



Volunteer Fire Service has Serious Concerns with OSHA's Proposed Emergency Response Standard

Background: On February 5 the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) published a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) in the Federal Register proposing a new safety and health standard, titled "Emergency Response," to replace the existing "Fire Brigades Standard" Standard. This proposed standard imposes numerous requirements that would be infeasible for many volunteer fire departments to comply with. The initial public comment period on this proposed standard concluded on July 22. OSHA will hold a virtual public hearing regarding the proposed Emergency Response Standard beginning on November 12. The National Volunteer Fire Council's public comments on the proposed standard can be found here: <https://www.nvfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/NVFC-OSHA-Comments-071624.pdf>.

Volunteer Fire Service Position:

- **Appreciates OSHA's intent to pursue our mutual goal of promoting firefighter safety:** The proposed standard would do a great deal to improve firefighter safety, however, if it's adopted as written it would hinder emergency response capabilities of volunteer fire departments that serve small rural areas.
- **The proposed standard is economically infeasible:**
 - Small rural communities are almost exclusively protected by volunteer firefighters.
 - The resources available to each volunteer department are either dependent on the local tax base, or the department's capability to fundraise, which can be very restrictive and limited in rural communities.
 - OSHA estimates the annual cost for volunteer fire department to comply with this standard would be approximately \$14,000. The NVFC believes the cost of compliance would be much greater due to the expertise, time, and staffing needed to fulfill the numerous reporting requirements in this standard, mandated compliance with one size fits all industry consensus standards, among other factors.
 - The NVFC conducted a survey of our membership on department budgets. Of the 2,444 responses we received 19% said their department's budget was less than \$50,000.
 - The most important federal grant programs that assist fire departments in achieving a baseline level of readiness are the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER). In FY24 Congress cut funding for these crucial programs by 10%.
- **The proposed standard is not scalable:** Though some parts are scalable, most of the requirements within this proposed standard would be the same for a small volunteer and a large metropolitan fire department.
- **The proposed standard would incorporate by reference 23 industry standards that are not readily available:** These standards require a monthly paid membership to print and preprinted copies cost over \$140 apiece.

Highlights of Congressional Engagement:

- The House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology held a hearing on OSHA's proposed Emergency Response Standard on June 4. The NVFC had a witness testify at this hearing.
- The House Education and Workforce Committee's Subcommittee on Workforce Protections held a hearing on OSHA's proposed Emergency Response Standard July 24. The NVFC had a witness testify at this hearing.
- In May Rep. Golden and Rep. Desposito co-led a letter with 40 other members of congress (29 Republicans, 13 Democrats total) asking OSHA to make the proposed standard more scalable for volunteer firefighters.
- In June Education and the Workforce Committee Chairwoman Foxx led a letter with 23 other Republican Members of Congress asking Acting Secretary Su to exempt volunteers from the emergency response standard.
- In July the Senate and House Members from the Arkansas Congressional delegation sent a letter to acting Secretary Su requesting that OSHA rescind the proposed rule.
- In August Sen. Moran and Sen. Coons led a letter with 7 other Senators (7 Republicans, 1 Democrat, 1 Independent total) asking Acting Secretary Su to exempt volunteers from the Emergency Response Standard.
- Senator Boozman sponsored an amendment that was included in the mark-up of the Senate's FY 25 Labor HHS Appropriations Bill that encourages OSHA to conduct listening sessions and outreach with stakeholders to fully understand the impact of new requirements on volunteer fire departments.

Ask: Please send a letter urging OSHA to exempt volunteer firefighters from their proposed Emergency response standard as written and work with the volunteer fire service on feasible and scalable ways to ensure their safety. For more information or questions please contact the NVFC's Chief of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs, Ryan Woodward at Ryan@NVFC.org