraction of the thousands of first responders and firefighters who risk their lives each and every day battling fires across the country. The USFA supports these individuals. They don't take their responsibilities lightly, and as an authorizer of the USFA, neither do I.

The testimony of our witnesses this morning should help the members of the Subcommittee to understand the priorities of the USFA, in order to better enable the USFA's continued efforts to reduce fire deaths, injuries, and property loss. We thank our witnesses for being here today and we look forward to your testimony.