

State of Fire Services in PA

Presented by:

Thomas Cook

Pennsylvania State Fire Commissioner



Let's start with a question



Municipality Required to Provide Fire Protection

- Local government officially responsible for providing fire protection
 - Acts 7 and 8 of 2008
- Sometimes referred to as the “Authority Having Jurisdiction” (AHJ)
- Common methods in PA:
 - Recognizing a volunteer fire department by resolution
 - Creating a combination career and volunteer organization
 - Creating a fully-paid career department

All Volunteer Departments

- May be a department in your municipality
- May be a department in a neighboring municipality
- Must be recognized by resolution
- Local Government Leaders responsible for who they select
- Are separately chartered corporations
- Municipality usually provides workers compensation coverage
- Are required to meet annually with elected officials



Combination Departments

- In many cases started as a volunteer department
- Paid staff is added to cover times when volunteer staffing may be light
- Firefighters may be employees of the municipality or department
 - Full Time
 - Part Time
- Excellent way to augment volunteers
- Comes with “us vs them” challenges
- Very successful in many municipalities across the commonwealth



Career Departments

- Fire Service provided by a department of municipal government
- Firefighters are municipal employees
 - Subject to collective bargaining (Act 111 of 1968)
 - Receive Heart and Lung Act Protection

Funding Sources

- National:
 - Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG)
 - \$324 Million Competitive Federal Grant Program (est. 2,000 awards)
 - Apparatus, turnout gear, safety equipment
 - Application Period Open to March 8, 2024, at 5 p.m.
 - Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program
 - \$360 Million Competitive Grant Program (est. 300 awards)
 - Hiring firefighters, recalling laid off firefighters, recruitment and retention efforts
 - Application Period is currently closed, no new period announced.

Funding Sources

- Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
 - Annual Fire and EMS Grant Program (approx. \$39 million)
 - Application period open September to October
 - Awards made in February
 - Awards based on number of applicants and bonus points for certification
- Municipal Department Capital Grant Program (\$450,000)
 - Competitive Grant Program
 - Career or Combination Municipal Departments for capital expenditures only

Two Percent Loan Program

- Administered by Office of the State Fire Commissioner
- Loans for
 - Apparatus
 - Construction Projects
 - Reporting Software
- Interest Rate is 2%
 - Length of loan depends on use and amount
 - No closing costs or PMI costs
- Department can have three active loans at one time

Firefighters' Relief Funding

2% Tax imposed on all foreign fire property insurance

A portion of that tax is allocated to Firemen's Relief Associations and Municipal Pensions

Money distributed to each municipality must be distributed to Relief Associations and reported to the state Auditor General

Restrictions on allowable expenses

Audited by the State Auditor General; reports of audits published publicly

Proposal has been sent to legislature for reform of system

Training and Certification

There is no statewide training standard

Required training set by local department and municipality (AHJ)

Standard Curriculum developed by State Fire Academy

- Delivered through “local level” courses
- Educational Training Agencies (Community Colleges and Fire Training Centers)

Voluntary Certification System

- Certification to a national standard (Pro Board and IFSAC)
- Administered by State Fire Academy
- Certification testing occurs at local fire stations and approved testing sites

OSFC Services

Training, Certification: The OSFC provides accredited fire service curriculum and instructors in PA and acts as the certifying body for the voluntary fire service certification program. The OSFC also oversees the State Fire Academy in Lewistown, PA.

Financial Support: The OSFC manages a variety of grant and loan programs, providing much-needed support to the state's local fire and emergency services providers. The OSFC also administers the Fireman's Relief funds and provides binding pre-audit advice to fire departments prior to undergoing an audit from the PA Auditor General.

Recruitment & Retention: The OSFC assists the fire service in their recruitment efforts and provides technical assistance to local fire organizations and local governments seeking to improve their recruitment and retention efforts.

Line of Duty Death Support: The OSFC offers its services and resources after a Line of Duty Death and serve as the liaison to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

Community Risk Reduction (CRR): The OSFC collaborates with fire departments, local authorities, and residents to proactively identify, assess and mitigate potential risks within a community to enhance overall safety. One key component of this effort is data collection and the management of PA Fire Information Reporting System (PennFIRS).

OSFC Contacts

Thomas Cook, State Fire Commissioner

tgcook@pa.gov

John "J.C." Tedorski, Deputy Fire Commissioner (Administration)

jtedorski@pa.gov

Harvey Boyer, Deputy Fire Commissioner (Training)

haboyer@pa.gov

Website: www.osfc.pa.gov