

# EVERYONE GOES HOME

FIREFIGHTER LIFE SAFETY INITIATIVES PROGRAM



## Inside this issue:

Life safety initiatives focus of <i>Fire-Rescue International</i> classroom presentation	2
<i>I-Chiefs</i> launch fire service near-miss reporting system	2
Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives Program Calendar	2
Myth Busters (con'td)	3
LODD Investigation	5

# NEWSLETTER

## MYTH BUSTERS IN THE FIREHOUSE

BY ROSS BAKER, WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP (OH) FIRE DEPARTMENT

The fire service is filled with myths, both small and large. Oftentimes, we act in unsafe ways because "it's the way we've always done it." Unsafe myths permeate our business, our tradition, and our culture, passed on from one generation to the next. They gain traction within our culture because they glamorize what we do. New recruits may be taught correct and safe ways to operate at fires and emergencies, but often, when they join a company, are "reeducated" as to the ways "real firefighters do it." Of course, they want to fit in, and they strive to emulate the perfect picture of fire service strength that myths perpetuate. And so the cycle continues.

After a recent mini-summit for the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation's Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives, I had a great opportunity to meet with several people and discuss items that can be addressed and concentrated on in an effort to begin the process of reducing line of duty deaths and injuries.

One of the problems that I felt was significant was the passing on of misinformation and myths. Now, I know that some will scoff at me or even say I'm attempting to erase the proud history of what has made and continues to make the fire service a great and heroic profession, but that couldn't be further from the truth. I'm talking about an open, public discussion about some of the seemingly small, erroneous ideas we pass along that have huge potential consequences in operational situations. New recruits and young firefighters are likely to become what their environment promotes. If we allow this abuse of information to continue, the cycle of unsafe practices will continue.

Here are some promulgated behaviors that I've had the pleasure of unlearning over the years as part of my self-help awareness to better my chances for going home.

***Wearing chinstraps is dangerous.*** I remember the horror stories I was told about what would happen if I used my helmet chinstrap. Some of the myths included, "You'll hang yourself if you wear it" and "You don't wear it because you won't be able to get your helmet off fast enough if you need to clear out a window." One "mentor" even told me, "Cut that that thing off. All it will do is get in the way." There are many other excuses and rationalizations for not wearing it. Mostly, chinstraps aren't worn because it looks macho not to. But there are numerous documented cases in which a helmet saved a firefighter from serious injury or death, and documented cases where a firefighter's losing a helmet had serious consequences. You'd be hard-pressed to find documentation on a firefighter losing his life because he was wearing his chinstrap. Still, this one gets passed along whether by verbal or non-verbal action.

***You don't need to wear seatbelts.*** How much more do we need to say about this one? Wear them! No excuses! A seatbelt policy must be in place, and enforced—by everyone in the organization. Take the extra time getting ready to mentally prepare yourself for the job at hand. If we don't get there safely, we do no one any good.

*Continued on p. 3*

## NFPA CODES WILL INCREASE SAFETY; NFFF SUPPORTS THE EFFORT

The National Fire Protection Association's Standards Council recently issued significant changes to the 2006 editions of its NFPA 101, Life Safety Code and NFPA 5000, Building Construction and Safety Code regarding automatic fire sprinkler protection. The additions to the standards include the following:

- All nursing homes will be required to be fully sprinklered.
- Sprinklers will be required in new construction of one- and two-family residential dwellings.
- New construction of nightclubs and similar establishments with occupancies of 50 individuals or more will be required to be fully sprinklered, as will be existing nightclubs with occupancy capacities of more than 100 individuals.

*Continued on p. 2*

AUGUST 2005/VOLUME 2

## ***NFPA CODES WILL INCREASE SAFETY; NFFF SUPPORTS THE EFFORT***

*Continued from p. 1*

The nightclub requirements come in response to the devastating Station Nightclub fire that claimed 100 lives; the nursing home requirements in response to deadly nursing home fires in Hartford, Connecticut, and Nashville, Tennessee. These and the landmark sprinkler provision for one- and two-family residential dwellings are critical steps toward increasing fire safety in America.

Chief (ret.) Richard Anderson, project director for the NFFF Life Safety Initiatives Program, spoke in support of the new standards at a recent meeting of NFPA membership in Las Vegas. "We applaud the NFPA 101 and NFPA 5000 technical committees and the NFPA Standards Council for moving forward on life safety in such an aggressive and progressive way to stem the tide of these senseless deaths in high-risk buildings such as nightclubs and nursing homes," said Anderson. "And as residential structure fires represent the single largest category of fire incidents in the United States, the new residential automatic sprinkler requirements will have a dramatic positive effect on firefighter safety and the safety of the citizens we protect."

## **LIFE SAFETY INITIATIVES CALENDAR**

The Courage to Be Safe...So Everyone Goes Home" Program, developed by NFFF and adopted by the Office of the Pennsylvania State Fire Commissioner, will be presented at the following locations:

### **SEPTEMBER**

9/1/05, Lionville Fire Department, Lionville, PA, 7:00 pm

9/6/05, Shippensburg Firefighters Activity Center, Shippensburg, PA, 6:00 pm

9/9/05, Mahanoy Area High School, Mahanoy City, PA, 6:30 pm

9/17/05, Luzerne County Community College, Nanticoke, PA, 9:00 am

9/29/05, Edinboro Volunteer Fire Department, Edinboro, PA, 6:30 pm

### **OCTOBER**

10/5/05, Connellsville Township Fire Department, Connellsville, PA, 6:30 pm

10/7/05, Monroe County Public Safety Center, Shrodsburg, PA, 7:00 pm

10/11/05, University of PA at Johnstown, Johnstown, PA, 6:30 pm

10/12/05, Allegheny County Fire Academy, Allison Park, PA, 6:30 pm

10/19/05, Moon Twp. Municipal Building, Moon Township, PA, 7:00 pm

10/19/05, Harrisburg Area Community College, Harrisburg, PA, 6:30 pm

### **NOVEMBER**

11/2/05, Lancaster County Public Safety Training Center, Manheim, PA, 6:30 pm

11/17/05, Greensburg Fire Department, Greensburg, PA, 6:30 pm

11/21/05, Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute, Radisson hotel, Camp Hill, PA

#### *Life Safety Initiatives Presentation:*

10/23/05, Fire Department Safety Officers Association Annual Conference, Rosen Plaza Hotel, Orlando, FL

## ***LIFE SAFETY INITIATIVES FOCUS OF FIRE-RESCUE INTERNATIONAL CLASSROOM PRESENTATION***

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Executive Director Ron Siarnicki and the Life Safety Initiatives project team delivered an interactive two-hour discussion on the Life Safety Initiatives at the recent International Association of Fire Chiefs' Fire-Rescue International Conference. Some 50 fire chiefs from across the country attended.

Initiatives Project xxxxx J. Gordon Routley moderated the discussion. The focus centered on culture change, response safety, and preventing line-of-duty heart attacks, three critical components of the 16 Life Safety Initiatives. Within those three initiatives, the challenges of qualifying and preparing apparatus operators and establishing department wellness/fitness policies, particularly within volunteer fire departments, proved to be especially hot topics.

The presentation was part of an ongoing effort by NFFF to interface with the fire service on the Initiatives and not only get the word out, but get the word back, as well. This fire service feedback is essential to the Foundation's goal of providing useful training and support materials in support of the mission to reduce line-of-duty deaths.

## ***I-CHIEFS LAUNCH FIRE SERVICE NEAR-MISS REPORTING SYSTEM***

On August 12, at a well-attended media event at its Fire-Rescue International conference, the International Association of Fire Chiefs unveiled its [firefighternearmiss.com](http://firefighternearmiss.com) reporting system. This system will provide a forum for firefighters to share and learn from details of fire department incident responses that did not result in firefighter injuries and deaths but had an imminent potential to do so.

The concept for the program came from the aviation industry's successful near-miss reporting program; members of the fire service immediately noticed parallels to an aviation industry that was investing in new technology without the safety results to match. [Firefighternearmiss.com](http://Firefighternearmiss.com), five years in the making, provides an opportunity for participating fire departments and individual firefighters to fill out a quick, user-friendly, on-line report about their near-miss experience. The reports are voluntary, non-punitive, and confidential. The near-miss program is funded through a \$1million Department of Homeland Security grant, 30 percent of which was matched by Fireman's Fund Insurance Company.

The NFFF Firefighter Safety Initiatives Program enthusiastically supports the [firefighternearmiss.com](http://firefighternearmiss.com) reporting system. It falls squarely within Initiative #10: Grant programs should support the implementation of safe practices and/or mandate safe practices as an eligibility requirement. And we encourage firefighters to use it. The program is one of the exciting developments showing the fire service to be taking firefighter safety seriously. Sharing our experiences and lessons learned is an important way to help prevent future injuries and deaths and enhance our growing fire service safety culture.

## MYTH BUSTERS IN THE FIREHOUSE

BY ROSS BAKER, WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP (OH) FIRE DEPARTMENT

Continued from p. 1

*Save your air for when you really need it.* Or “Save your air, the smoke’s not that bad.” Sadly, the portrait of the smoke-eater is engrained in our heads. How many times have we heard the words, “No need to mask up, it’s just a car fire.” Studies have shown the cumulative effects of breathing even small quantities of smoke over a sustained period of time to be life-shortening. Breathing the carcinogenic and oxygen-displacing chemicals in smoke seriously impacts cardio-respiratory function and short-term mental capacity. Frankly, the implication that we need to “save” our air for heavy smoke conditions may be indicative of serious organizational problems—among them, lack of staffing and lack of an air management/air safety policy—that need to be addressed by the leadership. Too many firefighters are injured and too many lives are shortened for us to embrace this myth. You really do need to be on air whenever there’s smoke—even light smoke—in your environment. That means for overhaul, too.

*You don’t need to buckle your SCBA waist straps.* While some of our brothers and sisters are required to free up their tanks in certain situations to manipulate the apparatus, it’s an advanced maneuver done to gain an operational advantage—not because it looks cool. The vast majority of departments do not operate with such a policy. For those that don’t, buckle the waist strap. An unbuckled waist strap is waiting to get snagged when you’re operating in the fire building or other dangerous scene. I’ve seen firefighters get caught up in the fire truck as a result of loose strap—just think what could happen when it gets stuck somewhere in a burning structure and you can’t free yourself.

There are those who argue against certified driver’s license requirements for firefighters operating our engines, trucks, and other heavy apparatus on the basis that firefighters will end up being in two unions and working as truck drivers. We refer to Life Safety Initiative #5, which calls for the development will result in firefighters being in two unions and implementation of national standards for training, qualifications, and certification (and regular recertification), equally applicable to all firefighters based on the duties they’re expected to perform. Considering the Initiative and the national effort to reduce LODDs, we find it confounding that there are places in which those driving a 33-ton fire truck at speeds of up to 55 mph under emergency conditions aren’t required to demonstrate their skills or competency, yet the Good Humor Ice Cream man, driving at 5 mph in nonemergency conditions, is required to get a CDL and demonstrate/document his driving skills. NFPA 1451 provides the standard for a training program, and NFPA 1002 the standards for professional qualifications, that the fire service should and must follow in this regard.

*Real firefighters don’t need all their PPE.* Consider the media images and many of the fire trinkets purchased for the home, the images of firefighters placing themselves in harm’s way with open bunker gear and no SCBA. We must reverse the images that seep into our safety culture. How do we do that? By instructors wearing all of their assigned gear. By practicing at company drills the way we need to operate at the real deal. By enforced department PPE policies at every incident. Anything less sends the wrong message to recruits and new firefighters. Anything less is to invite preventable injuries and deaths. Can’t feel the heat with your hood on? How about learning other ways—such as reading the building and fire conditions—to tell if you’re in a place you don’t belong? The fire service lexicon is replete with real-life examples of experienced firefighters saving themselves from excruciatingly painful injuries or death by wearing their hoods.

*On-the-job training is all you need.* Of course, learning from real incidents is critical to our operational development, and that’s where strong company officers and senior members, and good critiques, become so important. But recently, a new firefighter said to me, after his second fire of the year (or maybe it was the second of his career), “I’m starting to get used to being on the nozzle.” You would have thought that, through proper training, he would already have been used to it and have understood how his department, his crew, and his equipment operated. We all need continual training, refresher training. The army doesn’t wait for the war to learn how to fight. Neither should we.

*Don’t put the training fire out; let it burn a little.* I’ve noticed the practice, at live fire training, of instructors telling their students to hit the fire quickly but not put it out. But talk about practicing the way you play: Recently, at a structure fire, some young firefighters were treating it more like a training fire. I feel this practice will sneak up on us quicker than we think. Teach proper fire attack methods and do it right every time.

These are just a few items to get the wheels turning. I hope to continue to compile erroneous information that is being passed on to the new recruits and seasoned veterans alike. I am in no way wanting to take anything away from this great job and the traditions that it has. What I do want to attempt to do is remove the tradition of death and dying in the fire service. We will continue to have an uphill battle if bad information keeps getting passed along from one generation to the next. The myths build into a huge powder keg waiting for a match. Believe me, I have to consciously think about some of the things that I do because of bad habits engrained in my firefighting youth.

I urge everyone to take a personal inventory of your knowledge and experience base. Are you one of the one passing along the bad information, the myths? Are you one of the ones buying into unsafe practices because it makes the job more glamorous? Are you one of those fire chiefs or line officers that make up the excuses for your crews because of inadequate skill? We don’t need to make this job more difficult than it already is. By continuing this cycle of safety abuse, we’re helping to ensure that the number of our line-of-duty deaths and injuries remains the same, this year and the next and those that follow.

**We want to continue and sustain this important Myth Busters column in the Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives Program Newsletter. Please email your Myth Buster contributions to [everyonegoeshome@firehero.org](mailto:everyonegoeshome@firehero.org) so we can share them with our brothers and sisters throughout the fire service.**

AUGUST 2005/VOLUME 2



***LODD  
INVESTIGATION REPORT***

***FIRE DEPARTMENT CITED IN THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN MARK MCCORMACK***

In late July, the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration cited the Santa Clara County Fire Department for safety violations surrounding the death of Captain Mark McCormack at a fire in Los Gatos, California, in February of this year. Captain McCormack died when he came into contact with an energized, 12,000-volt power line. The Cal-OSHA report charged that the fire department failed to establish a means at the scene to prevent accidental contact with the power line, allowed firefighters to work near the power line, and failed to maintain an injury prevention program that met state workplace regulations.

It is imperative that fire departments have preestablished programs, including on-scene protocols and standard operating procedures, for dealing with such fireground hazards as downed electrical lines, and train in the avoidance and mitigation of the hazards. Regulations compliance is a minimum safety threshold, and it is incumbent on every fire department and firefighter in this country to take ethical responsibility for ensuring electrical hazards and other common hazards are addressed, in both policy and practice.



***LAFD REPORT SAYS FIREFIGHTER JAMIE FOSTER DEATH ACCIDENTAL***

A Los Angeles Fire Department investigation into the line-of-duty fatality of Firefighter Jamie Foster concluded that her death was accidental. Foster, a first-year firefighter, died in 2004 when she fell off the tailboard and under a ladder truck while backing into the station. She was not wearing a tailboard safety harness. The investigation did not yield a “direct cause” in the death, but cited her failure to wear the harness as an “indirect cause.”

Some in the fire service are engaging in public criticism regarding this tragic incident. The Life Safety Initiatives project makes no such criticism, and it is not within our purpose to do so. It’s tragically obvious that the results of not wearing the tailboard safety harness can lead to terrible results. We’ll only add to this, without any criticism whatsoever, the following: Even as the most conscientious, safety-conscious fire departments may and will experience tragedy, it is critical that every fire department in the United States reevaluate its safety programs on an ongoing basis, and build contingencies into their policies—including those safety policies that may seem simple and obvious. We also believe it prudent to reach out to the technology and standards communities for their participation in helping to ensure that an accident such as this never happens again, consistent with Initiative # 8: **Utilize available technology wherever it can produce higher levels of health and safety.**