

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
DIVISION OF FIRE SAFETY
NEW JERSEY FIRE SAFETY COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING**

Meeting of March 17, 2021

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, the New Jersey Fire Safety Commission meeting was held virtually on Zoom on March 17, 2021.

Commission Members Present: Mr. Kevin Krushinski, Chairman
Sen. Sam Thompson
Mr. Lawrence D. Wood
Mr. Armando Roman
Mr. Kevin Bellew
Mr. Gerard Naylis
Mr. John Wisniewski
Mr. Richard Blohm
Mr. Daniel DeTrollo
Ms. Kathleen O’Leary
Mr. Arthur Londensky
Mr. Steve O’Gorman
Mr. Fred Collender
Mr. Arthur Hayducka
Mr. Raymond Heck

DCA Staff Members Present: Richard Mikutsky, NJ State Fire Marshal
Lou Kilmer, NJDFS
Charles Lavin, NJDFS
Frank Clark, NJDFS
Vincent Campagna, NJDFS
Jerry Clark, NJDFS
Justin Henry, Codes and Standards

Guests: David Kurasz, NJFSAB
Amy Fritz
Vincent Corsaro, Jefferson Twp. Fire Prevention
Donald Nelsen
Peggy Brookes, Princeton
Rich Heimbach
Nicole Ginis
Ethan Dreiblatt
Paul McGrath, City Fire
Alden Blackwell
John Garton, NJDOL/PEOSH
Barbara Applebaum
Marty Hawley

A. Call to Order

Chairman Kevin Krushinski called the meeting to order at 10:06 AM. He led the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

B. Approval of Minutes

With no discussion requested or additional corrections, the minutes of the regular meeting of January 20, 2021 were approved.

C. Correspondence

Chairman Krushinski noted that any and all correspondence for today's meeting was transmitted to the Commission members electronically prior to the meeting. Secretary Charles Lavin added that there will be additional Advisory Council minutes sent after the meeting when available. With no discussion requested on any of the items submitted, the meeting was moved to Public Comment I.

D. Public Comment I

Chairman Krushinski opened the meeting up to any members of the public wishing to comment before the Fire Safety Commission. With no members of the public wishing to address the Commission at this time, the meeting was moved to Division of Fire Safety Activities.

E. Division of Fire Safety Activities

Director Richard Mikutsky began his report by acknowledging the great work that the NJDFS staff continues to perform under the adverse conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The staff is still working mostly remotely, keeping the health and safety of Division personnel as the top priority.

Director Mikutsky reported that he and Chief Kilmer continue to push for the backfilling of positions within the NJ Division of Fire Safety. A number of promotions have been made over the past several months and backfills need to be made from there. Director Mikutsky also spoke about the Memos that had been sent out recently by the NJDFS. The first he spoke about was the Safety Alert about the 3M Scott masks that had been developing cracks in the nose-cone area. After getting wind of this issue, the NJDFS identified numerous cases of this and alerted the manufacturer. The Safety Alert Memo outlined the NJDFS's findings on this.

The next NJDFS Memo Director Mikutsky reported on was regarding the Federal Death/Disability Benefits for COVID-19. This was an informational guidance document and was passed onto all fire departments statewide. This stemmed from a legislative change that expanded eligibility.

Director Mikutsky reported that the NJDFS will be issuing a memo this coming Friday expanding capacity at the Fire Academies statewide. This keeps with the expanding guidelines coming from the Governor's Office and will allow for 50% capacity. Director Mikutsky also announced that the Mental Health Hotline MOA with Rutgers University

is going forward. This will provide emergency responders with assistance with mental health issues and should start up some time later this year.

Director Mikutsky spoke about a meeting that is being put together by the Governor's Office to discuss multiple fire safety-related pieces of legislation. Having to do with fire sprinklers in new townhomes, the meetings are being set up for early April and will include Codes & Standards as well. Director Mikutsky also noted that it is budget season at the state, and DCA's budget has been submitted for FY2022. There are two hearings scheduled on this – April 12th and April 22nd, for anyone who is interested in viewing them live on the State's legislative website.

So far in 2021, the NJDFS reported 6 school fires, 75 civilian burns, 16 residential fatal fires totaling 26 fatalities. These numbers represent essentially double where we were at during the same time period in 2020. Therefore, the Investigations Unit has been extremely busy to this point in 2021. Additionally, Director Mikutsky reported that the Spring's online training semester has surpassed 11,000 students.

Effective May 1, 2021, the NFIRS reporting software will require the property loss estimates to be entered into all structure fire reports. This was an area that could previously be skipped, but the software will no longer allow this to complete a report. In the area of Community Risk Reduction, the unit is awaiting smoke alarm shipments from Kidde via the Operation-7 Save-a-Life program. Once the yearly supply is received, staff will work towards distribution statewide – starting with the ABC-7 viewing area.

Director Mikutsky spoke about a 21-year-old recruit from Irvington who collapsed during training in Morris County and later passed away at Morristown Medical Center. His services will be this coming weekend and will be a full honors funeral in Nutley. Director Mikutsky will have the Commission Secretary distribute the details to all. Director Mikutsky also gave details on the forest fires that took place over the past weekend in Lakewood – where a firefighter was injured and remains hospitalized. There was also an incident in Ridgefield Park where a junior firefighter suffered serious injuries and he remains hospitalized. Director Mikutsky asked that the Fire Safety Commissioners keep these firefighters and their families in their thoughts and prayers. Commissioner Richard Blohm added that, in regard to the incident in Ridgefield Park, he had received a call from the Department of Labor (who is conducting the investigation). They were looking closely into the junior firefighter program and will be speaking to the department about the recruit's training record.

Bureau Chief Lou Kilmer began his report by providing an update on the Fire Code, which NJDFS staff is working diligent to update chapter-by-chapter. The bulk of the book is contained in the first ten chapters, and staff is reviewing the ninth and tenth now – meeting twice weekly to push the project forward. Chief Kilmer hopes to have this published before the end of the year. Commissioner Dan DeTrollo asked if it was announced somewhere that the 2015 Fire Code. Chief Kilmer answered that it was absolutely adopted and published and he would provide details on where to find that after

the meeting. Chief Kilmer also spoke about the Subchapter 4 amendments, which have been completed.

As far as inspections, Chief Kilmer reported that the Inspections Unit is about 100 inspections ahead of schedule for 2021 thus far. The NJDFS recently finished interviews for hourly inspectors with an eye towards hiring an additional 16. This will bring the total number of hourly inspectors to 25. The NJDFS will continue to provide inspections staff with N95 masks and additional PPE for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chief Kilmer added that all NJDFS staff wishing to receive the COVID-19 vaccine have been (or are in the process of being) vaccinated. Chief Kilmer thanked the Director, DCA Administration, and the Governor's Office for their hard work in making this happen.

Chief Kilmer reported on the Rule Relaxation Notice that was put out last July. There are several items contained in the notice that have lapsed, while others will not lapse until the public health emergency is determined to be over. One rule that has been extended an additional year is the one regarding school inspection requirements.

Chief Kilmer spoke about the progress being made on the new computer system – now known as “ULTRA”. NJDFS staff is meeting with developers twice a week to work on the system and it seems to be moving along at a faster-than-anticipated pace. At this point they are looking at an early 2022 launch. The NJDFS is also beginning to share the platform with the RIMS users group to get their thoughts on the new system after seeing it demonstrated. The ultimate goal is to have a user-friendly system for everyone looking to access it from inside and outside the NJDFS.

Chief Kilmer also reported that Annual Report season is just about completed at this point. He said that he was pleasantly surprised how well it went, despite the obvious challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year. Chief Kilmer thanked Frank Clark and his staff for a great job on getting this done. They continue to work on dealing with those municipalities who have had issues reporting.

Chief Kilmer announced the promotion of Bob Lenox, who will now be heading up the Compliance Unit. He, along with NJDFS leadership, has been holding interviews for compliance officers to fill out the unit. Chief Kilmer thanked Director Mikutsky for all the hard work he has put in on getting promotions and backfills done to keep the NJDFS ranks strong. Chief Kilmer also said that the administration – from DCA, to the Lt. Governor, to the Governor's Office – has been tremendous in their support of the NJDFS and New Jersey's fire service in general.

Chief Kilmer noted that the quarterly rebates went out as recently as yesterday (March 16th). This quarter is a particularly difficult one because of deductions that are taken if inspections are not done during the quarter. NJDFS is still spending a lot of time on COVID-19 related issues.

The NJDFS has started the School Fire Sprinkler Survey, which had previously been put on hold due to issues that had arisen due to COVID over the past year. Staff will be compiling data on this going forward and Chief Kilmer will provide updates to the Fire Safety Commission at subsequent meetings. Chief Kilmer also noted that the NJDFS had been working with the Department of Health in ensuring that any and all healthcare facilities need to be in compliance with the Fire Code. The Department of Health issued a memo reiterating this to the facilities.

Chairman Kevin Krushinski asked about the issuing of permits for tents and if there was still no charge in the fee schedule. Chief Kilmer answered that, yes, if it is COVID-19 related it is free of charge. If it's not related to COVID, there will be a charge as usual. Chairman Krushinski also asked about Fit-Test requirements and if they have been scaled back or the rules relaxed. Both Chief Kilmer and Commissioner Blohm answered that there were no rule relaxations on this and all agencies must comply as usual.

Commissioner Gerard Naylis asked about a report that the National Fire Alarm Code (2019 edition) has been changed to require notification of supervisory (non-emergency) fire alarms to dispatch centers. Chief Kilmer answered that he had not heard of this change, but would assume if it had been done it would be for newly installed systems. Commissioner Naylis expressed concern about this because of the influx of calls it would cause. Chief Kilmer said he would look into this and report his findings back to Commissioner Naylis.

With no additional questions raised regarding Division of Fire Safety Activities at this time, the meeting was moved to Advisory Council reports.

F. Advisory Council Reports:

1. Codes Advisory Council

Commissioner Arthur Londensky reported that the Codes Advisory Council met on February 17th, virtually via Zoom. The minutes of that meeting were distributed to the entire Fire Safety Commission for review. Commissioner Londensky said the next meeting of the Codes Advisory Council – also to take place virtually – will be on April 21st.

2. Training and Education Advisory Council

Commissioner Lawrence Wood reported that the Training and Education Advisory Council met virtually on February 16th and the minutes were distributed to the Fire Safety Commission for review prior to today's meeting. Commissioner Wood announced the passing of Council member Larry Rauch. The Fire Safety Commission as a whole expressed their condolences and acknowledged Mr. Rauch's contributions to the state's fire service and citizens throughout his career.

Commissioner Wood spoke about the Junior Firefighter recommendations, as they will be forwarded to the Training and Education Advisory Council very soon so they may conduct a review. Commissioner Wood also reported that the Council is looking at adding mental health and stress elements to Firefighter I and II, and this continues to be developed. Commissioner Wood and Commissioner Naylis also discussed the ability to use acquired structures for live burn training.

The next meeting of the Training and Education Advisory Council will take place virtually on April 20th at 10:00 AM.

3. Statistics and Information Advisory Council

Commissioner Gerard Naylis began his report by stressing that any and all COVID-19 exposures need to be meticulously documented and tracked. Commissioner Naylis also expressed concern that fire deaths seem to be on the rise thusfar in 2021. At this pace, 2021 will exceed 100 fire deaths. NFIRS staff, as well as the Council, is looking into these deaths to see if there is a common thread that can be focused on with public education or addressed via a code change.

Commissioner Naylis concluded his report by stressing the importance of NFIRS reporting for all fire departments and urged all members present to carry this message back to their respective jurisdictions.

4. Master Planning and Research Advisory Council

Although present, Commissioner Raymond Heck was unable to give his report at this time. A report would be distributed after the meeting.

5. Public Education Advisory Council

Commissioner Daniel DeTrollo reported that the Public Education Advisory Council is still working on a reorganization. No meeting had been held since the last Fire Safety Commission meeting. Commissioner DeTrollo reported briefly that the Operation-7 Save-a-Life program was set to resume this spring. A written report was submitted for the Fire Safety Commission members to review.

6. Firefighter Safety and Health Advisory Council

Commissioner Richard Blohm reported that the Firefighter Safety and Health Advisory Council had met virtually on March 16th at 10AM and the minutes of that meeting were forwarded to all Fire Safety Commission members prior to today's meeting.

Commissioner Blohm reported that the Department of Labor is also looking into the firefighter fatalities, as well as the serious injury that took place with the junior firefighter. He also noted that the PEOSH Act does not differentiate a junior firefighter from one that is eighteen years of age. They are viewed as a public employee regardless

of age. Commissioner Blohm also reported that the Department of Labor is looking into the 3M Scott masks and has been in touch with the manufacturer on this.

Commissioner Blohm spoke about a potential issue in South Jersey, that officers were not qualified. A discussion was held on the qualifications needed and the process by which it is to be done to ensure that the officer is qualified and certified by the NJDFS. Director Mikutsky agreed to look into this with the Training and Certifications Unit and will clarify for Commission Blohm subsequent to today's meeting.

The next meeting of the Firefighter Safety & Health Advisory Council will be May 6th at 10AM – it will either be via Zoom or in-person at Middlesex County Fire Academy if possible.

7. Youth Firesetter Prevention Advisory Council

Commissioner Kathleen O'Leary reported that the Youth Firesetter Prevention Advisory Council met virtually on March 12th via Zoom. Commissioner O'Leary reported that the Council is hoping to hold the Annual Conference, and it is tentatively scheduled for December 2nd and 3rd at Middlesex County Fire Academy.

Commissioner O'Leary spoke in-depth about the need for reporting on youth firesetting incidents, and there was a lengthy discussion at the Council meeting to get this done properly on a county-level. Commissioner O'Leary highlighted the need for youth firesetter intervention to be included with early firefighter training and asked that the State Fire Marshal and the Training and Certifications Unit look into expanding upon this.

Commissioner O'Leary thanked Peggy Brookes and the Princeton/Mercer County group for all their hard work on providing resources for virtual learning – providing awareness and resources on a number of topics.

The next meeting of the Youth Firesetter Prevention Advisory Council will be held at Monmouth County Fire Academy on May 13th at 10AM.

G. Committee Reports

1. Residential Sprinkler Committee

Commissioner Gerard Naylis reported that there was no formal report to be given at this time.

2. Ad-Hoc Committee on Legislation

Commissioner Kevin Bellew reported that there was no formal report to be given at this time.

H. Old Business

Chairman Krushinski asked if anyone had any Old Business to bring before the Commission. Chief Kilmer spoke about the 2015 International Fire Code and gave details on where one could find confirmation on its adoption. This went into effect on January 1, 2018.

With no other Old Business to discuss, the meeting was moved to New Business.

I. New Business

Chairman Krushinski asked if anyone had any New Business to bring before the Commission. Commissioner Wood made a motion that the roster of Training and Education Advisory that was submitted to the Fire Safety Commission be reappointed for the next two years. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Arthur Londensky and passed unanimously.

There being no further New Business, the meeting was moved to Public Comment II.

J. Public Comment II

Chairman Krushinski asked if anyone from the public wished to comment at this time. There being none, the meeting was moved to Adjournment.

K. Adjournment

With no further discussion requested, Chairman Kevin Krushinski called for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Londensky made the motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Naylis and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:37 AM.

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