

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

**HEARING CHARTER**

*Working for a Fire Safe America:  
Examining United States Fire Administration Priorities*

**Thursday, May 17, 2012**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

**2318 Rayburn House Office Building**

**I. Purpose**

On Thursday, May 17, 2012, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation will hold a hearing to examine the priorities of the fire service community for the future of the United States Fire Administration (USFA). Witnesses will discuss the current effectiveness of the USFA; priorities for future research, development, and training activities; and the areas of greatest importance for the upcoming reauthorization.

**II. Witnesses**

**Mr. Ernest Mitchell, Jr.**, Administrator, United States Fire Administration

**Dr. John R. Hall, Jr.**, Division Director, Fire Analysis and Research, National Fire Protection Association

**Chief Jim Critchley**, Tucson Fire Department; President, Western Fire Chiefs Association

**Mr. Kevin O'Connor**, Assistant to the General President for Governmental Affairs, International Association of Fire Fighters

**III. Background**

The USFA was established following the 1973 report of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, *America Burning*, which recommended the creation of a federal fire agency to provide support to state and local governments and private fire organizations in their efforts to reduce fire deaths, injuries, and property loss. *America Burning* found that over 12,000 citizens and 250 firefighters lost their lives to fires, and an additional 300,000 suffered fire related injuries on an annual basis. The Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-498) established the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration (NFPCA) at the Department of Commerce, whose stated goal was to reduce the number of fire-related fatalities in the Nation by half. The NFPCA was renamed the United States Fire Administration in 1978, and in 1979

the USFA was placed within the newly created Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The current structure of USFA is designed to ensure that the Administration is responsive to the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA, as well as the emerging needs of first responders.

The objective of the USFA is to significantly reduce the loss of life from fire, while also achieving reductions in property losses and non-fatal injuries due to fire. While the USFA has met its original reduction goal of bringing the number of fire-related fatalities below approximately six thousand per year, the fact remains that more Americans die from fire-related incidents in residential structures than in all other natural and manmade disasters. Although America’s fire death rate continues to decline, it continues to be higher than more than half of the industrialized countries in the world. In 2010, firefighters responded to over 72,000 calls per day ranging from medical emergencies to residential fires. These fire responses are as diverse in scope as they are in size. USFA efforts continue to address the safety of residents and the Nation’s estimated 1.2 million firefighters and emergency responders.

***Fires and Fire Loss Estimates and Trends (2000-2009)***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Fires</b>	<b>Deaths</b>	<b>Injuries</b>
<b>2000</b>	1,708,000	4,045	22,350
<b>2001</b>	1,734,500	3,745	20,300
<b>2002</b>	1,687,500	3,380	18,425
<b>2003</b>	1,584,500	3,925	18,125
<b>2004</b>	1,550,500	3,900	17,875
<b>2005</b>	1,602,000	3,675	17,925
<b>2006</b>	1,642,500	3,245	16,400
<b>2007</b>	1,557,500	3,430	17,675
<b>2008</b>	1,451,500	3,320	16,705
<b>2009</b>	1,348,500	3,010	17,050
<b>10-Year Trend</b>	<i>(17.7%)</i>	<i>(19.7%)</i>	<i>(21.7%)</i>

Figure 1. **Fires and Fire Loss Estimates and Trends (2000-2009).**  
*United States Fire Administration Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 2010.*  
[http://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/annual\\_reports/fy10\\_usfa\\_annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/annual_reports/fy10_usfa_annual_report.pdf)

The USFA is responsible for leadership, coordination, best practices, and support for the nation’s fire prevention and control, fire training and education, and emergency medical services activities. It prepares first responders and health care leaders to react to all hazard and terrorism emergencies. USFA programs include the following:

- **Research and Technology**  
 Through the USFA’s research, testing, and evaluation programs, the USFA promotes and improves fire and life safety. Research is conducted on fire detection, prevention, suppression, notification, and health/safety issues. This research is published and available free of cost to the public through the USFA Publication Center.

FEMA utilizes USFA expertise in its administration of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG), the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant Program (SAFER), and the Fire Prevention and Safety Grant Program (FP&S). USFA assists with the planning and conduct of fire service outreach, the development of funding priorities, and the administration of the peer review process, including recruiting fire services representatives to participate on peer review panels.

- **Data Collection**

The USFA National Fire Data Center (NFDC) is a national system of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and information on fire and other emergency incidents to local governments and the fire community. The NFDC provides a national analysis of fire and emergency incidents in order to identify problem areas for which prevention and mitigation strategies are needed at the local level.

- **Public Education and Awareness**

USFA public information and information efforts are managed by the National Fire Programs Division (NFP). The NFP publishes and disseminates fire safety awareness and education programs, highlighting information related to the Nation’s fire problem and USFA programs. Research efforts in fire detection, prevention, suppression, and first responder health, safety, and effectiveness are also managed by NFP.

- **Training**

The National Fire Academy (NFA) promotes the professional development of the career and volunteer fire and emergency response community and its allied professionals involved in fire prevention and life safety activities. NFA supports state and local training organizations by developing, delivering, and managing educational and training programs having a national focus, which supplement and support the state and local training mission.

## Budget

The current authorization of the USFA (P.L. 110-376) expires on September 30, 2012. The table, below, shows recent appropriated funding for the USFA.

***United States Fire Administration (USFA)***

*(dollars in millions)*

	<b>Authorization</b>	<b>Administration Request</b>	<b>Appropriation</b>
<b>FY 2008</b>	\$68.8	\$43.3	\$43.3
<b>FY 2009</b>	\$70.0	\$43.3	\$45.0
<b>FY 2010</b>	\$72.1	\$45.6	\$45.6
<b>FY 2011</b>	\$74.3	\$45.9	\$45.6
<b>FY 2012</b>	\$76.5	\$42.5	\$44.0

## Current Goals

The USFA has identified five goals in its Strategic Plan for FY2010-2014. The identified goals are as follows:

1. **Reduce risk at the local level through prevention and mitigation.** The USFA is working to establish national models for state and local risk reduction, prevention, mitigation, and safety strategies while encouraging code development, compliance, safe building design, and infrastructure resilience.
2. **Improve local planning and preparedness.** The effectiveness of an incident response handled at the local level is a direct result of the preparedness of the local responders. The USFA is working to set the standard for local fire and emergency services throughout the country.
3. **Improve the fire and emergency services' capability for response to and recovery from all hazards.** The USFA is working to ensure that best practices and training at the local level keep incidents from escalating to a state or national response.
4. **Improve the fire and emergency services' professional status.** The USFA is working to promote a nationally-accepted competency-based system of professional development that can be completed in conjunction with state and local partners.
5. **Lead the Nation's fire and emergency services by establishing and sustaining USFA as a dynamic organization.** The USFA is continuing work towards its vision of being recognized as "America's Fire and Emergency Services Leader".

## IV. Issues for Examination

### National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS)

The USFA, through the National Fire Data Center, plays a significant role in collecting and distributing data concerning fire causes and consequences to fire departments and communities. Witnesses will assess the USFA's progress in providing current, relevant, and accessible data to departments nationwide to help the fire services make more effective decisions, plans, and justifications for fire department operations and administration. The modernization of the NFIRS is underway, but USFA faces a continuing challenge to find resources to maintain and enhance the system.

### Training

Witnesses were asked to address how the USFA revises, improves, and expands curricula to meet DHS/FEMA/USFA and other national priorities, and provides education and training through both resident, off-campus, and distance deliveries. Witnesses have also been asked to discuss how the USFA effectively reaches both paid and volunteer fire departments, as well as metropolitan and rural departments.

### Research

The USFA is undertaking the development of a focused and detailed fire service vulnerability assessment model applicable to fire departments of all sizes, which incorporates new technologies, plans, tactics, and training. The vulnerability assessment is being designed to assist fire departments across the country to evaluate risks and vulnerabilities and based on findings, implement and maintain occupational safety and health programs that will effectively reduce firefighter duty-related deaths and injuries. Witnesses have been asked to discuss the prioritization and identification of other areas of ongoing and future research at the USFA, including programs undertaken in partnership with other agencies and organizations that share the USFA's interest in reducing the Nation's fire loss.

### Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

As part of the 2008 USFA Reauthorization Act (P.L. 110-376) USFA was tasked with coordinating EMS programs. The Subcommittee will examine how EMS is integrated in USFA's vision, mission, and goals, including how the USFA provides training and designs program activities to support fire-based EMS as an option for local community life safety strategies.