

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

HEARING CHARTER

*The United States Fire Administration Reauthorization: Addressing the Priorities of the
Nation's Fire Service*

October 2, 2007

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

2318 Rayburn House Office Building

1. Purpose

On Tuesday October 2, 2007, the Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation of the House Committee on Science and Technology will hold a hearing to explore the priorities of the fire service community for the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA). The witnesses will discuss the effectiveness of USFA's current activities, priorities for future research and development and training activities, and areas of greatest concern and importance for the upcoming reauthorization.

2. Witnesses

Mr. Gregory B. Cade is the United States Fire Administrator.

Dr. Shyam-Sunder is the Director of the Building and Fire Research Laboratory (BRFL) at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

Chief Steven P. Westermann is the President and Chief Fire Officer of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC).

Captain Robert Livingston is the Captain of the Salem, Oregon Fire Department, and is the representative of the Oregon State Council of Firefighters of the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF).

Dr. John R. Hall is the Assistant Vice President, Fire Analysis and Research at the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Chief Gordon Henderson is the Vice President of the Georgia State Firefighters' Association.

3. Overarching Issues

- What is the status of current USFA core activities? Are they meeting the needs of the Nation's fire service and allied professionals?

- What are the priorities of the fire service community for a reauthorization of the USFA?
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4. Background

History of the USFA

In the early 1970's the President's National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control released a report entitled *America Burning* which presented a bleak assessment of fire safety in the U.S. According to the report, nearly 12,000 citizens and 250 firefighters lost their lives annually to fires in the United States. An additional 300,000 Americans suffered fire related injuries each year. In response to these findings, Congress passed the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-498), which created the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration within the Department of Commerce. In 1978 Congress changed the agency's name to the U.S. Fire Administration and subsequent governmental reorganization by President Carter in 1979 placed USFA within the newly created Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). USFA still resides within FEMA, and it operates from a campus in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

USFA's Core Activities

When it was established in 1974, USFA's stated goal was to reduce fire-related fatalities in the Nation by half--bringing the number to approximately six thousand per year within a generation. By 1998, the agency had met this goal, and these numbers continue to drop. However, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) the U.S. still has on of the highest rates of death, injury, and property loss due to fire among all industrialized nations. NFPA reports that in 2005 there were 3,675 civilian fire deaths, 17,925 fire injuries, and an estimated \$10.672 billion in direct property loss due to fire. They estimate that the fire fatality rate is 14.8 per million population. Also, USFA reports that in 2006, 106 firefighters died in the line of duty.

USFA continues to combat these high fire losses with activities in training, education and fire awareness, data collection, research, and the administration of the Fire Grant programs.

Training: USFA's National Fire Academy (NFA) offers educational opportunities for the advanced professional development of mid- and senior-level fire and emergency medical services (EMS) officers, as well as allied professionals involved in fire prevention and safety activities. NFA also develops and delivers educational and training programs that supplement and support state and local fire service training. At the campus in Emmitsburg, NFA teaches approximately 8,100 students annually. NFA curriculum reaches another 85,000 students through support and partnership with state and local programs, and their courses reach an additional 200,000 professionals through web-based distance learning programs. NFA shares the Emmitsburg Campus with FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI). Together these two entities form the National Emergency Training Center. In FY2007, USFA funded training activities at \$10.7

million, which was about \$700,000 over the previous year.

Public Education and Awareness: Through partnerships and special initiatives, USFA involves the fire service, the media, other federal agencies and safety groups in the development and delivery of fire safety awareness and education programs. These programs are targeted to those groups most vulnerable to the hazards of fire, including the very young, elderly people, and the disabled. USFA is also very engaged in educational activities to improve firefighter health and safety in an effort to reduce the number of firefighter fatalities and injuries.

Data Collection: USFA's National Fire Data Center (NFDC) administers the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS), which collects, analyzes, and disseminates data and information on fire and other emergency incidents to State and local governments, and the fire community. The NFDC provides a nationwide overview and analysis of the fire problem, identifying problem areas for which prevention and mitigation strategies are needed. Examples of applications of the NFIRS data can be found in USFA authored reports on topics such as *Structure Fire Response Times*, *Fire and Older Adults*, and *Candle Fire in Residential Structures*.

Research and Related Activities: Through research, testing and evaluation, USFA works with public and private entities to promote and improve fire and life safety. Research and special studies are conducted on fire detection, suppression and notification systems as well as issues related to firefighter and emergency responder health and safety.

Fire Grants: The Assistance to Firefighters Grants and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants, generally referred to as the FIRE grants, are administered through the Office of Grants and Training within FEMA. Through a Memorandum of Understanding, USFA drafts the guidance for proposals and manages the peer review process for the grants.

5. Priorities for Reauthorization

USFA's current authorization will expire at the end of fiscal year 2008. Priorities in the reauthorizing legislation will address updating NFIRS, addition of curriculum topic areas for NFA, _____

NFIRS Update

Updating NFIRS is one of the fire community's most urgent priorities as timely and accurate fire incident data is a crucial resource for local fire departments and policy makers. The current system captures data from approximately 21,000 fire departments across the nation and records about one million fires a year as well as 13 million other emergency incidents. Though participation in NFIRS is required to be a recipient of FIRE grant money, USFA estimates they still only capture about 50 percent of the fires that happen annually. Another concern is that the current reporting system is slow and bureaucratic. To report incidents, local departments send their data to a state office, either via a paper form or a computer file. The State then periodically sends their

compiled data to NFDC in Emmitsburg. This system can delay reporting of the incidents to the database by up to a year. Both USFA and the fire service community would like to see a more modern reporting system that would allow for real-time reporting of incident data on a web-based platform. They believe that transforming the system in this manner will speed up reporting and bring NFIRS closer to capturing data on all the fire and emergency incidents that occur in the Nation.

NFIRS was last updated in 1999 to include reporting on a broader range of emergencies _____. Cost estimates for creating a web-based, real-time reporting system range from \$3 to \$5 million over three years. These costs reflect both the development of the system and any capital investments in IT software or hardware that USFA would have to make.

Training Curriculum

The training available at NFA's Emmitsburg campus and through their partnerships and distance learning programs is a vital resource to the fire service and allied professionals. In most cases, these courses are unique. As such, NFA strives to work with partners from local, state, and fire service organizations to keep curriculum up to date and aligned with the needs of the fire service. The fire service community has identified additional programmatic areas that are of key concern, though in many cases NFA has been proactive in engaging in these areas already. They include:

- *Fire fighting in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI):* WUI areas are development sites that are adjacent to wildland areas. This proximity to forests, grasslands and other undeveloped areas increases the fire risk to these homes in a unique way. The methods of fighting forest fires are fundamentally different than those of fighting structure fires and unfortunately many fire departments that must protect the homes and businesses in these areas do not have personnel properly trained in this type of firefighting. Development in these areas is increasing. 38 percent of new home construction in the Western U.S. is in these types of areas and according to the USFA/NFPA *Needs Assessment* done in 2006, only 24 percent of fire departments could fight a fire in the WUI with local personnel. In response to this growing problem, USFA has partnered with the National Wildfire Coordinating Group to create curriculum that would teach structure firefighters the core competencies needed for a different type of fire.
- *Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Activities:* Fire department-based EMS operations across the country account for 90.8 percent of the emergency medical first response in the Nation's 200 most populous cities. Nearly every firefighter receives emergency medical training and fire departments. Because of the fire service's large role in EMS activities, the fire service community would like to ensure that NFA continue its high-level EMS management courses.
- *Fighting Fires Involving Hazardous Materials:* Fires involving a variety of chemicals and other hazardous materials pose unique technical and safety risks to firefighters. Many departments across the country do not have enough adequately trained firefighters to respond to fires or other

emergencies involving hazardous materials. NFA currently offers classes to train fire and emergency service providers, as well as other local officials, on issues related to mitigation, prevention, and response to the incidents involving hazardous materials that are either accidental or terrorist in nature.

Research and Related Activities

USFA has been very resourceful in leveraging limited research funds to accomplish many projects important to the fire service. They also have strong relationships with NIST, DHS S&T, and other federal agencies and non-governmental organizations. These partnerships have directed research funding toward the development of technology, and standards for that technology, in areas such as thermal imaging cameras, residential sprinklers, firefighter protective clothing, and computer-based firefighter training simulators. USFA directed research focuses not only on purely technical issues, but also on studying the behavioral issues that lead to fire. For instance, USFA, in partnership with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, examined the types of behaviors and sequences that lead to cooking fires and developed recommendations for mitigation of these behaviors.

There is X amount authorized for standards setting activity in the current authorization. However, it is not clear the actual amount that goes specifically to standards setting, or generally to research activities that were specifically designated in the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974. Additionally, the last document pertaining to USFA's research agenda was ___ in ___. A priority for hearing discussion is thus the amount of USFA funding going to research and related activities, how the research agenda is prioritized, and the mechanisms that transfer research results either into new firefighter gear, fire prevention strategies, or life-safety measures. This discussion will help guide the reauthorization's priorities for these activities.

Educational Activities

7. Proposed Bill Summary

Section 3: Authorization levels

This section authorizes USFA at \$70 million for fiscal year 2009 and raise the authorization level 3 percent each subsequent year until fiscal year 2012. This rate of increase mirrors the previous authorization (PL 108-169).

Section 4: Education and Awareness Activities

Section 5: Training Activities

This section authorizes additional programmatic activities at the National Fire Academy. These activities would specifically address training related to WUI firefighting, emergency medical services management, and handling issues relating to fire and spills of hazardous materials.

This section also direct the Administrator to offer more “train the trainer” type courses and to put adequate resources toward developing curriculum for USFA’s training programs.

Section 6: National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS)

This section directs USFA to update NFIRS to create a web-based, real-time reporting system that would speed reporting and capture more incident information. It authorizes \$5 million, evenly distributed over three fiscal years to do this.

Section 7: Research and Related Activities

This section authorizes programmatic activities for research and technology development into WUI fires.

Section 8: Definitions

This section defines “Administrator”, “Wildland-Urban Interface”, and “Hazardous Materials”.