

2019

FIRE SERVICE DAY ISSUES BOOK



January 29th, 2019

January 29th, 2019

Dear Member of the Minnesota Legislature,

On behalf of the over 20,000 men and women of the Minnesota Fire Service, we are pleased to provide you with a copy of our 2019 Firefighter Issues Book. Our firefighters face tremendous challenges that are directly impacted by the decisions made at the Legislature. This booklet will provide you with an understanding of some of the issues we now face and the challenges ahead. We look forward to continuing to work with you on making the Minnesota Fire Service an effective force in keeping the citizens and visitors to our state safe.

For more information please contact our offices and/or Governmental Affairs representatives at the following numbers:

MPFF President Chris Parsons- 763-545-8100. Email: cparsons@mpff.org

MPFF Governmental Affairs Brian Rice- 612-676-2303. Email: brice@ricemichels.com

MSFCA Legislative Chair BJ Jungmann- 952-292-9016. Email: legislative@mfsc.org

MSFDA President Mark Rosenblum- 612-597-2096. Email: valleyfire25@yahoo.com

MSFCA & MSFDA Governmental Affairs Ann Lenczewski- 612-339-6900. Email: atlenczewski@locklaw.com

Cullen Sheehan- 612-339-6900. Email: cdsheehan@locklaw.com

Phasing Out Carcinogenic Flame Retardants

Firefighters are contracting a wide variety of deadly cancers at an alarming rate, much higher than the general population. Studies have linked many flame retardants, common in upholstered furniture like couches and chairs, and their combustion by-products furans and dioxins to cancer. Even more, these flame retardants have been shown to have little benefit in a fire. We know that firefighters are acutely exposed hundreds of times over a decades-long career to these carcinogens.

In 2015, Minnesota passed the landmark Firefighters' & Children's Health Protection Act which ended the sale in Minnesota of upholstered furniture and children's products of four (4) specific toxic flame retardants.

The current legislation allows for a phase-out of most remaining carcinogenic flame-retardants, as well as toxic firefighting foam containing perflourinated chemicals that studies have shown to have negative health impacts to firefighters and the general population.

- Studies have shown that flame retardants only provide an extra 3 seconds of escape time in a fire, while producing two times more smoke, 7 times more carbon monoxide, and 80 times more soot, greatly impacting survivability
- This bill phases out the sale in Minnesota of upholstered furniture, mattresses, residential textiles such as carpeting and window coverings containing any halogenated, phosphorus-based, nitrogen-based, or nanoscale flame retardant.
- Safer alternatives to flame retardants exist and consumer demand is driving a growing list of retailers and manufacturers to eliminate carcinogenic flame retardants in their furniture.
- Many states in recent years have phased out the use of carcinogenic flame retardants with no negative consequences in terms of increased injuries or deaths from fires

Current Status: **HF 359 (Becker-Finn) is in Health & Human Services Policy Committee & SF 321 (Howe) is in Commerce & Consumer Protection Finance and Policy Committee.**

Supporting Soldier-Firefighters & Safer Staffing

Many of Minnesota's career firefighters also serve concurrently, or have served, in our nation's Armed Forces. The Minnesota Veterans Preference Act (MNVPA) provides military veterans preference in hiring for jobs with local units of government. A career in firefighting allows veterans to serve their communities on the home-front, and the paramilitary structure of the fire service is attractive to many.

Another benefit of the MNVPA requires local government units to provide employees, who are also members of the military via the National Guard, Reserves, or as Active Duty personnel, up to 15 paid days off per year for Military Leave. However, when firefighters must miss work due to military leave fire department staffing and response capabilities often suffer. Fire companies must operate with less personnel, hire back overtime at significant cost, or shut down for the day all-together. The added costs to fire departments can run from the ten of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars annually.

This bill sets up a grant program to allow local governments that employ members of the military as firefighters to recoup a portion of the costs incurred when these servicepersons must miss fire department duty in order to complete their military service, up to 15 days per year.

- The MNVPA has encouraged many past and current members of the US military to seek careers in firefighting and provides employees of local government units preference in hiring and paid time off for Military Leave.
- Private employers are neither required to give hiring preference to military veterans, nor provide paid time off for Military Leave.
- Fire Department staffing models and platoon schedules often require firefighters on military leave be replaced on shift by overtime, or that fire department staffing and services to the public be reduced.
- This legislation helps to ensure that fire departments can better maintain their staffing levels while members are away on military leave, allowing for safer staffing for the public and firefighters alike.

Current Status: **HF 325 (Lee) is in Ways & Means Committee and SF 305 (Pappas) is in Veterans & Military Affairs Finance & Policy Committee.**

Fire-Protection Districts

Fire departments across the state and our nation continue to face severe staffing shortages. The combination of demographic and socio-economic issues impacting firefighters coupled with increasing costs associated with fire and emergency services are challenging to our current model and not sustainable.

EMS Taxing Districts have served as a model for solutions to similar problems. Cloquet Area Fire District sought and received special legislation to operate as Statutory Fire Districts with both operating successfully.

This solution provides for representation of appointed elected officials on the board, transparency in budgeting and the potential to improve service delivery, reduce administrative and capital costs, and mitigate staffing challenges.

Currently, groups of communities must seek approval from the Legislature to create a Protection District. We support legislation that would allow two or more communities, sharing a border, to create a Fire Protection District without prior Legislative approval.

- Fire Protection Districts allow communities to share the costs of fire department operations and capital costs.
- Governance of the Fire Protection District is by elected officials representing the participating entities.
- Boards comprised of elected officials will annually determine the budget and subsequent amount of the levy.

Current Status: **Drafting for this legislative session.**

Hands Off Our Fire Safety Account

The Fire Safety Account (FSA) funds the State Fire Marshal Division, MN Board of Fire Training and Education, and Regional Response Teams per MN Statute 299F.012. Funding these programs is crucial to enable the continuation of the highly efficient fire and emergency response services in the state. According to the Center for Fiscal Excellence, **Minnesota ranks 44th in total state spending on the fire service.** If we are to continue to provide high quality services to our communities policymakers will need to improve this ranking.

In the 2018 Legislative Session, the 12-member Fire Service Advisory Committee (FSAC) advised the Commissioner of Public Safety regarding expenditures from the FSA totaling \$13 million for FY 2018/2019 to fund:

- State Fire Marshal Division
- MN Board of Firefighter Training and Education
- Chemical Assessment/Emergency Response Teams (CAT/ERT)
- Task Force 1 Special Rescue
- MN Air Rescue Team (MART)
- Matching awards to local communities for the purchase of firefighter turnout gear cleaning equipment
- Minnesota Firefighter Initiative (MnFIRE) to improve firefighter health and wellness

Too often, the Legislature has looked to divert funds away from the Fire Safety Account for purposes other than the fire service within the State's budget. We strongly request that the Legislature leave the FSA intact and instead explore methods to address Minnesota's anemic standing in fire service investment.

Current Status: **Ongoing.**