

Firefighter Strong

News for a Better You and a Stronger Crew



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NVFC **SERVE STRONG**

www.nvfc.org

ABOUT THE

National Volunteer Fire Council

The NVFC is the leading nonprofit membership association representing the interests of the volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services. The NVFC serves as the voice of the volunteer in the national arena and provides resources, programs, education, and advocacy for first responders across the nation. Membership in the NVFC is just \$21 and comes with an array of benefits, including access to the First Responder Helpline, free training in the Virtual Classroom, dynamic conversation in the Volunteer Voices online community, an AD&D policy, and much more. Find information and join at www.nvfc.org/join. Learn more about the NVFC and access resources at www.nvfc.org.

DISCLAIMER

The information and resources presented in this document are for informational purposes only. They are not intended to offer a diagnosis or treatment of any health issue. Consult a healthcare professional if you feel you may be experiencing a health issue or for any questions you may have. This document does not provide a comprehensive listing of resources that are available.

FIREFIGHTER STRONG: Resources to Help Emergency Responders Thrive

Recruitment and retention. Health and safety. Leadership. These are hot button issues in the emergency services, and many fire and emergency service departments are looking for ways to enhance their initiatives and strengthen their workforce so they can best serve their communities.

In that spirit, the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) annually releases the *Firefighter Strong* newsletter to provide information and tools to help departments thrive. This free publication is sent to all U.S. volunteer and combination fire departments, distributed at the NVFC trade show booth, and is available electronically on the NVFC web site.

The work of a fire department truly is a team effort, and the team is stronger when each member is at their best. The NVFC strives to help responders and their departments through meaningful support, training, programs, and resources. You can find a list of what we have to offer in our catalog on page 25.

Whether you are just starting out in the fire service, are a seasoned veteran, or serve in a leadership role, the tips and resources provided in this publication will help build your knowledge and strengthen your ability to serve your department and your community. We are excited to share expertise from an array of fire and emergency service leaders, including the U.S. Fire Administrator, National Fire Academy superintendent, heads of organizations and companies, members of national work groups and committees, and chiefs of successful departments.

We also recognize that being a volunteer in the fire service affects not just you, but your whole family. It can be a difficult transition for new fire service families to adjust to the lifestyle that comes with this calling. With that in mind we have released an updated edition of *What to Expect: A Guide for New Volunteer Firefighter Families*, and we are giving away 2,500 copies so that departments can better support new recruits. See page 13 for more information.

The NVFC is here for you. We hope you will utilize our resources to strengthen your department and focus on critical issues impacting your membership. You can find much more on our web site at www.nvfc.org. Thank you for all you do to protect and serve your community. ■ ■

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Starting on Solid Ground: Advice for New Fire Service Members

For those just beginning the fire service journey, the path ahead can seem daunting. Seeking advice and assistance from mentors and those with more experience can help ease the adjustment and form a solid foundation for what is to come. With that spirit in mind, we asked instructors from the 2024 NVFC Training Summit to provide their best tips, advice, and words of wisdom to those starting out in the fire service.

Joe Maruca

Retired Chief of the West Barnstable (MA) Fire Department

"You must like people and like helping people. It's not about you."

Bill Hopson

Captain with the Beachwood (NJ) Fire Department

"It is important to never lose sight of why you applied in the first place. You cannot become a trusted, 20-year veteran overnight, without getting through day 1, month 1, and year 1. If you do not accept and buy into this occupation and lifestyle on day 1, you are wasting everyone's time, mostly your own. This is a calling that not everyone can answer."

Brian McQueen

Past chief of the Whitesboro (NY) Fire Department

"The future of our fire service lies within our current ranks at both the officer and firefighter level. These firefighters have so much to offer that if their knowledge, skills, and techniques are untapped, we are failing our department. Your future leader search within your department starts when that new recruit walks in the door. Don't waste an opportunity."

Timothy Cowan

Deputy Fire Chief with the Dewitt (NY) Fire District

"Never stop learning. Always be a student of the fire service. The day you think you have learned everything is the time to retire and move on from the fire service. The fire service has changed more in the past 20 years than it has in the past 150 years. In order to keep up with the changing technology, you must never stop learning."

John Oates

President and CEO of the International Public Safety Data Institute

"My advice is:

1. From the book/movie *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*, learn your position and become proficient in that role. Once you have accomplished that, teach your role to the person below you; learn the position of the person above you. This is (partially) how we pass along organizational history and knowledge.
2. Do not stop learning. There is so much that encompasses the work of firefighting that it is impossible to learn everything. Become knowledgeable in as much as you can. Become proficient; but there is no expectation (nor is it possible) to become expert in all. Challenge yourself with things that you find difficult or out of your normal area of comfort.
3. Live up to 'always remember/never forget.' If your department has suffered a line-of-duty death any time in its history, you MUST know that person's

name, what happened, and how/why/ if the department made improvements to prevent it from ever happening again. PS: When was the last time someone had contact with that family?

4. Quiet confidence and calm in the face of extreme events is built by knowledge and training. Read, learn, practice.
5. Luck is where preparation meets opportunity.

Jan Spence, CSP

International speaker, author, and consultant

"As a new recruit in the fire service, it can often be intimidating when rubbing elbows with seasoned veterans. To ensure a successful start to your new role, I encourage you to 'lean in' to get to know your fellow station members on a personal level. For example, rather than just showing up for training or your shift, be intentional about making extra time to learn more about your teammates. Visit the station off-hours, bringing your favorite homemade dish, sharing a new card game, or even just to talk on-on-one and to listen and learn from your peers. Investing this time will be a great return as they know more about you and you know more about them. It's simple, just be intentional about making deeper connections."

Alisa Arnoff

Founding member of Scalambrino & Arnoff

"It all starts with YOU – make me proud that I am in the community you serve." ■ ■

POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH:

Turning Negative Experiences into Positive Changes



By Dr. Richard G. Tedeschi

People join the fire service to help others and make a positive difference in their communities while engaged in challenging, exciting, and personally fulfilling work. Unfortunately, the unique stressors placed on first responders and the routine exposure to trauma can have negative impacts on a firefighter's mental wellbeing. The fire service is becoming increasingly familiar with terms like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue. While most firefighters will not suffer these debilitating outcomes of their work, it is important to know the warning signs and provide resources to help those struggling to prevent tragedies such as suicide.

There is also another side to working as a first responder that has increasingly been recognized. Although life traumas can lead to mental health problems, it is even more likely that people can experience positive changes in themselves in the aftermath of traumatic events. This is called post-traumatic growth (PTG). There are five ways that people report PTG. With some reflection you might notice some of these developments in yourself.

- A greater sense of personal strength
- New opportunities to pursue certain interests and priorities
- Improved relationships with others

- A greater sense of gratitude and appreciation for life
- Spiritual and existential changes that clarify a sense of purpose and meaning

Post-traumatic growth is a term I introduced to the psychological literature in 1995 with my colleague Lawrence Calhoun, when we were professors at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. We had recognized that in the traditions of the great religions and philosophies of the world, there were frequent references to the ways that challenging and sometimes traumatic life experiences had yielded new insights into living well and wisely. We interviewed many people who had successfully lived through physical disability and loss and learned how their lives had changed in ways they had not anticipated and now valued. There are now about 3,000 research studies on PTG that have shown what the process is like for people in a variety of extraordinary circumstances.

Here are some things to understand about PTG:

First, in the aftermath of trauma, people are usually in survival mode and are not seeing any value in their experiences. Often the positive changes take a good deal of time to notice. This is usually a time of significant struggle, where easy answers are not to be found.

Second, traumas themselves do not produce change, but rather they are catalysts for change, setting in motion a process that in the aftermath of trauma might yield positive outcomes. Events are catalysts when there is something unanticipated in them, forcing a new perspective or understanding to help us make sense of something that is disturbing.

Third, what makes events traumatic is that they challenge our usual ways of thinking about ourselves, our world, and our futures. That produces anxiety but also opportunities to reconstruct this system we rely upon to navigate our lives every day without much reflection. This psychological infrastructure becomes rocked by events the way a city is rocked by an earthquake and the buildings, roads, electric grid, and water supply are disrupted or shattered. Rebuilding the city better than it was before is imperative in order to be more resilient in the face of future natural disasters. The same can be said for our psychological infrastructure. We can go through a process of reconstructing what we understand and believe about such things as how predictable life is, how much control we have, how vulnerable we are, what the course of our life will be, how benevolent people are, and our own morality.

Fourth, it is better to go through such a process with someone else

who can provide some guidance and encouragement. These are our “expert companions” who are trusted listeners, who want to understand what we are going through, and are not too quick on the trigger of advice giving. Instead of trying to fix things or offering empty optimism about our situations, they stick with us for what could be a long haul of struggle to understand the changes that are happening in us, and to see the value in us and what we are going through.

Fifth, PTG does not make life easy or everything happy. It also does not necessarily replace all symptoms of PTSD and other reactions to trauma. It does tend to be related to a reduction in such symptoms and a better tolerance of the residue, as life becomes more meaningful and there is a greater sense of purpose.

Organizations have a responsibility to support the work of their members in a way that the work is not contributing to damage

to first responders and their families. Instead, working in the organization can be an experience of continuing growth and personal development. I encourage first responder organizations to learn more about PTG and how to support their members. The Boulder Crest Foundation has resources on our web site at

<https://bouldercrest.org>. In addition, there are books available that can teach you about PTG and help guide you through your own process. These include *The Posttraumatic Growth Workbook*, *Transformed by Trauma: Stories of Posttraumatic Growth*, and *Struggle Well*.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Tedeschi, Ph.D. is professor emeritus in the Department of Psychological Science at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and executive director of the Boulder Crest Institute for Posttraumatic Growth, in Bluemont, VA, where he has been one of the developers of programs based on post-traumatic growth principles to help combat veterans and first responders. He has published 10 books and numerous articles on trauma, bereavement, and post-traumatic growth, a term he coined and introduced while at UNC Charlotte. Dr. Tedeschi serves as a consultant to the American Psychological Association on trauma and resilience and is a past president of the North Carolina Psychological Association.

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RETURNING TO DUTY: Reintegrating Members After a Behavioral Health Absence

BY JEFF DILL

In 15 years of educating first responders on behavioral health and suicide awareness, there is one question that I get asked a lot. After a member returns from a behavioral health absence, how do we, as an organization, reacclimate that individual back into the workforce, with success for both the individual and the other members?

There are many reasons a member may need to take a leave of absence from a department. Some behavioral health examples include dealing with grief or loss; family issues; seeking support for addiction or substance misuse; anxiety, stress, or other mental health issue; a traumatic call or post-traumatic stress; or a suicide attempt. How much other members know about the reason for the leave of absence will vary. There is a very fine line between the confidentiality of the member, the educating of the other members of the department, and instilling confidence in both the crew and the returning individual. If this is handled poorly, the results can be catastrophic. The individual may end up leaving the department permanently, or in the worst-case scenario, attempting or completing suicide.

The Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance (FBHA) has been validating and tracking first responder suicides since 2010. As of May 20, 2024, FBHA has validated a total of 2,035 firefighter, EMS, and dispatcher suicides in the U.S. During the validation of these losses, FBHA has come across over a dozen losses due to “lack of confidence” by either the department members or the returning individual.

Let’s discuss an example: As the chief of a volunteer fire department, one of your experienced members has been off due to numerous traumatic calls, which resulted in this member struggling with depression. During a depressed state, this member attempted to take his life by overdose. Your on-duty crew ran the call and transported this firefighter to the hospital. The member and his family agree that he needs in-patient treatment to assist in dealing with these struggles. After a 45-day treatment stay, this member is doing well and excited to get back involved as soon as possible.

So the question to you, the reader, is what are the steps you take to ensure a successful transition?

Here are some helpful suggestions to consider:

- The department assigns a liaison officer to assist the family while the member is at recovery.
- The department provides behavioral health training to members, including how to talk and listen to take care of each other. This includes ensuring the returning member is treated with dignity and support, not to have members walk around on “eggshells” whenever they train or respond on calls.
- The department sets up policies to assist returning members. This includes assigning the returning member to an officer who will respond with the returning member to observe how the individual reacts to calls. The department will set a timetable based on weeks or a predetermined amount

of call types, such as drownings, MVAs, cardiac arrests, or any traumatic call.

- If the returning member is willing, have them discuss their situation on training night prior to them returning to active duty. I have known numerous responders over the years who speak about their own lives to prevent others from struggling.
- The department utilizes free resources and training from the National Volunteer Fire Council’s (NVFC) Share the Load Program (www.nvfc.org/help). In addition, the department can provide their members with an NVFC membership, which includes access to the First Responder Helpline for assistance in a crisis or with a variety of work-life stresses, similar to an employee assistance program.
- The department builds or updates a listing of counselors and chaplains who are culturally competent in the fire service. The NVFC maintains a directory you can utilize at www.nvfc.org/provider-directory.
- The department invites family members to parties, celebrations, and training on behavioral health. Departments need to show how much they value family members.
- ***If a member comes back after an extended time away, they need to attend training sessions specific to testing their ability and skills. This will assist them in the long run to enhance their confidence and the confidence of their crew.***

I italicized and put in bold the last point because this will help avoid the

following scenario: A firefighter bravely states that after all the years and calls, they now struggle with memories, anger, relationships, or whatever the issues are. The department members congratulate this firefighter for making a stand, admitting they have problems, and announcing they need outside help. They slap the firefighter on the back, give them a hug or handshake, and say "Best of Luck." However, when the firefighter returns, there are unanticipated emotions felt by both the individual and the department members. Some members even question if the firefighter is "fit" enough to perform the duties of a firefighter, meaning they question this person's emotional capabilities to handle difficult calls. This is where the lack of confidence can be a struggle for both the returning firefighter and some department members. If this occurs, it may result in the returning member questioning themselves and their decision to seek help. They might feel like an "outsider," someone who isn't trusted, and like they don't belong anymore.

Welcoming a member back after a behavioral health leave of absence can be an exciting time, but it also brings challenges that need to be addressed. The bottom line is ultimately that a department wants to create an atmosphere of unity, trust, and family to all members. This is why EVERY department should be proactive when it comes to behavioral health and not reactive. Instilling a culture that accepts and

supports those dealing with behavioral health issues is critical because in our world these issues are not going away. As long as human beings are doing this extraordinary work for their communities, there will be struggles both physically and emotionally.

Most importantly, always remember to treat your brothers and sisters like you would want to be treated. ■ ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Dill founded Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance (FBHA) in 2010. He brings his workshops throughout the U.S. and Canada to educate firefighters, dispatchers, and EMS providers about behavioral health awareness, moral injury, suicide prevention, and preparing for retirement. In addition to its 10 workshops, FBHA tracks and validates data on firefighter, EMS, and dispatcher suicides in the U.S. Dill holds a master's degree in counseling, is a retired fire captain at Palatine Rural Fire Protection District in Inverness, IL, and currently serves as the behavioral health administrator for Las Vegas Fire & Rescue.



Safety first, every minute of every day

The AES Corporation is a Fortune 500 global energy company accelerating the **future of energy**. AES is a leading developer, owner and operator of innovative clean energy solutions in the US, including utility-scale and community solar, wind, battery energy storage and now green hydrogen.

We put safety first every minute of every day – for our people, contractors and communities. Our commitment to safety first aligns with the NVFC's mission and we are proud to support and collaborate with firefighters and emergency responders across the nation to achieve a safe and responsible transition to cleaner energy resources.



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FREE

Health & Safety Training and Resources from the National Fire Academy

By Eriks Gabliks

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) has had a significant impact on the health and safety of volunteer fire and EMS personnel through nationally recognized programs such as the Psychologically Healthy Fire Departments (PHFD) initiative, the *Firefighter Strong* newsletter that is mailed to all U.S. volunteer and combination fire departments, and much more. What you may not realize is that a strong partner of the NVFC is the United States Fire Administration's (USFA) National Fire Academy (NFA), which also has resources available, free of charge, that address first responder safety and health.

On an annual basis, more than 70,000 fire and EMS personnel participate in classes offered by the NFA. This includes attending classes on the campus of the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, MD; attending off-campus NFA classes offered in partnership with state fire training agencies; and online classes.

You may be asking yourself several questions, such as: What is the National Fire Academy? What does it cost to attend? Why should I go? Let's address these one at a time.

What is the NFA?

The NFA was created 50 years ago through the passage of the Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1973. The United States had a fire problem! Our nation was having too many fires, too many civilians were dying from fire, too many firefighters (career and volunteer) were being injured, too many firefighters were dying in the line

of duty, etc. The National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control demonstrated tremendous foresight when they recommended the establishment of the NFA in its seminal report, *America Burning*. The Commission envisioned that the NFA would be like military academies to prepare our current and future leaders. While the NFA is not a military academy, nor is the fire service a military organization, the authors envisioned that the NFA would provide professional development opportunities to our current and future fire and EMS leaders, regardless of who these women and men were or if they were career employees or volunteers. The campus is located about 15 miles south of Gettysburg, PA, on the campus of the former Saint Joseph's College.

What Training Does the NFA Provide?

Fire and EMS personnel have access to dozens of training programs on the local, county, regional, and state level. The NFA doesn't offer classes that you can find locally like Firefighter I, Fire Officer 2, Instructor 1, or EMS. The NFA is here to support the efforts of our local, state, tribal, and territorial fire and EMS partners, not replicate them. We develop and offer classes that are not readily available on the local level, and we make these classes available at the NFA and around the nation.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the NFA transitioned many of our classes to online and online-mediated formats with many more in the process of being updated for virtual delivery. While we embrace

technology, it is important to note that not every NFA class can be delivered in a virtual format due to classroom activities and hands-on elements. The good news is that we do offer dozens of online offerings that enable you to attend a NFA class without leaving your home.

How Much Does NFA Training Cost and Where are Courses Offered?

Whether virtual or on-campus, all NFA classes are free of charge. The USFA is a federal agency, and your tax dollars provide our organization with the funds needed to accomplish our mission. If you are selected to attend a resident class at the NFA (five, six, or ten days), we will provide travel assistance to get you to and from the campus. We will provide lodging for you and world-class training. Your expense for attending classes on campus is your time and your meals while you are with us. If you attend a resident class, you will receive amazing training but also build a network of peers from around the country (and sometimes the world) who are doing similar work that you are in fire and EMS.

The NFA also offers classes around the nation. In fact, we reach more students close to home than we do on our campus in Emmitsburg. Each state receives nine two-day classes which the state fire training agency selects along with dates and locations. This allows the NFA to get as close as we can to you and save you the time and costs connected with taking time away from work and family to come to Emmitsburg.

How Does the NFA Support Health and Safety Needs?

We offer several two-day classes such as Incident Safety Officer, Health and Safety Program Manager, Fire Service Safety Culture: Who Protects Firefighters from Firefighters, Department Wellness Program, and others. Online classes include Empowering Responder Wellness, Firefighter Safety: Calling the Mayday, Safety Essentials, and others.

Now that you have the details on the National Fire Academy, what are you waiting for? Look at our webpage for resident and online classes, contact your state fire training agency for classes in your state, and apply for a class at www.usfa.fema.gov/nfa.

If you are working to address safety and health issues at your fire department and need some assistance, we also have the largest fire and EMS library in the United States with more than 100,000 publications in stock, of which 90% have

been digitized. We employ research librarians who will find documents and resources to support your work at the local level. There is no cost for you to access the library. Simply go to www.usfa.fema.gov/library to get started.

In closing, the USFA and NFA are committed to reducing firefighter fatalities and injuries by helping to create

a safer operational environment for all our emergency responders. We are here for you, and have a dedicated webpage focused on safety and health at www.usfa.fema.gov/a-z/health-safety-wellness. ■ ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eriks Gabliks is the superintendent of the National Fire Academy (NFA), which focuses on enhancing the ability of fire and emergency services and allied professionals to deal more effectively with fire and other emergencies. He previously served as director of the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training. Gabliks has been active in the volunteer fire service for more than 30 years and has served with four volunteer, combination, and career fire agencies in New Jersey and Oregon. He holds a master's degree in public policy and administration from Portland State University and has completed the Executive Fire Officer Program at the NFA and the Executive Development Institute at the FBI Academy in Quantico, VA.

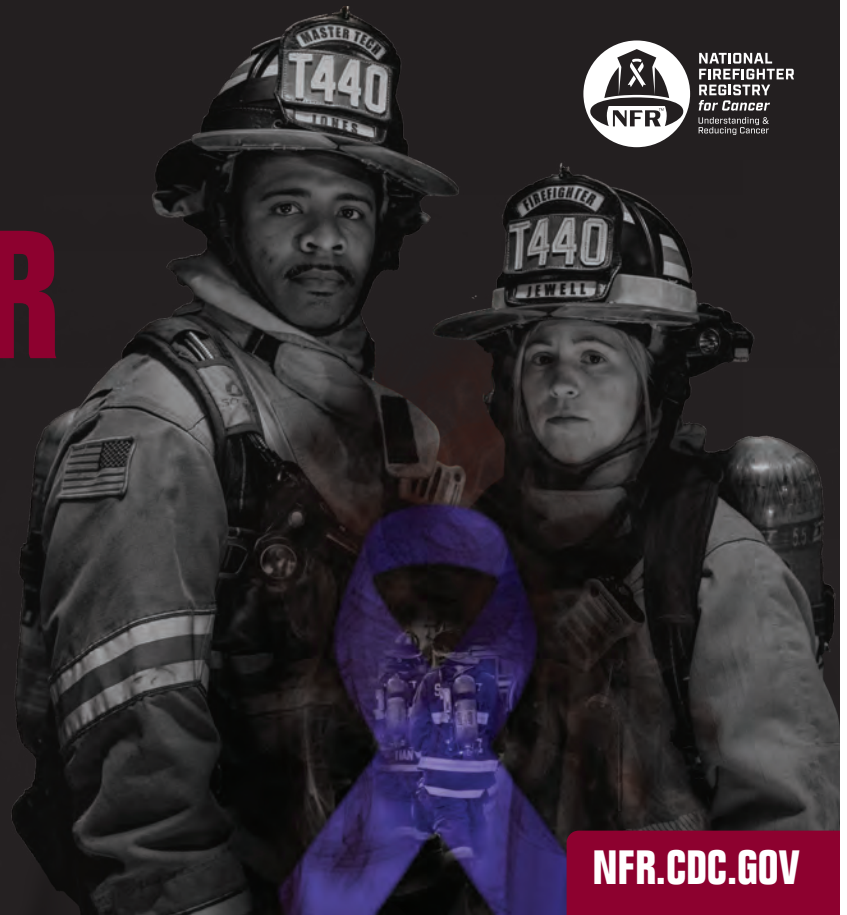
STAND TOGETHER

The National Firefighter Registry (NFR) for Cancer is the largest effort undertaken to understand and reduce cancer among U.S. firefighters.

Sign up from your phone or computer. All firefighters – paid or volunteer, active or retired, with or without cancer – can join.



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Recruiting In a Modern Age:

6 Tips to Boost Your Volunteer Staffing



By Chief Matt Hohon

When I was elected chief of the Granbury (TX) Volunteer Fire Department (GVFD), it was on the brink of collapse, which made no sense. We had all the necessary components for a great department, so why wasn't it thriving? I was willing to try anything to grow the organization. Creating a complementary and supportive process was a vital part of my approach, and my priority was always finding the best way to grow. And grow we did.

A few months ago, I was discussing our organization's recruitment and retention success with our assistant chief. We decided to capture our thoughts and ideas to help others who may be struggling with volunteer staffing. The following tips are based on what we have learned from our experience. While not absolute, it can serve as a starting place for those looking to boost their recruitment and retention efforts.

To discuss recruitment, first understand my mindset through my favorite quote. "The difference between commitment and involvement is like a ham and egg

breakfast. The pig was committed, and the chicken was involved." I am committed to volunteerism.

TIP 1

Prioritize Training

One of the most valuable pieces of advice I can give anyone is always prioritize training. Whether you're trying to solve problems within your organization, bridge generational gaps, or help new members find their place, training is the key to success. I spent much time thinking about making training as effective as possible rather than just going through the motions. Training is the foundation of everything I accomplished, and without it, I would have struggled to move forward.

TIP 2

Change with the Times

GVFD was incorporated in 1907. I had the chance to review the organization's constitution and bylaws from 1927 and was shocked to see that the department

had made little progress. Having a constitution that mentions feeding horses is not the best place to be. Hence, I took the initiative to rewrite and create new articles and bylaws that support the current growth and development of the organization. For instance, limiting the number of members or having distance requirements to the station is not in our best interest, as it automatically turns down potential help. This approach can lead to missing out on new applicants who could contribute to the department's growth. With the recent changes, new applicants know they are welcome.

I knew we would need a process to handle new applicants as we grew, so I completely reworked our SOPs/SOGs. With an emphasis on new members, the SOGs more effectively support our department and serve as the backbone of how we train and operate.

TIP 3

Maintain an Online Presence

Social media is an opportunity for fire departments. It is a modern, accepted

form of communication that all ages use. Having no social media presence means stagnation and can be a one-way road to oblivion. We grew our social media presence by providing community updates on road closures/delays and wildland fires. By being the first to make a post, our local community subscribed to our updates. We also included recruitment information, which resulted in a growing and active platform. If your department has the budget, it may be worth considering spending money on social media advertising to reach out to the community. We do periodic recruitment drives through Facebook that have been quite successful and have resulted in our page having a larger following than the entire population of our city.

A web site is another important tool to reach the community and let prospective recruits learn more about your department. Our department struggled for years with building and maintaining our web site with little success. Eventually, we hired a local company to create, host, and maintain our web site for a total cost of \$1,200. If your department doesn't have the budget for web development, look for non-operational volunteers, local college students, or a supportive local business who may be willing to assist for free.

TIP 4

Market Your Department

Once we laid a strong foundation for our department, we were ready to grow. To achieve this, we began recruiting heavily and everywhere, which resulted in an astonishing growth from 35 active members to 55 in just eight months.

One of the reasons for our success was targeting young men and women interested in pursuing a career in fire/EMS. Our organization has always been known as the triple-A farm league for the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and many of our members have gone on to successful careers in the field. We emphasized the importance of community service and a career in our message, which helped us attract more dedicated members to our team.

We also focused on building relationships with our membership and the community. Being active within the community can create more awareness, leading to potential recruits or resources for your organization. Chiefs should seek out "salespeople" for their department – recruitment for a volunteer department is essentially selling your organization as an investment in the candidate's time. It is a significant achievement if your organization successfully makes this sale.

TIP 5

Embrace Politics

Like it or not, politics is an essential aspect of any organization, especially for those in leadership positions. To become a chief, you must actively engage in politics because it's a crucial part of the job. As a chief, you need to be the face of the organization, represent it, and advocate for its interests. This doesn't mean you must be a dramatic character on a TV show. Instead, you need to be a responsible figurehead who speaks about the organization's benefits and how it saves taxpayers millions of dollars annually. By embracing this responsibility, you can help your organization grow and succeed. For example, by actively participating in politics, you can secure more funding for your organization and improve its budget. If you want to be an influential chief, get out there, represent your organization, and make a difference.

TIP 6

Recruitment is an Ongoing Process

Since 2010, I have been considering the barriers to volunteering and proposing solutions and ideas for these issues. However, I have realized you can only climb K2; you cannot carry it. You need a trusted group and their buy-in to tackle things effectively. Their ideas and concerns should also be considered. Before addressing specific issues, it's important to communicate, identify, consider, and plan for potential challenges such as budgets, time constraints, poor documentation, toxic culture, etc. In my case, I addressed a generation gap through training and mandatory interactions.

We have put a lot of thought into creating a recruitment plan, but we still have more ideas that require time and planning. I don't just cast a line and hope for the best when recruiting. Instead, I use a drift net to catch everything related to joining my organization. I advertise on various platforms such as social media, TV, billboards, radio, and print to reach a diverse audience. It doesn't matter to me what someone looks like, what they wear, or what their political beliefs are. What matters is their desire to serve their community and achieve their goals. I want to help them find the proper role and provide support. ■ ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Hohon is chief of the Granbury (TX) Volunteer Fire Department (GVFD). Born and raised in Western Colorado, he moved to Texas after living internationally and joined GVFD in 2010. He is a State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas certified Firefighter 1 and 2 and Instructor 3 and hosts a podcast that focuses on volunteer fire departments and the issues they face. Hohon is an airline transport pilot and received his degree in math and international business from Metropolitan State University of Denver.

FIREFIGHTING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR



BY MIKE & ANNE GAGLIANO

Firefighting truly is a family affair. It's important to recognize this, as it is not just the firefighter who serves and sacrifices. The journey will have very real impacts on the entire family. Firefighters will be much more effective and successful if they bring their family on board. With supportive, involved loved ones, the firefighter will not only do better... they will be better.

So, why should the family be asked to support such a demanding calling? Being a volunteer firefighter is, after all, just a hobby, right? Something to do for the thrill of it all and to hang out with friends?

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The first thing to understand about the work of a firefighter is that it truly matters. We hope that this reality brings comfort throughout all the sacrifices that need to be made, including time away from home, missed holidays and family events, and middle of the night calls. This is not some thrill-seeking adrenaline ride that is more about kicks than necessity. What we do impacts lives every day and contributes to a civilized society that works.

Firefighters show up to provide help during the worst days of people's lives. The dangers and sacrifices are about bringing order to chaos and helping those in dire

need. We were made for this and truly enjoy helping others. Firefighters accept this calling because it's who we are. Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman has this to say about first responders in his book, *On Combat*:

"There is something gloriously right with them. Because if we did not have warriors, men and women willing to move towards the sound of the guns, and confront evil, within the span of a generation our civilization would no longer exist."

When spouses and family members recognize this about their firefighters, they then can provide a level of comfort and support that is valuable beyond measure.

Firefighter spouse, never underestimate the vital role you play in the fire service. Your firefighter needs you more than you know. The kids too. When the whole family respects and supports this calling, the firefighter is stronger and healthier. When you don't, they may grow weak and more vulnerable. With just one supportive person at your side, a human being can endure incredible levels of pressure and adversity. "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves." -- Ecclesiastes 4:12.

Firefighters are exposed to massive amounts of trauma and danger because of

their passionate desire to help people. One of the primary reasons they can do this, not just once or twice, but for the span of a career, is you. Your encouragement "gives courage," and this they desperately need.

Encouragement doesn't take much effort and it doesn't cost a thing, yet it is absolutely priceless. Positive words lift the spirits of the firefighter, and in lifting them, you lift yourself. The result of speaking kindly to each other creates breathing room for the extra stresses firefighting can bring into the household. Tell each other "the good stuff," as we like to call it, and this will bring energy to you both to pursue all of your passions and dreams. Together, as a couple and as a family, you can go the distance in this high-stakes game of life and death, courage and sacrifice. Encouragement is energy and magic, mystical stuff that gets you out of bed. We all need a friend, and this is critically true for those who are exposed to chaos, devastation, and despair as a necessary part of their work.

A positive attitude and speech pattern will be easier for families that are truly grateful for the fire service. Remember all the benefits that the fire service brings into your life. It is work that is enjoyable, has meaning, and creates an extended family for you all to be a part of, for life. A family that will be there on your darkest days. A family that will welcome you and cherish you for the vital, needed members that you are. It is a group of men and

women that emulate positive role models for your children. This is a wonderful addition to any child's life. The fire service represents honor, tradition, and courage; all noble qualities that will develop rich character into your impressionable kids. They'll witness firsthand neighbor helping neighbor, firefighters saving lives and homes and even pets. Life is valuable and worth treasuring, and this is something healthy for the whole family to experience.

To get your kids involved, bring them to the firehouse often. Let them know they are welcome as they explore the rigs and experience the rush of the bells signaling someone in need. Speak at their schools and youth groups to show their peers what you do. Every kid, in their own way, wants to be proud of their parents. Have them participate in fundraising activities for the fire department such as dinners, bake sales, and festivals. Not only will they be helping the fire department buy new equipment, but they'll learn the value of money and hard work along the way.

Auxiliaries are another avenue of family involvement. They support the department with non-operational activities, such as fundraising, public education, and providing food, drink, and places of rest at active fire scenes. As your family members volunteer their precious time, they too will be contributing to the vital work of the fire service. Introduce them to your fellow firefighters and tell them you're safer because of the team.

Make sure your family feels they are rightly viewed as honorable, respected, and much-needed members of a very cool organization – the fire service. As you do this, they will gladly walk beside you and understand the reasons behind the sacrifices you all must make.

Firefighting truly is a family affair. ■ ■

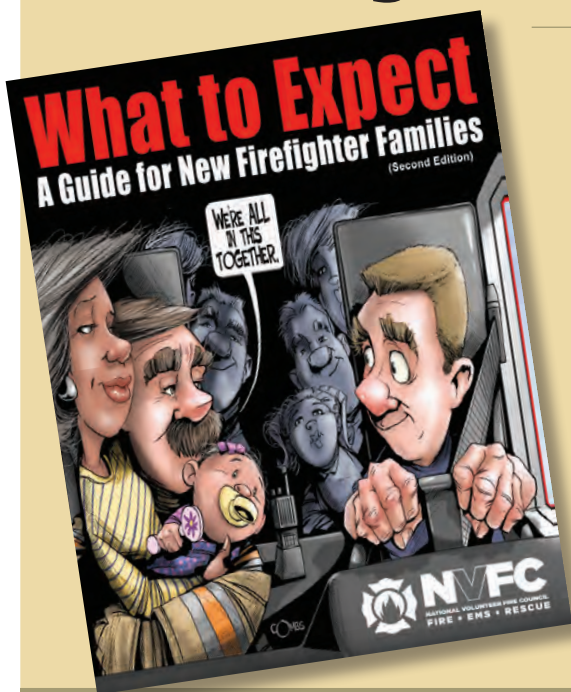


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anne Gagliano is an author, lecturer, and spouse of retired Seattle Fire Captain Mike Gagliano for over 38 years. Her Fire Engineering article "What Every Firefighter's Spouse Should Know" and ongoing contributions to www.fireengineering.com and **fire-life** have inspired couples all over the world. **Mike Gagliano** has over 33 years of fire/crash/rescue experience with the Seattle Fire Department and the U.S. Air Force. He teaches across the country on fireground tactics/decision-making, air management, leadership, and company officer development. Anne and Mike co-authored the Fire Engineering book *Challenges of the Firefighter Marriage* and the 2024 NVFC guide, *What to Expect: A Guide for New Volunteer Firefighter Families*.

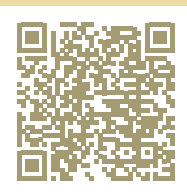


Family Guide Giveaway!



The NVFC has released an updated edition of *What to Expect: A Guide for New Volunteer Firefighter Families*. Joining the volunteer fire service impacts the entire family, and this guide will help prepare spouses, children, parents, and siblings of new volunteers as to what they can expect and how to successfully adapt to this lifestyle. This is a great resource for new recruits at your volunteer fire department.

We are giving away 2,500 free copies of this guide on a first come, first served basis. Request up to 10 copies for your department – only one request per department will be fulfilled.





A NATIONAL STRATEGY:

10 Work Groups Addressing Challenges Facing the U.S. Fire Service

By Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), created by the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act in 1974. While America's fire losses today are dramatically improved from 50 years ago, there is still so much work to be done.

I believe that the fire service can make great strides toward tackling these issues if we unite and speak with #FireServiceOneVoice. We took the first step in 2022 when we held the first U.S. Fire Administrator's Summit on Fire Prevention and Control during the 100th anniversary of Fire Prevention Week. At the summit, fire service leaders came together to establish the Fire Service National Strategy to address the fire-related challenges facing the nation. As a result, six work groups were established to develop comprehensive and actionable solutions focused for these challenges. These are:

- Impact of Climate Change
- Recruitment and Retention
- Firefighter Cancer
- Mental Health and Well-Being
- Codes and Standards
- Whole of Government Approach to Elevate the Fire Service

The work groups met throughout 2022 and 2023, providing their report and recommendations at the 2023 U.S. Fire Administrator's Summit on Fire Prevention and Control. The recommendations may

be found on the USFA web site at www.usfa.fema.gov/about/usfa-events/2023-10-10-usfa-summit/

The 2023 Summit hosted more than 500 attendees on site and consistently had nearly 4,000 online participants, maxing at 7,000 during the day. The summit discussions revealed the need to add the following four topics to the National Strategy.

Electric Vehicles and Energy Transition

Lithium-ion (LI) batteries have become indispensable for our modern needs, but fire risks increase when they are damaged or charged incorrectly. This has become a complex issue for the fire service. The stored energy in a LI battery presents the risk of thermal runaway. Firefighters must consider the risk resulting when the batteries are no longer functioning as intended. Research is needed to better understand the hazards and the means to mitigate them.

Emergency Medical Services

With the number of fires decreasing, fire departments are increasingly dominated with EMS needs. This requires fire departments to champion out-of-hospital EMS and integrate innovative practices to improve overall health, safety, and well-being in their local communities. USFA has expanded its work in EMS by adding the EMS Branch to the National Fire and EMS Programs Division.

Data and Technology

In addition to addressing the fire

problem, the Fire Service National Strategy is embracing a culture of data and technology. On May 4, 2023, the USFA in collaboration with DHS S&T, contracted with UL's Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI) to develop and launch a new interoperable fire information and innovative analytics platform, known as the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS). NERIS will empower the fire and emergency service community by equipping them with an empirical basis for decision-making. It will provide the community with reliable predictive analytics to support enhanced preparedness and response to all-hazard incidents, wildland-urban interface events, community risk reduction efforts, climate change threats and associated resilience and mitigation efforts, and future pandemic emergency response resource preparedness.

NERIS will be tailored to meet the evolving needs of today's fire and emergency responders. It will have a user-friendly design that will allow data input and retrieval on mobile phones, tablets, and desktops. The revamped data framework will streamline incident reporting, enabling responders to document in less time. Seamless connectivity with trusted third party systems will simplify data management. Turnkey tools, enhanced analysis and dashboard capabilities will make it easier to spot trends and provide mission critical information for your teams. In return, you will have access to near real-time data offering dynamic and timely incident updates that will increase visibility in decision-making.

Six local fire departments have successfully onboarded to NERIS and started reporting local emergency incident information. These departments will inform future developments in preparation of the full production version to release in fall of 2024.

Firefighter Cardiovascular Health

The need to address cardiac health is based in the nature of firefighting and the associated physical stressors on the body. The national strategy recognizes the need to invest in ongoing research to understand cardiovascular risks of fire/EMS personnel and promote evidence-based programs to minimize risks and enhance cardiovascular health. The USFA is happy to announce that Dr. Denise Smith, a lead researcher in firefighter cardiovascular health, has agreed to lead the Cardiac Work Group and she has also accepted the director position to lead USFA's National Research and Data Division. With Dr. Smith's leadership, USFA can begin to partner with other academic institutions

to conduct research on a scale USFA has never done in the past.

The 10 work groups are working to complete actionable items identified in the 2023 Proceedings report and identify any additional recommendations. The work groups provided a midyear report to the Fire Administrator at the Congressional Fire Services Institute's annual meeting on April 30. The final report containing

action items and recommendations will be delivered to the 2024 U.S. Fire Administrator's Summit on Fire Prevention and Control on October 8, 2024.

I am grateful for the support of the National Volunteer Fire Council as we stand together with #FireServiceOneVoice. Together we can address the challenges before us and make lasting change for the nation. ■ ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell was appointed by President Joseph Biden as the U.S. Fire Administrator on October 25, 2021. Prior to her appointment, she served nearly three years as the president and CEO of the International Public Safety Data Institute, which she founded after retiring from a 26-year tenure as a senior executive in the International Association of Fire Fighters. She began her fire service career in 1987 as a fire department paramedic in the City of Memphis (TN) Fire Department. She is a Doctor of Public Health and data scientist, whose work has changed fire and EMS deployment throughout the world.

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<https://virtualclassroom.nvfc.org>

REDUCING CANCER RISKS: Keeping the Fire Service Strong through Prevention & Training

U.S. Fire Administrator Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell has emphasized the need for the fire service to speak with one voice when it comes to key issues such as fire and life safety. One area where the national fire service organizations have excelled at coming together with one voice is occupational cancer.

Many organizations representing the national fire service – both volunteer and career – have been researching fire service occupational cancer and educating firefighters and their families about how to minimize risks. In a show of solidarity, major fire service organizations and occupational cancer-specific researchers formed the Fire Service Occupational Cancer Alliance in 2015, releasing an action plan to address this issue through research, prevention, training, and legislative initiatives.

Understanding the Risks

The need for action is clear. Studies have shown that firefighters have a higher risk of certain types of cancers than the rest of the population due to job-related exposures. In 2022, the International Agency for Research on Cancer released a study that concluded occupational exposure as a firefighter is carcinogenic to humans. Exposures firefighters may encounter include combustion products, diesel exhaust, building materials, asbestos, chemicals, and ultraviolet radiation, among others.

The purpose of this information is not to scare you, but rather to underscore why this is an issue that needs our immediate attention. It is clear that to reduce risks and save lives, firefighters, leadership, and government officials need to recognize and understand the seriousness of this issue, take action, and provide the means to protect our boots on the ground fire service and their families.

Training is Key

Monumental steps forward have been made in creating and implementing

preventative measures by examining lessons learned and developing best practices. These include the *Lavender Ribbon Report* (nvfc.org/lrr), released in 2018 by the National Volunteer Fire Council and International Association of Fire Chiefs' Volunteer and Combination Officers Section to provide 11 best practices to reduce exposure risks and prevent occupational cancer. As with anything, "practice makes perfect" and it is through repetition and training that these practices become second nature to firefighters. We must build the foundation of sound, effective work practices while providing services to our communities. Fire service leaders and training officers need to continually reinforce these practices on scene, at the station, and in training.

It's Up to You

The *Lavender Ribbon Report Update*, released in 2021, takes a more personal approach by bringing to light the impact an occupational cancer diagnosis has not only on the firefighter, but their family. It helps firefighters understand why this is so important and what they can do to protect themselves and their loved ones.

I get so frustrated when I see social media posts of firefighters in an IDLH atmosphere taking pictures of themselves, or their teams, working without full PPE, or standing in windows with smoke billowing in the background and an interior firefighter without an SCBA mask on covered in soot smiling for the camera. I remember the words of Mary Seavey, the wife of occupational cancer advocate

Chief James Seavey Sr., who passed away from occupational cancer: "Five long years later of treatment, doctors, hospitals, chemo, rehab facilities, wounds, infections, surgeries, pills, mouth sores, etc., his body could not fight any longer."

The pain of a cancer diagnosis never goes away, but the opportunity to protect ourselves and our families from having this pain is ours. You have the power to follow the safety practices to protect yourself, as well as to be an advocate for positive change in your department.

You can also help researchers better understand the links between firefighting and cancer by registering with the National Firefighter Registry for Cancer (nfr.cdc.gov). This registry is for active and retired firefighters, with and without a cancer diagnosis. The 30 minutes of time it takes to sign up will save lives.

The words "culture change" get tossed around a lot when talking about occupational cancer. But through the collaboration of national fire service agencies and the diligence of local departments, what we are doing is more fully incorporating safety and well-being into our culture. We are embedding practices into our daily routines and trainings that will prevent this horrible disease from impacting our lives and the lives of our families, our departments, and our communities. We cannot ignore our health when so many people depend on us. ■ ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian McQueen is a 45-year member and past chief of the Whitesboro Fire Department, currently serving as their safety officer. He is a member of the National Volunteer Fire Council's Executive Committee and chairs their cancer subcommittee. Brian is a co-author of both Lavender Ribbon Reports, sits on many cancer committees across the nation, and is an occupational cancer survivor.

Are You Ready for Action?

Make sure you are properly utilizing your PPE.



Hood

Particulate-blocking hoods should have a PFE of 90% or greater.

Helmet

The helmet's chin strap should always be tight with ear flaps down to ensure a snug fit.

Facepiece

No skin should be exposed between the hood and facepiece.

SCBA

SCBA should always be worn in the presence of smoke, heat, or toxic gases – IDLH – including overhaul.

Flashlight

A hands-free flashlight helps improve visibility and situational awareness while keeping hands available for other functions.

Radio

The radio should be properly clipped and not dangling allowing for quick access.

Turnout Coat & Pants

Gear that fits properly will be better able to protect you. Take care to ensure you and your members have turnout gear that fits.

Gloves

Gloves should be worn to protect the hands from burns, cuts, and abrasions.

Boots

Make sure your boots comply with NFPA 1970.

The PPE ensemble should meet the NFPA 1970 Standard.

HOT TIP

Protect your crew and community by properly wearing, cleaning and storing your PPE gear.

Learn more at nvfc.org/lrr

EMBRACING CHANGE: THE TRANSITION TO NERIS FOR INCIDENT REPORTING

BY TOM JENKINS

In the fire academy, I doubt any candidate firefighter is excited or intrigued about incident reporting. However, in a data-driven world, it is imperative that fire and EMS organizations have timely and accurate information at their fingertips. This information allows fire departments to properly allocate resources, understand their community's risk, and assess the performance of response units. Unfortunately, many firefighters see incident reports as nothing more than a chore, a first cousin to taking out the fire station trash.

A SHIFT IN CULTURE

It is time for our attitude about incident reporting to change, along with how reporting is perceived in fire department culture. Having access to critical data improves decision-making at all levels, and each member of a department can help make sure that information is accurate and current.

The groundbreaking report *America Burning*, published over 50 years ago by the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, highlighted the need for information to combat public

apathy and governmental rigidity in allocating resources to fire and other emergency needs. While our existing incident reporting system tries to collect information relevant to emergency risk, the demands and risk of our industry mandate change and adaptation.

THE ADVENT OF NERIS

In May 2023, the United States Fire Administration, Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate, and the Fire Safety Research Institute entered a contract to develop a new emergency response information system for our country. This system, the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS), will replace the existing National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and be the premier source of information for our nation's emergency responders.

NERIS will empower fire departments by providing them with real-time information and analytic tools to enhance preparedness and response. Obtaining incident information will always rely on a firefighter who understands the need and takes the time to properly input what situation was encountered and what firefighters did to solve the specific problem.

NERIS is designed with the firefighter as the top priority.

Through augmentation and automation of data, and by leveraging geospatial technology, NERIS is being developed to reduce data entry burdens on firefighters. The variables that are entered by firefighters also reflect a more robust set of modern values. Incident types, actions taken, and other information have been systematically refreshed to ensure the questions being asked of firefighters have "real-world" value.

IMPLEMENTATION AND BENEFITS

NERIS will require a significant update to the current records management system software, or alternatively, the use of a new free app for collecting incident data. Once the new system is in place, it will also be able to integrate information from the computer-aided dispatch system (CADS). This integration will enable a comprehensive "story" of each incident, from the moment the call is received to when the last fire company departs from the scene.

The primary beneficiary of this transformational project is the local fire

PREPARING FOR THE TRANSITION

NERIS isn't a pipe dream, or a project slated for completion a decade from now. Instead, this new system is charging full steam ahead to replace NFIRS in late 2025. In your fire department, the time is now to start asking questions and considering how you'll want to transition to the incident reporting process.

Some important steps to take include:

Designate a Point of Contact:

Preferably someone who is very familiar with the existing software(s) you're using and who isn't planning on retiring or leaving the department soon.

Evaluate Current Software:

Determine what software you currently use and whether that company, if appropriate, is preparing to transition to the new NERIS setup.

Understand Your Geography:

Gather information regarding your department's geography. Your response boundaries and other special geospatial elements are important to NERIS since it can help determine your performance and risk.

Familiarize Yourself with Operational Details:

Make sure your point of contact is properly familiar with the operating details of your organization. NERIS will include information on the baseline resources and operational framework for your fire department, making it important that this person understands many details of your agency.

department. The new system will provide basic analytics and reports to local fire departments, an offering that is likely to grow over time. This information and analytics will be the first time that some of our country's 29,000+ fire departments have seen a dividend from any of the data they've submitted. Furthermore, the design of the system will make information available much quicker – in “near real-time” – for the state, regional, and federal agencies also using it to understand the character of risk and response.

The transition to NERIS represents a significant leap forward in the way we approach incident reporting. By embracing this change, we can ensure that our fire departments are equipped with the tools they need to effectively respond to emergencies and protect our communities.

If you have questions or would like to learn more about NERIS, visit the NERIS program page at fsri.org/programs/neris or email at NERIS@ul.org. ■ ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Jenkins is a retired fire chief and serves as a research advisor at the Fire Safety Research Institute, part of UL Research Institutes. He is a previous president of the International Association of Fire Chiefs and currently serves on the FEMA National Advisory Council.



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Leveraging Artificial Intelligence for Fire Service Recruitment & Retention

It was not long ago that the adoption of artificial intelligence, or AI, was considered a science fiction story, but now it has become part of our reality. Many individuals don't even realize they use AI daily through fitness devices, voice assistants such as Alexa and Siri, autonomous vehicle technology, and smartphones.

Fire departments can now leverage AI at no cost to boost their recruitment and retention efforts. AI models such as ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com>) interact in a conversational way to create engaging social media posts, attractive recruitment letters, and other forms of content. Examples are provided below.

An important note: While AI can provide the backbone for the content you are creating, adjustments or modifications may need to be made. A real person should carefully review the content to make sure it is accurate, relevant, and appropriate for your purpose.

Volunteer Position Descriptions

AI can be used to draft descriptions for volunteer positions. For example, if a department was adding a wellness coordinator to the team, they could ask ChatGPT to "Draft a volunteer role description for a wellness coordinator in the fire service" and the AI response could be the one on page 21.

Thank You Notes

Expressing gratitude to volunteers is an important part of retention. Developing different messages to thank each volunteer personally can be a challenge. AI will draft meaningful thank you messages customized to your specific needs. For example, let's say you had a volunteer spend an entire Sunday washing a truck without being asked. Tell AI to "Write a thank you note to a volunteer firefighter who spent all day Sunday washing trucks." The AI response from ChatGPT is as follows.

Dear [Volunteer Firefighter's Name],

I wanted to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for your incredible dedication and hard work this past Sunday. Your willingness to spend the entire day washing trucks exemplifies your commitment to our fire service community, and it does not go unnoticed.

Your efforts in maintaining our equipment not only ensure that our trucks are in optimal condition but also contribute to the overall effectiveness and safety of our operations. Your attention to detail and tireless work ethic are truly commendable, and we are incredibly fortunate to have you as part of our team.

Your selflessness and willingness to go above and beyond your duties as a volunteer firefighter are inspiring to us all. Your dedication embodies the spirit of service and camaraderie that defines our firefighting family.

Thank you once again for your hard work and dedication. Your contributions make a difference, and we are grateful for everything you do to keep our community safe.

With deepest appreciation,

[Your Name] [Your Position/Title] [Your Fire Department/Organization]

Social Media Posts

AI can become a force multiplier for creative expression with trendy social media captions created around your audience's interests and relevant topics. As your creative assistant, AI can inspire post ideas, generate content, and even recommend hashtags. For example, if you wanted to create a recruitment post around the Super Bowl you could ask AI to "Write a social media post around the Super Bowl with a focus to recruit volunteer firefighters." The response within 15 seconds could be:

Join Our Winning Team!

As the Super Bowl fever grips the nation, we're not just cheering for touchdowns – we're rallying for heroes! Are you ready to be part of something bigger than the game itself?

Volunteer firefighters are the backbone backbone of our community, stepping up to protect and serve when the call comes in. Just like the athletes on the field, our volunteers showcase strength, teamwork, and dedication every single day.

If the AI-generated post is too long, you can tell AI to "Shorten for Twitter (now called, X)" and the new reply could be:

Join Our Winning Team!

Ready to be a hero off the field? Become a Volunteer Firefighter! No experience needed, just passion and dedication. Serve your community, gain skills, and make lifelong friends. Answer the call today! #VolunteerFirefighter #CommunityHeroes #BeAHero

If these examples of AI have not convinced you to give it a try, here is why ChatGPT thinks "In 20 words or less, volunteer firefighters should use AI as part of their recruitment and retention strategies:"

AI elevates volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention through personalized outreach, targeted campaigns, and data-driven strategies, ensuring sustained community support and engagement. ■ ■

Volunteer Wellness Coordinator – Fire Service

Role Overview: As a Volunteer Wellness Coordinator within the fire service, you will play a vital role in ensuring the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of our volunteer firefighters. Your primary responsibility will be to develop and implement comprehensive wellness programs tailored to the unique needs of our volunteer firefighters. You will work closely with fire department leadership, firefighters, and external partners to promote a culture of health and wellness within the organization.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Program Development:** Develop wellness programs and initiatives focused on physical fitness, mental health, nutrition, and overall well-being for volunteer firefighters.
- **Education and Training:** Provide educational resources, training sessions, and workshops to raise awareness about the importance of wellness and to equip firefighters with the tools and knowledge to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- **Health Promotion:** Organize health promotion activities such as wellness challenges, health screenings, and vaccination drives to encourage proactive health management among firefighters.
- **Crisis Support:** Offer confidential support and resources to firefighters experiencing personal or professional challenges, including access to counseling services and mental health support networks.
- **Resource Coordination:** Collaborate with external health professionals, community organizations, and government agencies to facilitate access to wellness resources, such as fitness facilities, counseling services, and health insurance options.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Collect and analyze data on firefighter health trends, wellness program participation rates, and the effectiveness of wellness initiatives to inform future program improvements and strategic decision-making.
- **Advocacy and Communication:** Serve as an advocate for firefighter wellness within the organization and the broader community, promoting a culture that prioritizes the health and safety of volunteer firefighters. Communicate regularly with firefighters to disseminate wellness-related information and updates.
- **Compliance and Documentation:** Ensure compliance with relevant regulations, policies, and procedures related to firefighter health and wellness. Maintain accurate records and documentation of wellness program activities and participant feedback.

Qualifications:

- Passion for promoting health and wellness, particularly within the firefighting community.
- Knowledge of health promotion principles, including physical fitness, nutrition, mental health, and stress management.
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills, with the ability to build rapport and trust with firefighters and external stakeholders.
- Strong organizational and project management abilities, with the capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate wellness programs effectively.

- Sensitivity to the unique challenges and stressors faced by firefighters and the ability to provide compassionate support and assistance.
- Familiarity with relevant laws, regulations, and best practices related to firefighter health and safety.
- Previous experience in wellness program development, counseling, or related fields is desirable but not required.

Time Commitment:

This is a volunteer position requiring a flexible time commitment, with an estimated average of 5-10 hours per week. Some evening and weekend availability may be necessary to accommodate firefighter schedules and wellness program activities.

Benefits:

- Opportunity to make a meaningful impact on the health and well-being of volunteer firefighters.
- Gain valuable experience in program development, health promotion, and community engagement.
- Expand your professional network and collaborate with a diverse range of stakeholders.
- Personal satisfaction in knowing that you are supporting those who dedicate their time and efforts to serving and protecting our community.
- Join us in championing the health and wellness of our volunteer firefighters and ensuring they have the support they need to thrive both on and off the fireground. Apply now to become a Volunteer Wellness Coordinator and help us build a healthier, stronger fire service community.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Candice McDonald is the deputy CEO of the National Volunteer Fire Council and has two decades of experience as a firefighter, EMT, inspector, and instructor. She holds an associate degree in health and human services, a bachelor's degree in organizational management, a master's degree in organizational leadership, and a doctorate in business administration with a specialty in homeland security.



What's Your Favorite Resource?

Firefighting is a physically and mentally demanding activity and one with high risk for injury and even death, but through training, awareness, and education, these risks can be lowered. The National Volunteer Fire Council's (NVFC) Health, Safety, and Training Committee along with the NVFC Health and Safety Work Group provide subject matter expertise, guidance, and direction for the NVFC's initiatives relating to health and safety. We asked members of these groups to share their favorite resource to help protect the health and safety of volunteer first responders. Utilize these resources in your department to support your members' wellbeing.

Next Rung

Recommended by Adrienne Ziyad, Women in Fire
www.nextrung.org

"Next Rung is my favorite resource because the nonprofit organization was started by a group of firefighters to provide counseling services and other resources for those in need."

Lavender Ribbon Report and the Lavender Ribbon Report Update

Recommended by Brain McQueen, NVFC
www.nvfc.org/lrr

"The Lavender Ribbon Reports are my favorite resources because they are written from the heart and because of the professional input from fire service leaders and family members of the fire service.

They are all-encompassing guides that will save lives if used in their entirety."

Everyone Goes Home – Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives

Recommended by Quentin Cash, NVFC
www.everyonegoeshome.com/16-initiatives

"The 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives from the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation's Everyone Goes Home program is my favorite resource because they offer best practices for life safety and are things all firefighters should abide by. They also make great drill topics."

First Responder Wellness

Recommended by Jeff Dill, Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance
www.firstresponder-wellness.com

"First Responder Wellness is my favorite resource because the in-patient treatment facility has produced wonderful and successful results for numerous referrals. Their program is designed specifically for first responders and their after-care plan provides long-term success.

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

Recommended by Richard Campbell, National Fire Protection Association
www.cdc.gov/niosh/firefighters

"NIOSH is my favorite resource because the web site offers vital resources for information on occupational health and

safety topics including research, injury prevention, data collection, current developments, emerging issues, and other safety topics."

The U.S. Fire Administration

Recommended by Joel Cerny, NVFC
www.usfa.fema.gov/a-z/health-safety-wellness

"The U.S. Fire Administration's health, safety, and wellness site is a one-stop-shop to find resources for firefighter health and safety issues."

NVFC's Serve Strong Program

Recommended by Kevin Quinn, NVFC
www.nvfc.org/servestrong

"The NVFC's Serve Strong program is my favorite resource because the message is about preparation and training. 'Better you, better crew' messaging works and is dedicated to building health and firefighter morale."

Emergency Responder Safety Institute

Recommended by David Lewis, NVFC and Cumberland Valley Volunteer Firefighters Association
www.respondersafety.com

"ERSI is one of my favorite resources because it addresses roadway safety concerns for first responders, is committed to reducing death and injuries to first responders working on the roadways, maintains an extensive collection of technical research papers, and offers free training." ■ ■ ■

Don't Suffer in Silence

Emergency responders face unique levels of stress, risk, and unpredictability every day. This can take a toll on your mental health.



Photo courtesy of Lauralee Veitch

Share the Load™ Program

Access to critical behavioral health resources for emergency responders and their families.

nvfc.org/help



Directory of Behavioral Health Professionals

Find local providers who are equipped to help emergency responders and their families with behavioral health needs.

nvfc.org/provider-directory



Psychologically Healthy Fire Department Toolkit

This toolkit helps fire department leaders support the mental wellbeing of their members to create a successful, high-performing department.

nvfc.org/phfd



NVFC First Responder Helpline

NVFC members and their household family can call in a crisis or for assistance with a variety of work-life stresses. This Helpline is offered through Provident by Business Health Services, and is supported in part by Lincoln Financial Group.

nvfc.org/helpline



BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS: A Growing Presence in Local Communities

By Mike Simpson

Utility-scale battery energy storage is often referred to as the bridge between a reliable power grid and building a clean energy future. Battery energy storage systems (BESS) are a flexible energy resource that address many of the challenges facing our electric grid as we work to decarbonize our electricity supply.

Energy storage provides backup for short-term power outages and interruptions; delivers dispatchable energy to meet periods of peak demand; provides ancillary services to maintain the stability of the grid; and supports the integration of renewable energy resources.

For all these reasons, investment and deployment of utility-scale battery storage is accelerating across the country. According to the U.S. Energy Storage Monitor report from Wood Mackenzie, grid-scale energy storage installations in 2023 totaled 7.9 GW, a 98% increase over 2022. In other words, if you don't already have a BESS facility in your district, you will likely be seeing one before too long.

As the deployment of utility-scale BESS accelerates, questions about the operations and safety of these facilities arise. Fortunately, fire incidents at energy storage facilities are rare and remain isolated. Earlier fires or thermal events have also reshaped the energy storage industry's approach to BESS system design and safety.

Lessons learned have resulted in the adoption of standards and codes like UL 9540 Standard for Safety of Energy Storage Systems and Equipment and NFPA 855 Standard for the Installation of Stationary Energy Storage Systems, in addition to continual design improvements that energy companies integrate into energy storage facilities. The energy storage technology being deployed today looks and operates very differently from the technology used just a few years ago. And we understand the technical and safety management of thermal hazards to a much greater level of detail today.

For example, at AES all battery cells and modules we deploy now undergo testing according to UL 9540A Standard for Test Method for Evaluating Thermal Runaway Fire Propagation in Battery Energy Storage Systems, both to characterize the hazards associated with battery energy storage fires and to demonstrate the effectiveness of fire mitigation mechanisms. In addition, layered protections are designed to address specific battery failure modes to greatly diminish the likelihood of any singular battery cell failure from cascading into a larger thermal runaway event or fire. Containment, at the cell level, enclosure level, and system level, is key to managing and mitigating thermal hazards in the unlikely event of occurrence.

Although incidents are rare, departments still need to be prepared in the event of a fire or other emergency at a BESS site and train for the unique considerations of such an incident. It is important for local fire departments to engage with BESS operators in their communities to learn about the facility and its safety features, as well as discuss any concerns or recommendations the department has relating to site design to improve response. Departments should also collaborate with the facility operators and other local emergency service agencies to conduct a hazard mitigation analysis and develop pre-incident and emergency response plans regarding the facility. Each site may offer its own challenges and each fire department may utilize different tools or prefer different methods. Early



and frequent engagement between BESS operators and firefighters can best serve the safety of the community.

These advancements in BESS technology and standards along with increased collaboration between clean energy project owners and local fire departments are paying off. According to the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), "the technology's overall safety record is strong and improving." There were about the same number of fires in 2023 as in 2019, even as global battery storage deployments have increased 20-fold. According to EPRI, there were fewer than 10 BESS failure events in the U.S. in 2023.

This is great progress. But there is always more operators and departments can do together to optimize the safety of BESS installations and make sure local firefighters are informed and equipped to respond to any potential BESS-related incidents. At AES, we continually seek new opportunities to work with firefighters to provide information, training materials, and other forms of support as we work together to build a clean and safe energy future. ■ ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Simpson is the director of innovation engineering at The AES Corporation and has two decades of experience working with battery energy storage technologies. As a leading provider of clean energy in the U.S., AES is committed to accelerating the future of energy and putting safety first for their people, contractors, and the communities they serve. They joined the National Volunteer Fire Council last year to create new opportunities to work with firefighters to help build and operate clean energy facilities to the highest safety standards.

Are You Utilizing All the NVFC Has to Offer?

Find these resources and much more at www.nvfc.org.

Training

www.nvfc.org/trainings

Online

- Virtual Classroom
- Train Strong Webinars
- Roundtable Talks
- Coffee Talks
- Volunteer Voices Live

In-Person

- NVFC Training Summit
- PIT Crew Hazmat Train-the-Trainer
- Wildland Fire Assessment Program
- Request a course

Resources

- Fire Department Pipeline Response, Emergency Planning, & Preparedness Toolkit
- Training Volunteer Firefighters to be Combat Ready
- Volunteer Fire Service Culture: Essential Strategies for Success

Behavioral Health

www.nvfc.org/help

- Share the Load Program
- Directory of Behavioral Health Professionals
- NVFC First Responder Helpline
- Psychologically Healthy Fire Departments: Implementation Toolkit

Membership Benefits

www.nvfc.org/join

- \$10,000 accidental death and dismemberment insurance policy
- NVFC First Responder Helpline
- All training free in the NVFC Virtual Classroom
- Access to Volunteer Voices online forum
- Personalized membership card
- Members-only web site and resources
- Eligibility to get members-only discounts from NVFC partners
- Eligibility to apply for members-only giveaways and scholarships

Recruitment & Retention

Make Me A Firefighter Campaign

www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org

- Customized recruitment materials generator
- Volunteer opportunities database
- Ready-to-use PSAs and recruitment tools
- What to Expect: A Guide for New Volunteer Firefighter Families (Second Edition)

National Junior Firefighter Program

www.nvfc.org/juniors

- Junior Firefighter Program Starter Kit, 2nd Edition
- Core Competencies for the Junior Fire Service
- Sponsorship Toolkit

Fire Corps

www.firecorps.org

- Guide to Fire and Life Safety Education
- Guide to Providing Rehab
- Home Safety Checklist
- Fire Corps Activity Ideas

Physical Health & Safety

www.nvfc.org/servestrong

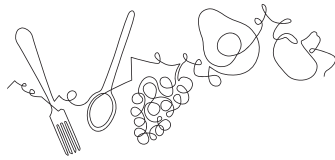
- Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program
- Lavender Ribbon Report
- Roadway Safety

Giveaways/Grants/Scholarships

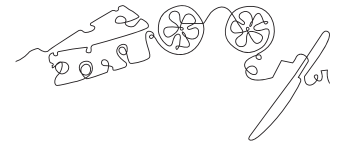
www.nvfc.org/opportunities

The NVFC's 2024 partnership giveaway programs include the following:

- Anheuser-Busch Emergency Drinking Water for Wildland Firefighters Program
- CHEMTREC® HELP (Hazmat Emergencies Local Preparedness) Award
- Columbia Southern University Scholarships
- DripDrop Electrolyte Drink Mix Giveaway
- Nutella® Stacks for Giving Back
- MSA and DuPont's Globe Gear Giveaway
- MSA Cairns® 1836 Fire Helmet Giveaway
- Training Summit Travel Stipends
- Volunteer Firefighter Support Fund



RECIPES



These healthy yet delicious recipes can be scaled to feed a family or a crew at the station and are courtesy of Eating Smart • Being Active from the Colorado State University Extension EFNEP Colorado State University and Department of Nutrition. <https://eatingsmartbeingactive.colostate.edu>

Cowboy Caviar

Makes a great side dish or snack.

Preparation Time: 10 Minutes
16 servings

Ingredients

- 1 (15-ounce) can kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-ounce) can corn, drained and rinsed
- 1 (4-ounce) can chopped green chiles, not drained
- 1 (15-ounce) can crushed or diced tomatoes, not drained
- ½ medium onion, minced
- 3 limes, juiced, optional
- 1 tablespoons vegetable oil
- Salt to taste
- Black pepper to taste
- Tortilla Chips

Directions

1. Collect, chop, and measure all ingredients.
2. Mix kidney beans, black beans, corn, chiles, tomatoes, and minced onion in a large bowl.
3. Add lime juice (if using) and oil to the bean mixture, and stir gently to combine.
4. Taste. Add a small amount of salt and black pepper, if desired.
5. Serve as a dip with tortilla chips.



Photos are courtesy of Yvette Graham

Cowboy Caviar

Nutrition Facts	
16 servings per container	
Serving size 1/2 Cup (137g)	
Amount Per Serving	80
Calories	
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 2g	3%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 250mg	11%
Total Carbohydrate 15g	5%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 4g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 4g	8%

Not a significant source of vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Grilled Vegetable Quesadilla

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size 1 Quesadilla (194g)	
Amount Per Serving	370
Calories	
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 15g	19%
Saturated Fat 8g	40%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 5mg	2%
Sodium 650mg	28%
Total Carbohydrate 45g	16%
Dietary Fiber 9g	32%
Total Sugars 9g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 17g	34%

Not a significant source of vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Enchilada Casserole

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size 1 1/2 Cup (434g)	
Amount Per Serving	420
Calories	
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 15g	19%
Saturated Fat 7g	35%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 35mg	12%
Sodium 690mg	30%
Total Carbohydrate 56g	20%
Dietary Fiber 8g	29%
Total Sugars 5g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 18g	36%

Not a significant source of vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Grilled Vegetable Quesadilla

Makes a great lunch. You can substitute the listed vegetables for any vegetables you have available.

Preparation Time: 10 Minutes

Cooking Time: 20-30 Minutes | 8 servings

Ingredients

- Nonstick cooking spray
- 1 medium zucchini
- 1 cup diced broccoli
- 1 pepper (green, orange, yellow, or red)
- 1 medium onion, minced
- 1 carrot, peeled, grated or shredded
- 16 (6 inch) flour tortillas
- 12-ounces cheese, shredded (3 cups shredded)
- Salsa (optional)

Directions

1. Collect, dice, shred, and measure all ingredients.
2. Spray a large skillet with cooking spray. Add zucchini, broccoli, pepper, onion, and carrot. Cook vegetables on medium heat for 4 to 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove vegetables from skillet and put on a clean plate.
3. Spray skillet with cooking spray again, and place 1 tortilla in the skillet. Top with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vegetables and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cheese.
4. Place a second tortilla on top. Cook on medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes or until cheese starts to melt and the bottom tortilla starts to brown.
5. Use metal turner to flip the quesadilla. Cook for another 2 to 3 minutes or until tortilla browns.
6. Repeat steps 3 through 5 to make additional quesadillas.
7. Cut each quesadilla in half or quarters, and serve hot with your favorite salsa.



Enchilada Casserole

Makes a great dinner.

Preparation Time: 10 Minutes

Cooking Time: 25-30 Minutes | 8 servings

Ingredients

- 1 (28-ounce) can green enchilada sauce
- 1 (15-ounce) can pinto or black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-ounce) can whole kernel corn, drained and rinsed OR $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups frozen corn
- 3 cups cooked brown rice*
- 12 (6-inch) corn tortillas
- 10-ounce Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese, shredded ($2\frac{1}{2}$ cups shredded)
- 3-ounce cooked and shredded meat (optional)
- 1 tablespoon taco seasoning (optional)

*cook rice according to package instructions.

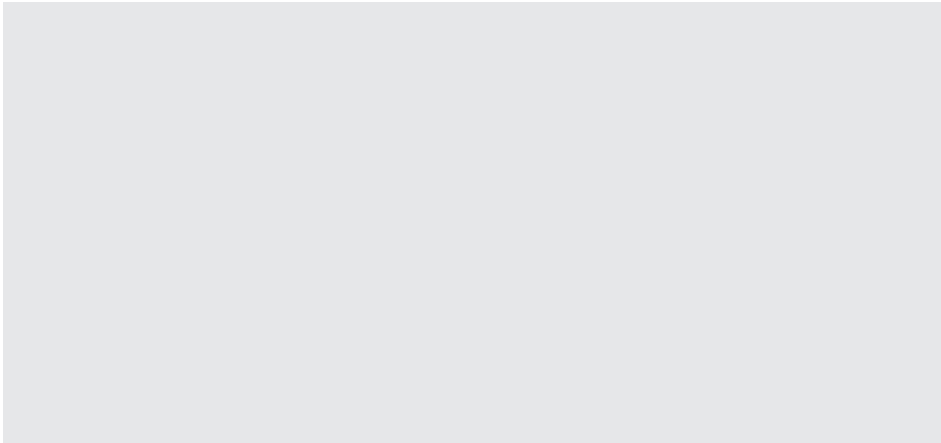
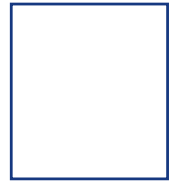
Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Collect and measure all ingredients.
3. In a large bowl, mix enchilada sauce, beans, cooked rice, corn, and (if desired) taco seasoning and cooked meat.
4. Place half the mixture on the bottom of a 9-inch x 13-inch pan or split it between two 9-inch square or round pans.
5. Spread the corn tortillas evenly over the mixture. Place remaining mixture on top of tortillas.
6. Top the mixture with cheese, and cover with foil. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes.
7. Remove foil, and back for 10 more minutes or until cheese is melted and sauce is bubbly.
8. Serve hot.





National Volunteer Fire Council
712 H Street, NE, Ste. 1478
Washington, DC 20002



VOLUNTEER FIRST RESPONDERS, WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK.



Become a member of the National Volunteer Fire Council to get what you need to be your best for you, your crew, and your community.



Have a voice
in advocating for volunteer fire and emergency services nationwide and locally.



Up your skills
through free training, educational scholarships, and giveaways.



Grow your fire family
by connecting with fire service volunteers in your area and across the country.



Look after your loved ones
with a \$10,000 AD&D insurance policy.



Become a member for only \$21 a year.
Join today at [NVFC.org/Join](https://www.nvfc.org/Join)



Know you're backed
by the top organization fighting for the volunteer fire and emergency services.