



New Jersey Division of Fire Safety

# FIRE FOCUS



Excellence in Public Safety

## **New Jersey Division of Fire Safety Celebrates** **27 Years of Saving Lives with ABC**

On February 19, 2025, representatives from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs and Division of Fire Safety traveled into New York City to celebrate the kickoff of the 27th Operation 7: Save a Life program. In what has become a yearly tradition, public service and private industry came together from around the Tri-State Area in the interest of fire safety.

Spearheaded by WABC Channel 7 in New York, the Operation 7: Save a Life Campaign's mission is to save lives by providing smoke alarms to our area's most at-risk citizens.



DCA Commissioner Jacquelyn A. Suárez and State Fire Marshal Rich Mikutsky join ABC-NY Anchorman Bill Ritter in Manhattan for the annual kickoff breakfast.

"Over the years, New Jersey has had one of the lowest fire death rates in the nation, falling far below the national average," said State Fire Marshal Richard Mikutsky. "Given New Jersey's demographics, dense population and older housing stock, the low fire-death rate is particularly impressive. And all of this is due to sound fire code enforcement, public fire safety education, and programs like Operation 7: Save a Life."



## Excellence in Public Safety

# **New Jersey Division of Fire Safety Celebrates** **27 Years of Saving Lives with ABC**



DCA Commissioner Jacquelyn A. Suárez represents New Jersey during a panel discussion hosted by Bill Ritter, alongside FDNY Commissioner Robert Tucker and Nassau County Fire Academy Director Paul Wilders.

For the first time in the program's history, WABC-NY Anchorman Bill Ritter hosted a panel discussion with fire service leaders from the Tri-State Area. The panel discussion focused on the goals and challenges facing today's firefighting community. DCA Commissioner Jacquelyn Suárez spoke specifically on New Jersey's perspective on creating a fire-safe state.

"Whether it's the dangers presented by lithium-ion batteries or forest fires occurring in wildland-urban interface zones, the key is education and raising awareness," said Commissioner Suárez. "Our State's citizens and firefighters need to know what to look out for, and how to prevent fires before they start, to keep themselves and their families safe."

Throughout the program's 27 years, over 225,000 smoke alarms have been distributed in the State of New Jersey alone. Thanks to the Operation 7: Save a Life sponsors – like First Alert and Toyota – the NJDFS has been able to support fire departments with these life-saving devices.

In addition to the Operation 7: Save a Life program, the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety participates in the Philadelphia area's equivalent - Operation 6: Save a Life. This allows the NJDFS - along with a close working partnership with the American Red Cross - to provide smoke and CO alarms to fire departments in ALL regions of New Jersey.



## Excellence in Public Safety

# **STATE FIRE MARSHAL MESSAGE**

With Spring upon us, Daylight Saving Time has begun. It is time for a simple, but essential, reminder to “Change Your Clocks, Change Your Batteries.” This timely habit can be a lifesaver for you and your family.

Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are your first line of defense against potentially deadly fires and carbon monoxide leaks. Working alarms can cut the risk of death in a home fire by more than 50 percent. However, without functioning batteries, these lifesaving devices become useless.



### **When the clocks move forward, take the following steps:**

- Swap out the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Even if the alarm isn't beeping, fresh batteries ensure the devices will work properly when needed.
- After replacing the batteries, press the test button on each alarm to confirm it's working correctly. If it doesn't beep during the test, it may be time for a replacement.
- Smoke alarms typically last about 8-10 years, while carbon monoxide detectors may have a shorter lifespan. Check the expiration date. If your alarm is outdated, replace it immediately with a 10-year sealed battery detector which eliminates the need for annual battery changes.
- Dust and debris can affect alarm performance. Gently clean alarms with a vacuum attachment or soft cloth to remove buildup.

### **Additional Safety Tips:**

- Install Alarms Properly: Ensure smoke alarms are installed in every bedroom, outside sleeping areas, and on each level of your home, including the basement.
- Have a Fire Escape Plan: Practice your family's fire escape plan twice a year to ensure everyone knows how to get out safely.
- Talk to your neighbors, friends, and family about the importance of changing their batteries and testing their alarms. A simple reminder can make a significant difference.

Let's make safety a priority! “Change Your Clocks, Change Your Batteries” is more than just a saying—it's a habit that can protect your home and loved ones. Stay safe and be prepared!

Richard J. Mikutsky  
New Jersey State Fire Marshal





## Excellence in Public Safety

# NJDFS Teams Up to Train First Responders on Spotting Criminal Activity

For the past four years, the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety has been working alongside the FBI and Union County Fire Academy to train the eyes and ears of first responders statewide. Led by the Office of Fire Department Preparedness's Bennet Berkman, Special Agent Steve Mulcahy, and Union County Field Intelligence Officer Robert Clarke – the "Criminal Activity Awareness" training course seeks to equip firefighters, EMTs, law enforcement officers, and inspectors with the knowledge to recognize all types of hazards, threats, and illicit activity.

In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it was clear that there was a lack of awareness and information-sharing between emergency services agencies. Therefore, this training focuses on not only how to identify signs of potential threats, but where and how to report them when they do.

The training program was developed, and is now hosted, by Union County Fire Academy in Linden, NJ. Along with the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) and the Office of Homeland Security & Preparedness, the team at the Union County Fire Academy has built almost movie-like sets to play out training scenarios. Academy Director Michael Scanio was eager to dedicate a portion of their facility exclusively for "Criminal Activity Awareness" due to the importance of the training.



First responders look on as Field Intelligence Officer Bobby Clark teaches situational awareness inside a simulated NJ Transit train car.



## Excellence in Public Safety

# NJDFS Teams Up to Train First Responders on Spotting Criminal Activity

"The fact of the matter is, there are bad people out there looking to do bad things," said Director Scanio. "The more educated our first responders are, the better. Because they are answering the calls and going into places not everyone can see."

The training itself encompasses a full eight-hour day. The first four hours are for classroom instruction, and the second four are for playing out interactive simulations – using scripts to act out real-life scenarios that could happen on the job. To date, approximately 1,000 first responders have taken the course and seen real-life results in stopping illegal activity in New Jersey.

"We've had instances right here in Union County where the people we trained were able to put a stop to illegal activity, just by knowing what to look for and where to report it," said Clark. "The more trained individuals we have out there spotting red flags, the better."



The NJ Division of Fire Safety's Bennet Berkman talks about post-incident interviewing inside a simulated hospital room.



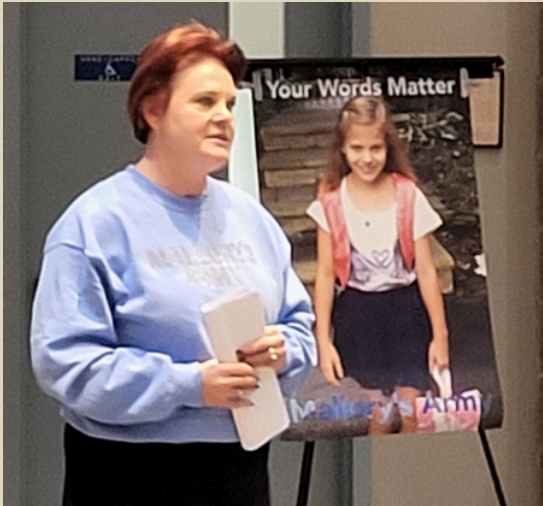
A simulated storage unit is set up with chemical agents that could be the precursor to the making of explosives.





## Excellence in Public Safety

# New Jersey Hosts 21st Annual Anthony R. Braig Conference On Youth Firesetting



Dianne Grossman, Mallory's Army

Since 2003, the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety has been committed to addressing the issue of youth fire setting, in part by hosting the annual Anthony R. Braig Conference on Youth Firesetting. On December 5-6, 2024, the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety (NJDFS) hosted the 21st Annual Conference, which brought together instructors and attendees from New Jersey, across the U.S., and internationally. The two-day event focused on addressing the challenges associated with youth firesetting, attracting over 130 participants from 14 different states.

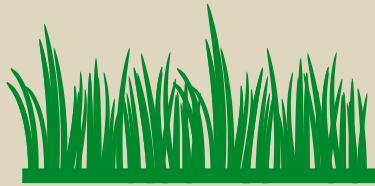
This year's Keynote Speaker - Dianne Grossman of "Mallory's Army" - gave an inspirational presentation in honor of her daughter, Mallory. Dianne spoke passionately about the dangers of social media, the immense importance of addressing the problem of bullying, and recognizing the fact that our words matter. Also, for the first time ever, the NJDFS enjoyed the support of the DCA Administration at this event as Commissioner Jacquelyn Suárez kicked off the proceedings with opening remarks.

Each year, the Anthony R. Braig Conference on Youth Firesetting is co-presented by the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety, Kean University, and the New Jersey Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators. This conference brings together professionals from diverse fields, including the fire service, mental health, law enforcement, social services, and education, all of whom are actively engaged in addressing the issue of youth firesetting.

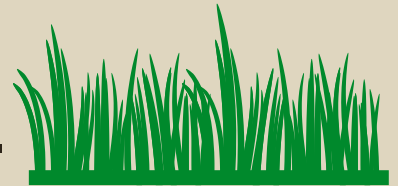
State Fire Marshal Rich Mikutsky expressed his gratitude for the annual event in New Jersey, stating, "We are fortunate to have this even each year. It's a success whenever the nation's top experts gather to educate us and highlight a pressing issue. While addressing youth firesetting in our communities is a challenging task, the expertise and leadership here inspire confidence that we can achieve our goals."



## Excellence in Public Safety



# SPRING FIRE SAFETY



As the seasons change in New Jersey, so do the hazards that could potentially cause fires. Please review some tips below that your Fire Department or Fire Prevention Bureau can utilize and promote in your towns this spring season.

### Spring Cleaning

- \*Properly store household chemicals. Never mix cleaning agents.**
- \*Dispose of old newspapers, magazines, and junkmail. They can pile up and increase the severity/spread of a potential fire.**
- \*Clean out dryer vents and be sure exhaust pipes are clear.**



### Yardwork Returns

- \*Remove dead vegetation and other flammable materials, especially within five feet of the home.**
- \*Keep gasoline in its proper container. Never bring it indoors.**
- \*Carefully dispose of rags with oil-based paints or stains. Do not leave them in a pile.**

### Grilling Safety

- \*Inspect grill carefully and make sure it's free of grease or fat buildup. Clear out any nests, spider webs, and debris.**
- \*For gas grills, check the hoses for leaks or damage prior to the first time using it each year.**



Throughout every season, it's crucial to develop and regularly practice fire escape plans. Additionally, emphasize the importance of ensuring that all smoke alarms in your home are functioning properly.

Keep messages of fire safety growing in the Garden State this spring!







# **Youth Firesetting Program Manager F0634**

**May 6-7, 2025  
Middlesex County Fire Academy  
1001 Fire Academy Drive  
Sayreville, NJ**

"Youth Firesetting Intervention Specialist" is a 2-day course based on the requirements of National Fire Protection Association 1035, Standard on Fire and Life Safety Educator, Public Information Officer, Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager Professional Qualifications pertaining to the youth firesetting intervention specialist.

The course empowers fire service professionals and all who deal with youths with knowledge on how to develop, enhance or rejuvenate a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program. This course is designed for the person who is responsible or will be responsible for leading a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program. Students evaluate the existing state of their current youth firesetting program, develop a vision for moving forward, construct an action plan and deliver a persuasive speech to decision-makers for advancing the program.

The course runs from 8AM-4PM each day. Breakfast and lunch will be provided on site.

For additional information, contact Charles Lavin via email:  
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