

The House Task Force on Fire Protection Funding



Task Force Report



Representative Donald L. Moffitt, co-chairman
Representative Michael K. Smith, co-chairman

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ILLINOIS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Dear Colleagues:

When the Speaker of the House agreed to form this task force, we were unprepared for the positive response we would receive from our fire protection services in the State of Illinois. On behalf of the entire task force, we would like to thank all the fire chiefs, fire fighters, fire protection district trustees, and municipal officials that agreed to sit down with us and share their concerns.

We set out with the purpose of finding ways that we can assist our fire protection services in doing their job. Throughout the summer of 2002 our task force met on 22 different occasions in fire houses and city halls all over our great State to hear from the local fire fighters who respond to emergencies. These brave men and women not only respond on a daily basis to house fires, but also to other emergencies. Auto accidents, suspicious mail, hazardous material spills, and abandoned infants are just a handful of the many things these people do.

We respectfully submit this report for your consideration. In it we list numerous ways we can help the fire protection service through funding, training, manpower, cost savings, and communication.

Most notably this task force would like to point out the need for a revolving loan fund to assist fire departments and fire protection districts with the purchase of new fire trucks and equipment. Although finding the initial lump sum to fund the program would be difficult, once appropriated, the fund would enable departments and districts to purchase new equipment on a perpetual basis.

The task force would also like to invite all members of the General Assembly to join us in creating a fire caucus so as to continue working to further the needs of the fire protection community, much like the fire caucus in the U.S. Congress. What this task force has shown us is that there are numerous challenges we as lawmakers need to face. We cannot face all these challenges in just one legislative session, but rather must build a team to continue to work on the public safety of all Illinois citizens, and to ensure that the vision we have created, as well as the visions of the Blue Ribbon Panel and the Volunteer Fire Service Summit, become a reality.

Sincerely,

Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Donald L. Moffitt

Michael K. Smith
Representative Michael K. Smith

House Task Force on Fire Protection Funding

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House Task Force on Fire Protection Funding

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OBSERVATION: THE COST OF FIRE PROTECTION

Providing fire protection service is a very costly operation, and for years Illinois's fire protection services have been having an increasingly hard time covering their costs and continuing to provide quality fire protection. With the addition of mandates, and a sluggish economy, fire departments and fire protection districts have had to start making cuts to their already slim budgets.

The task force has observed that fire departments/districts spend a large amount of time, energy, and resources planning fundraisers. As enjoyable as these gatherings are for the public, it is noteworthy that the time spent planning a fundraiser can be better spent in training.

Equipment is by far the most costly part of providing fire protection. Each individual fire fighter carries hundreds of dollars in equipment on their person. Naturally, fire trucks are also expensive and can cost anywhere between \$80,000 to \$500,000 per vehicle. Maintenance and upkeep of these trucks is also a challenge, as they usually require specific parts.

Different parts of the State require different trucks. For example, municipalities usually require ladder trucks that can service buildings that are several stories high. Rural areas require tanker trucks to deliver water to fires where there are no hydrants. Rural areas also require brush trucks that have 4-wheel drive to drive into the woods to put out forest fires or homes located in woody areas.

Throughout Illinois there is a huge disparity in the quality and quantity of fire protection equipment. In some areas of the State, trucks are being used that were purchased in the 1960s or even earlier. That is in stark contrast to other areas where a truck that is 12 years old is considered unusable.

In one hearing, testimony was delivered that a particular fire truck is unable to operate in the cold months of the year, thus leaving the area without fire protection. In another hearing, the task force was told of an instance where a fire truck was unable to operate on its own, and had to be towed from the fire house to the fire. In addition, testimony was delivered that highlighted a fire protection district in which the fire truck was deemed unfit for use by the district's insurance company. However, since the district cannot afford a new fire truck, they continue to use their current one without insurance coverage.

Fire departments and fire protection districts are unable to purchase newer fire trucks and other capital expenses because the costs are so high. Very few fire departments and fire protection districts have the cash on-hand to purchase the trucks.

Recommendation #1: The State Treasurer and the State Fire Marshal should administer a revolving loan program to provide zero interest loans for the purchase of capital improvements, most notably for fire trucks and apparatus, based on on-site need determination.

(Although the rural bond bank does grant loans, these loans have to be paid back with a high interest. Many departments and districts cannot afford this interest, and are left with inadequate equipment to fight fires. In addition, the task force has observed that if a department or district has better equipment and superior training, their insurance rating will be lower, which would also be a cost savings.)

This loan fund idea was well accepted by members of the fire protection service community, and the task force is committed to introducing and passing legislation in the spring session of 2003 creating this fund so that every fire department and fire protection district in the state can have adequate fire protection equipment.

Arsonists create an unfair burden upon the rest of the tax payers with their illegal activities. Fire departments and fire protection districts spend valuable resources fighting fires that are created by arson. That money could otherwise be spent on real, accidental fires or for fire training or equipment. (Currently, there is no fine to be paid to the fire protection service for people convicted of arson.)

Recommendation #2: The General Assembly should pass legislation creating a fine of \$500 to be imposed upon a person who is convicted of arson, residential arson, or aggravated arson. The fine should go to the fire department or fire protection district that suppressed or investigated the fire that was set by the defendant.

False alarms are very common in the fire protection service. Neighbors think they see a pile of leaves that are burning out of control, someone at work thinks they smell smoke, or a child accidentally pulls a fire alarm. Fire departments and fire protection districts do not mind servicing a false alarm if the alarm is an accident. However, in some instances the false alarm is intentional. Individuals who cause false alarms tie up resources that could otherwise be diverted to real emergencies. Testimony was delivered to the task force that stated a local group of teenagers continually pull false alarms for their own amusement. Unfortunately, there is little the fire protection district can do to discourage this activity.

Recommendation #3: Allow fire protection districts to charge fees for repeated false alarms. Fire departments already have this ability, but fire protection districts do not. Not only would these fees create a revenue source for fire protection districts, but also it would cut down on repeated false alarms.

This task force heard testimony that in some fire protection districts the County Recorder does not survey certain land that is being protected by a fire protection district, and thus it does not pay taxes to the fire protection district. This is obviously unfair to this district as they have to cover something that does not pay taxes for their coverage.

Recommendation #4: The task force recommends that fire chiefs work to ensure that their county assessors are aware of the fire protection district's boundaries, and that every parcel of land in their county is appropriately accounted for to help fund the district's expenses.

Fire protection districts that have interstates and/or state rest stops, as well as state parks in their area have an unfair burden that other districts do not have. These interstates and rest stops present numerous challenges to the fire protection district, yet they do not provide any revenue for their service. In some areas of Illinois, this task force has observed that rest stops account for over one-third of all service calls to the fire protection district.

Recommendation #5: The State should offer additional grants to those fire protection districts that are responsible for ensuring the safety of state interstates, state rest stops, and state parks.

Fire protection districts, unlike municipal fire departments, must pay fuel taxes. It was brought to this task force's attention that a fire protection district's budget for fuel is almost one-half tax. This could be an expense of \$2,000 to \$8,000 or more per year depending upon the size of the district.

Recommendation #6: The State should not collect tax money from fire protection districts for the purchase of motor fuel for the use of fire trucks.

Occasionally fire departments and fire protection districts are able to assess fines on various entities. These fees can be for repeated false alarms, violations of fire code, or for specific services. (For example, fire protection districts are able to assess a fee on people who do not live in the district for a fire call.) However, those entities fined do not always pay their fines, and the department/district does not have a legal staff to sue those assessed.

Recommendation #7: The State should offer a program to assist fire protection districts with recovering money owed to them. (Fire departments generally already have legal staff through their municipality.)

Currently, state law provides that a fire department or fire protection district is eligible to receive a maximum of \$500 from a DUI offender if the offender causes an accident that the department/district responds to. However, the costs of a DUI accident to a fire department or fire protection district can easily reach into the thousands. Moreover, that fine is only issued if the judge chooses to issue it.

Recommendation #8: The General Assembly should raise the amount to be paid to the fire department or fire protection district for DUI offenses from the current maximum of \$500 to \$1,000.

In today's world, the use of illegal drugs seems to be on the rise. Unfortunately, the creation of many of these drugs is a large fire hazard. Most notably, the task force heard a great deal of

testimony about the increase in methamphetamine (meth) laboratories. To create methamphetamine the criminal must use many dangerous and hazardous chemicals that are toxic. These chemicals are also extremely unstable. In the event of a meth lab explosion (and subsequent fire) the toxic chemicals leave a destructive residue that not only creates a severe health hazard to the responding fire fighters, but also is very difficult and costly to clean up. This task force heard testimony in which a volunteer fire fighter had to be hospitalized for over a week due to inhaling the toxic chemicals from a meth lab fire.

Recommendation #9: The current charge for a meth lab is a Class X Felony, the most serious charge in the State of Illinois except for murder. However, the General Assembly should enact legislation to further deter people from creating meth labs by allowing them to be charged with possession of explosive chemicals without a permit.

Recommendation #10: The General Assembly should give fire departments and fire protection districts the power to recoup losses from the clean up of a meth lab from the felon. (Currently fire departments and fire protection districts can only ask for restitution if the fire causes injury to a fire fighter or damages fire fighting equipment.)

The task force does not recommend that the owner of the property be fined for the meth lab, unless it is proven that the owner knew the lab existed and had the opportunity to prevent it.

When a fire protection district responds to an emergency that is outside the district's coverage area, the district has the ability to collect a fee for their services. The most common example of this is when a vehicle from outside the district enters the district and catches fire. This option is not currently available to fire departments, although it is to fire protection districts.

Recommendation #11: The General Assembly should pass legislation to allow fire departments to collect a fee for responding to an emergency outside of the department's area of coverage, much like fire protection districts currently can.

(This recommendation is not to be interpreted as superceding a mutual aid agreement, but rather for when such an agreement does not exist.)

OBSERVATION: TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

Many beginning fire fighters train at the University of Illinois Fire Service Institute. The institute is located in Champaign and offers seminars on Officer Training, Auto Extrication, Hazardous Materials, Rescue, EMS, Fire/Arson Investigation, and Terrorism. The institute also offers advanced and re-training courses.

Sending fire fighters to this institute is rather costly for fire departments/districts, as they have to pay tuition, hotel, and per diem expenses. In addition, when a fire fighter leaves to attend the institute, the department/district must arrange for another fire fighter to “cover” for the one that is gone. For departments, this usually involves paying a fire fighter overtime. When possible, most departments/districts opt to do local training as much as possible.

Testimony was delivered to the task force in which one particular fire department was unable to pay for a fire fighter candidate to attend the institute, preventing the fire fighter candidate from joining, leaving the fire department under staffed.

Fire fighters must continue to train and re-train, even years after leaving the institute. New procedures/policies are constantly adopted, new equipment is purchased and memories of training from the past can fade.

Recommendation #12: It would be cost effective to provide as much training as possible in the local fire house. This can be done by sending the institute’s trainers out, training by video or conference, or even via the internet. Moreover, the use of CD ROMs should be utilized to replace other forms of training such as manuals.

Recommendation #13: The General Assembly should appropriate additional funds to the Fire Service Institute to increase the Outreach program to local departments/district.

A major training tool is a fire tower, which is a concrete structure, usually three to four stories high. Combustible items are placed in the tower and set on fire. Fire fighters then must put the fire out as if it were a real fire. The tower can then be cleaned and used again.

These towers are extremely expensive. The owner of the tower must own the land the tower sits on, and build and maintain the tower. Several departments/districts throughout the State have built their own towers for their own use, although that tends to be the exception rather than the rule.

Recommendation #14: It is recommended that the State Fire Marshal assist all departments/districts with promoting the use of their locally owned tower for other local departments/districts to use as well.

In addition, local departments/districts should consider “teaming up” to build towers in a central geographic area, and then sharing the cost.

Recommendation #15: The State should build regional training centers, operated by the State Fire Marshal or the Fire Services Institute.

Volunteer fire fighters naturally must train as well. It is preferred that volunteers do their training at the Illinois Fire Service Institute. However, because volunteers are not paid for their time at the institute, and because many volunteer departments are even more cash-starved than career departments, enabling volunteer fire fighters to become properly trained at the institute is extremely difficult due to its cost.

Recommendation #16: The State of Illinois should cooperate with the Fire Services Institute to award scholarships to the institute for volunteer, or less financially stable, fire departments or districts.

Many community colleges throughout the State offer certification and re-certification classes. (It is common for the trainers to be retired fire fighters.) Unfortunately, the community college and the trainers might not keep their training materials up to date with new testing procedures. This task force heard testimony in which a fire department paid a large amount of money to train at the local community college, only to find out later that the test was different from the training materials provided to the trainees.

Recommendation #17: The State Fire Marshal should communicate with the Community College Board to ensure that community colleges throughout the State are aware that the State Fire Marshal test changes on a routine basis to reflect new procedures, and that community colleges should ensure that their training reflects these changes.

Being a fire chief carries a great deal more responsibility than being a fire fighter. Many fire chiefs, particularly those overseeing volunteer fire fighters, would benefit greatly from specific training on the duties of a fire chief.

Recommendation #18: The Fire Services Institute should continue to offer training programs for new fire chiefs. In fact, the institute should work with the State Fire Marshal and the various associations to develop training workshops specifically for fire chiefs.

OBSERVATION: EQUIPMENT

The status of fire fighting equipment in many of the state's fire departments and fire protection districts is embarrassing. Many departments/districts are using fire trucks that were built in the 1950's and 1960s, and some even older. This task force heard from numerous fire chiefs that said their fire fighters usually wear denim jeans and shirts for protection instead of fire turn out gear. The task force also saw fire hoses that were held together with duct tape.

Besides the recommendation for a revolving loan fund to purchase new fire trucks, apparatus, and other capital improvements (see "The Cost of Fire Protection," page 2), this task force has other recommendations to upgrade the state's fire protection equipment.

* * *

Some departments/districts are using equipment that was deemed unusable by other departments and subsequently threw them out. Because of liability concerns, these departments cannot legally give their used equipment to another department/district. Sadly, this task force heard testimony in which a fire chief informs another fire chief of where they will be throwing out their old equipment so that other fire chiefs can visit those dumpsters to take the used equipment.

Recommendation #19: The State should entertain the idea of allowing the Office of the State Fire Marshall to create an equipment exchange program. Departments looking to dispose of old equipment can donate their used materials to the State Fire Marshal, who can re-certify what is safe equipment, and reissue that equipment to other departments.

Departments that donate such equipment would not be held liable for the equipment once they donate it.

In some cases, departments are looking to dispose of old fire trucks. Through advertisements in fire newsletters, other departments/districts offer to purchase the fire truck, but have no way to transport the truck because the truck cannot be driven long distances.

Recommendation #20: The State should examine the possibility of utilizing transportation trucks controlled by Illinois Department of Transportation and the National Guard to transport large equipment.

On occasion local departments/districts will cooperate to buy equipment together through a bulk purchase. The savings to each department/district goes up with the more departments/districts that participate in the purchase.

Recommendation #21: The State should give the State Fire Marshal the power to do a statewide bulk purchase on behalf of as many fire departments and fire protection districts that wish to join.

For example, the State Fire Marshal can buy thermal imaging cameras through a bulk purchase on behalf of many fire departments/districts. Buying the cameras in a bulk purchase is more cost effective than buying them individually, as the State Fire Marshal can then competitively bid for these cameras. This bulk purchase can be done for protective gear, hoses, and even fire trucks.

Valves and hose threads come in many different sizes. Even when various departments/districts have a desire to do an equipment exchange, this often can be impossible because different parties use different size equipment.

Recommendation #22: The State should encourage all fire departments and fire protection districts to adopt a standard thread size for all fire hoses and fire trucks. This would enable various departments and districts to cooperate with each other at the scene of an accident without spending time worrying about which hose goes to which truck, as well as enable equipment sharing.

OBSERVATION: MANPOWER

In the State of Illinois there are over 42,000 fire fighters working or volunteering in over 1,200 fire departments and fire protection districts.

Being a fire fighter is one of the most dangerous jobs available in the world. In the U.S. alone, 85,000 fire fighters are injured every year, and over 100 are killed.

In the 21st Century, fire fighters provide many services beyond fire protection, such as emergency medical ambulance service, hazardous material mitigation, vehicle extrication, industrial rescue, water and trench rescue, carbon monoxide investigations, abandoned infant care, and much more. The role of a fire fighter has changes so much, that this task force heard testimony on numerous occasions where fire departments were actually changing their names to “Fire and Rescue” to better reflect their current responsibilities.

Although additional tasks have been assigned to the fire protection services, little or no funding has been added. Moreover, these additional assignments require additional training, which takes time and resources away from other projects.

Recommendation #23: The General Assembly should discontinue its practice of creating unfunded mandates upon fire departments and fire protection districts.

Volunteer fire fighters are the most difficult to find. A volunteer fire fighter must volunteer not only his time to fight fires, but also to train and participate in other fire fighter activities. These commitments put a huge constraint on a fire fighter’s family life. Moreover, volunteers inevitably take time away from work, because fires occur at all hours of the day, not just in the evening and weekends.

Above all, volunteer fire fighters accept the risks of being a fire fighter without compensation. Many volunteer fire departments and fire protection districts are having an increasingly hard time finding volunteers to commit to the fire protection service.

It is also noteworthy that approximately two thirds of all fire fighters in the State of Illinois are volunteers.

Although career departments have experienced a decrease in their applicants, volunteer department and fire protection districts have experienced a crisis in finding new volunteers. The task force has heard testimony from several districts that rely on volunteers that are over the age of 70.

Recommendation #24: The State of Illinois should create the following incentives:

- A. Create income tax breaks for serving as a volunteer fire fighter;
- B. Develop a life insurance and disability plan for volunteers to protect their families;
- C. Develop a scholarship program for volunteer fire fighters and their families to Illinois universities and community colleges.

Recommendation #25: The State of Illinois should cooperate with the various fire protection service associations to create awareness programs on the importance and significance of becoming a fire fighter.

It is noteworthy that finding a time for volunteer fire fighters to receive training, as well as meet in other outlets, can be extremely difficult. For example, most of the hearings of this task force were held during business hours, which made it difficult for volunteer fire fighters to deliver testimony in person because the volunteer fire fighters were at their place of employment.

Recommendation #26: The General Assembly should support a resolution for state agencies and other governmental bodies to hold meetings, fact-finding hearings, and training endeavors at regional sites during non-business hours.

As the roles of fire departments and fire protection districts in the community continue to grow, it has become more of a burden for employers to have volunteer fire fighters on their pay roll. The increased role of a fire fighter means the individual must go on more service calls, thus leaving their job more often. The task force has observed that many employers are beginning to set rules for how long their volunteer fire fighters can be absent from the work place. In addition, some employers are beginning to refuse to hire volunteer fire fighters if they insist on being on call during working hours.

Recommendation #27: The State of Illinois should develop an incentive program for employers that allow their employees to leave the work place to respond to emergencies.

Recommendation #28: The General Assembly should provide volunteer fire fighters with job security should they be forced to leave the workplace to respond to an emergency.

The State of Illinois' chief fire fighter is the State Fire Marshal. Because the role of fire fighters has increased so much in today's society, the State Fire Marshal is playing a much more important role in state government.

Recommendation #29: The State Fire Marshal's position should be elevated to better reflect the responsibilities of a cabinet level position of Director of the Office of the State Fire Marshall.

OBSERVATION: FIRE SAFETY AND AWARENESS

Not only does the fire protection service fight fires, but it actively works to help prevent them as well.

Many fire departments and fire protection districts have a designated fire inspector. This individual is a specially trained professional who visits buildings throughout the area to ensure they are in regulation with fire code. In some cases they can fine building owners for fire hazards, whereas in others they merely make suggestions.

As important of a role as these inspectors fill, there is little or no funding for them. Unfortunately, most departments/districts cannot afford to hire an inspector, full-time or part-time. Naturally, it is difficult for neighboring departments/districts that do have inspectors to send their inspectors out to other areas.

Recommendation #30: The General Assembly should appropriate more funds to the State Fire Marshal for the purpose of hiring more fire inspectors.

Recommendation #31: The State Fire Marshal should coordinate with local departments and districts to provide free fire inspections of major structures and public gathering centers.

The Department of Public Health routinely inspects health care facilities throughout the State. A part of those inspections include fire safety and awareness. The local fire department or fire protection district also inspects many of these facilities. Although it is infrequent, it does occasionally happen that the requirements of the local fire code are inconsistent with the Department of Public Health.

This task force heard many examples of facilities that were told by the Department of Public Health to do one thing, only to be told to do the exact opposite by the local fire officials. Health care facilities are already regulated in extreme amounts, and such inconsistencies only add to frustration and confusion to health care providers.

Recommendation #32: The Department of Public Health should co-ordinate with the State Fire Marshal when doing inspections of public health care facilities.

On occasion, fire fighters have to work with local utility companies to fight fires. A common example is to have the gas company shut off the gas supply to a house fire. However, if a fire chief were to call a utility's consumer telephone number, precious minutes would be lost. It has been suggested that the State work with the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) to develop a

statewide hotline for these emergencies. However, it would be faster for the fire chief to call the utility directly.

Recommendation #33: Fire chiefs should communicate with all of their local utility companies to request an emergency number that the fire chief can call in the event of an emergency.

In the event of a fire or other emergencies, the telephone number of the local fire department should be readily available, since 911 service is not currently available in all areas of the State.

Recommendation #34: The General Assembly should pass legislation requiring that telephone books publish emergency numbers on the front page of all telephone books where 911 service is not yet available.

(This requirement is currently a rule with the ICC, but not law. In addition, the rule states that the emergency numbers should be “in the front part of the directory pages,” not the front page.)

Many municipalities throughout the State have adjusted their traffic lights to automatically turn green upon the approach of an emergency vehicle with lights flashing. Each traffic light has a sensor that receives a signal from the emergency vehicle. The devices that send the signal are set on top the emergency vehicle and can be turned on or off by the driver. These devices are somewhat expensive, costing over a thousand dollars each. Unfortunately, these devices are becoming available on the black market to individuals who are not intended to have them.

Recommendation #35: The General Assembly should pass legislation making it illegal to own traffic light changing technology unless they are authorized by the emergency services to do so.

OBSERVATION: PROVIDING FIRE PROTECTION

With the challenges of urban sprawl, as well as the growing and faster pace of American life, fire departments and fire protection districts are finding themselves in more mutual aid situations than in decades past. Many departments/districts have even created organizations called MABAS (Mutual Aid Box Alarm System) that formally combine many departments/districts that border each other into one large fire fighting organization. In this manner they can share costs, not only for equipment but also for training. Most importantly, they are able to provide the best fire protection service available.

Recommendation #36: Any fire department or fire protection district that has not yet joined a MABAS unit should work with the State Fire Marshal to find one to join.

Recommendation #37: The task force would like to encourage the various departments and districts throughout the State to continue to create MABAS agreements.

Moreover, in some cases, the task force would like to recommend that various fire protection districts consider abolishing their current, smaller districts and creating a new, larger one. The task force realizes that consolidating districts is not an easy one, and that there are many challenges and opponents to consolidation. Districts enjoy their current identity and are often hesitant to “throw away their history.”

It is noteworthy that just because many departments/districts will merge, the need to maintain just one firehouse is not necessarily so. Much like major cities that have numerous firehouses, districts that cover a large geographic area can consolidate their costs and management, but retain the separate firehouses to ensure a good reaction time to emergencies.

However, the task force would like to point out that a fire station’s purpose is to provide the best fire protection service available, and if consolidating districts fits that purpose, it is worth the challenge for the safety of Illinois citizens.

In some rare instances, the task force has come across land that is on the border of various fire protection districts, and actually is not formally assigned to any of them. Although this task force has not found many examples of this, even one parcel of land that is not assigned for fire protection is unnerving.

Recommendation #38: The State Fire Marshal should work with the various local governments to ensure that every acre of land in the State is formally assigned to a fire department or fire protection district.

(This is a separate recommendation from the one listed on page 4, where it is recommended that county assessors ensure that all land already covered in a fire protection district is appropriately accounted for revenue purposes.)

A large part of any fire department and fire protection district is the use of communication devices that allow the various fire trucks to communicate with other fire trucks as well as other emergency personnel and organizations.

Recommendation #39: The task force strongly recommends that every fire department and fire protection district in the State of Illinois, as well as the State Fire Marshal, join the Statewide Radio Communication Network for the 21st Century (STARCOM21).

This communication network is a statewide network leased and organized by the Department of State Police with Motorola. Local governments and other state agencies can also join the network if they purchase the radios and pay a monthly fee. Although many local governments are hesitant to agree to pay a monthly fee, the benefits of STARCOM21 are great, plus the added convenience of knowing that Motorola is responsible for the maintenance of the system.

As was shown on September 11, 2001, in New York, different emergency responders use different radios, and are unable able to communicate effectively. STARCOM21 was specifically developed to eliminate that problem. All members of the network are able to maintain communication with their own departments, but with a switch of a button will be able to “open up” their radio frequency to all other emergency responders in the area. For example, the police department can communicate directly with the fire department, which can communicate directly with the State Police, who can communicate directly with IDOT, and vice versa.

STARCOM21 uses 21st Century technology. Unlike the current, popular radio system, STARCOM21 will not be available to members of the public unless they were somehow able to obtain one of the STARCOM21 radios. In addition, STARCOM21 has an independent power source and would not be affected by a power outage.

Motorola is currently in the process of developing the infrastructure for STARCOM21 and is set to go up on a statewide basis by September of 2004. However, in anticipation of STARCOM21's activation, many local governments have already signed up for the STARCOM21 service. As such, Motorola has developed their communication infrastructure first, so that they can begin to benefit from the network now.

Recommendation #40: The State should develop a STARCOM21 awareness program to ensure that all local governments, law enforcement, and emergency personnel in the State are aware of the STARCOM21 network, and will consider joining the network. The more entities on the network, the safer Illinois citizens will be.

In addition, the more entities on the network, the safer those entities will be because they can share information when responding to each other's emergencies.

Recommendation #41: The State should develop a grant program through the Illinois Emergency Management Agency to assist local governments with the purchase of the necessary STARCOM21 radios.

OTHER ISSUES

Over the course of 22 hearings, several issues were presented that require additional studying before a formal recommendation can be made to the General Assembly. The issues that require additional studying include the following.

* * *

It is common for fire departments and fire protection districts to implement fire codes that local homes and businesses must follow. However, fire protection districts often have difficulty in enforcing these codes in a municipality in their district, because municipal ordinances take precedence over fire codes.

There is great disparity between the amount of money granted for law enforcement and fire protection, both on the federal and state level. For example, legislation that passed Congress in the wake of September 11th appropriated over \$5 billion for law enforcement, but just under \$500 million for fire protection.

The task force also has found that fire departments and fire protection districts have a difficult time servicing newer neighborhoods. When a particular neighborhood grows at a faster than expected rate, it creates an unfair burden on the fire protection service. The local department/district must provide fire protection service to this new area, although it may take years before the department or district collects money from the new area.

A common problem that fire departments have in urban areas is finding ways to protect newer structures made with 21st century technology. These buildings are made of newer materials that burn hotter and faster and are being built at heights that can make them near impossible to rescue people.

At numerous hearings, witnesses gave testimony noting that fire departments and fire protection districts respond to emergencies that occur on State property. Because the State of Illinois does not pay local taxes, fire departments and fire protection districts are, in a way, providing “free” fire protection.

The Illinois FIRST program has provided numerous grants for fire protection service. Our task force has observed that Illinois FIRST has provided more than \$137 million to new fire trucks, breathing equipment, thermal imaging cameras, bullet-proof vests, communication systems, new jaws of life, fire resistant uniforms, HAZMAT response supplies, police and fire stations, ambulances, and other emergency equipment. Although this figure does not include member initiative grants, which amounted to \$45 million, we know that many of our colleagues allocated significant portions of their grants to fire protection. This observation has renewed the task force’s interest in Illinois FIRST, and we encourage our colleagues to continue to help their local fire departments and fire protection districts as much as they can.

CREATION OF AN ILLINOIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRE CAUCUS

This task force has shown to us that there are many issues in the fire protection service that need to be addressed by the Illinois General Assembly. The task force heard from fire chiefs, emergency medical responders, fire fighters, fire trustees, mayors, and activists on a wide variety of issues including training, equipment, manpower, fire safety and awareness. Many of these issues and problems provide complex problems, with no easy solutions or quick fixes.

Moreover, we realized that there is great disparity in the fire protection service as you travel across the State. Although some legislators in one area of the State may be content with their own fire protection, they should realize that whenever they leave their hometown, they also leave behind their hometown fire protection. This emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the quality of coverage everywhere be improved.

All of these issues cannot be addressed in just one bill, in one legislative session, or even in one General Assembly. We, as lawmakers, owe it to our citizens to continue to study these issues and to pass legislation allowing the fire service to better protect the entire State of Illinois. Therefore we should form a unified team to continue to fight for these changes.

Recommendation #42: The General Assembly should form a Fire Caucus consisting of bipartisan members from both the House of Representatives and Senate, much like the one that currently exists in the United States Congress.

The Fire Caucus can continue to meet on a regular basis with fire and safety representatives to study the needs of the fire protection service. The caucus can advance a legislative agenda that is supported by the fire service with agreed items that will make all citizens of Illinois more safe and secure.

House Task Force on Fire Protection Funding List of Task Force Hearings

April 12, 2002 - Peoria Heights, Peoria Heights City Hall

Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Ricca C. Slone
Representative Michael K. Smith

April 12, 2002 - Galesburg, Galesburg City Council Chambers

Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Richard P. Myers
Representative Ricca C. Slone
Representative Michael K. Smith

April 15, 2002 – Springfield, State House

Representative Thomas B. Berns
Representative James D. “Jim” Fowler
Representative Jerry Mitchell
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Richard P. Myers
Representative Timothy L. Schmitz
Representative Ricca C. Slone
Representative Michael K. Smith
Representative Wyvetter H. Younge
Representative Anne Zickus

June 26, 2002 - Sugar Grove, Waubensee Community College

Representative Patricia Reid Lindner
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Michael K. Smith
Representative David A. Wirsing

June 27, 2002 - Chicago, James R. Thompson Center

Representative Sidney H. Mathias
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Ricca C. Slone
Representative Michael K. Smith

July 10, 2002 – Champaign, Champaign Council Chambers

Representative Thomas B. Berns
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Dale A. Righter

July 10, 2002 – Normal, Normal Town Hall

Representative Daniel P. Brady
Representative Bill Mitchell
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Michael K. Smith

July 24, 2002 - Franklin Grove, Franklin Grove Fire Station

Representative Jerry Mitchell
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Ronald A. Wait

July 25, 2002 – Rockford, Illinois Building

Representative Jerry Mitchell
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Ronald A. Wait
Representative Dave Winters
Representative David A. Wirsing

July 26, 2002 - Palos Hills, North Palos Fire Protection District Training Facility

Representative Robert A. “Bob” Biggins
Representative Renee Kosel
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Anne Zickus

August 6, 2002 – Springfield, Springfield Council Chambers

Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Michael K. Smith
Representative Raymond Poe
Representative Michael K. Smith
Representative Jim Watson

August 8, 2002 - Norwood Heights, Norwood Park Township Fire House

Representative Robert J. Bugielski
Representative Michael McAuliffe

Representative Donald L. Moffitt
August 15, 2002 – Murphysboro, Davis McCann Building

Representative Mike Bost
Representative Donald L. Moffitt

August 21, 2002 – Sycamore, DeKalb County Farm Bureau Building

Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Ronald A. Wait
Representative David A. Wirsing

August 29, 2002 – Belleville, Belleville City Hall

Representative Jay C. Hoffman
Representative Thomas “Tom” Holbrook
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Dan Reitz
Representative Mike Smith

September 10, 2002 – Cuba, Cuba Fire Station

Representative Richard P. Myers
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Mike Smith

September 19, 2002 – Addison, Addison Fire Protection District Headquarters

Representative Patricia R. “Patti” Bellock
Representative Robert A. “Bob” Biggins
Representative Lee A. Daniels
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Carole Pankau
Representative Ricca C. Slone

September 26, 2002 – Marion, Marion Fire Station

Representative Gary F. Forby
Representative James D. “Jim” Fowler
Representative Mike Smith

September 30, 2002 – Centralia, Centralia City Hall

Representative Kurt M. Granberg
Representative Mike Smith

October 8, 2002 – Gardner, Gardner Fire Department

Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Mary K. O'Brien
Representative Mike Smith

October 18, 2002 – Albany, Albany Fire Station

Representative Mike Boland
Representative Mike Smith

November 20, 2002 – Springfield, State House

Representative Thomas B. "Tom" Berns
Representative Mike Bost
Representative James D. "Jim" Fowler
Representative Thomas "Tom" Holbrook
Representative John O. Jones
Representative Sidney H. Mathias
Representative Jerry Mitchell
Representative Donald L. Moffitt
Representative Richard P. Myers
Representative Timothy L. Schmitz
Representative Ricca C. Slone
Representative Michael K. Smith

House Task Force on Fire Protection Funding List of Witnesses

April 12, 2002 - Peoria Heights, Peoria Heights City Hall

Earl Carter, Peoria Heights Fire Department
Robert Favorite, Peoria Heights Fire Department
Norm Reichert, Peoria Heights Fire Department
Bob Spencer, Spring Bay Fire Protection District
Dan Wells, Princeville Fire Protection District
Mike Helms, Bartonville Fire Department
Todd Baker, West Peoria Fire Protection District
Ken Barrick, Cuba Fire Protection District
Ray Modglin, Peoria Fire Department

April 12, 2002 – Galesburg, Galesburg City Council Chambers

Jim Connard, Monmouth Fire Department
Sonny Snyder, Elba-Salem Fire Protection District
Don Earnst, Knoxville Fire Protection District
Philip Robbins, Victoria-Copley Fire Protection District
Sam McKie and Earl Sandry, Oneida-Wataga Fire Protection District
John Swan, Colona Fire Department
Art Goodrich, Clover Township Fire Department
John Cratty, Galesburg Fire Department
Jack Reitman, Mayor of the City of Monmouth

April 15, 2002 – Springfield, State House

Ernest Russel, State Fire Marshal
Tim Deutsche, Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts
Thomas E. Harnsberger, Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts
James S. Sinclair, Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts
John Swan, Illinois Fire Fighters Association
Dave DeFraties and Ed Crews, Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois
David Campagni, Jim McArthur, and Jay Reardon, Illinois Fire Chiefs Association
Michael R. Wsol, Chicago Fire Fighter Union Local 2

June 26, 2002 - Sugar Grove, Waubensee Community College

Trustee Floyd Dierzen, Newark
Chief Roger Probst, Aurora
Chief Tom Brady, Aurora
Chief Louis Oine and Asst. Chief Joseph Cluchy, South Elgin
Chief Rollyn Anderson, Rutland-Dundee
Chief Steve Miller, North Aurora
Chief William King, Sugar Grove
Chief David Sigmund and Trustee Dan Ebert, Kaneville
Captain Jay Van Landuyt, Hinckley
Captain Jean Micklevitz and Chief Kevin Peterson, Burlington

June 27, 2002 - Chicago, James R. Thompson Center

James Joyce, Chicago Fire Commissioner
Gene Ryan, Chicago Fire Chief
Bob Hoff, Chicago Fire Chief
Chief James Reardon, Illinois Fire Chiefs Association
Robert Bettenhausen, retired fire fighter and activist
Chuck Vaughn, Fire Chiefs of Illinois and the Fire Protection Districts of Illinois
James D. Spiegel, Countryside Fire Protection District.

July 10, 2002 – Champaign, Champaign Council Chambers

Steve Clarkson, Jim Wild and Greg Fisher, Champaign Fire Department
Richard Rotramel, Jeff McDuffy, and Matt Webber, Urbana Fire Department
Mick Humer, Tolono Fire Department
Dick Bickel, Arcola Fire Department
John Jay, Cornbelt Fire Protection District
Herman Taylor, Paris Fire Department
David Clark, Illinois Fire Service Institute
Steve Hettinger, Tuscola Fire Department
Charles Morris, Mid-Piatt Fire Protection District
Ron Weishaar, Cisco Fire Department
Mark Griffith, Pro Ambulance
Dave Ferber, Fairmount Fire Department

July 10, 2002 – Normal, Normal Town Hall

Frank Edwards, Springfield Fire Department
Keith Ranney, Bloomington Fire Department

Dave Sessions, Heyworth Fire Department
Steve Garner, Cooksville Fire Department
Gerald Paige, Moline Fire Department
Jim Watson, Normal Fire Department
John Cratty, Galesburg Fire Department
Jim Scott, Ellsworth Fire Department

July 24, 2002 - Franklin Grove, Franklin Grove Fire Station

David J. Lohse, Dixon Fire Department
J. Pat Hilliker and Glenn Rosenberg, Dixon Fire Department
Gary Cook, Rockfalls Fire Department
Kevin Laleen, Dixon Rural Fire Department
Mike Lewis, Byron Fire Department
Mike Wilcox, City of Dixon
Frank Stenzel, Amboy Fire Protection District.

July 25, 2002 – Rockford, Illinois Building

Oscar Presley, Harland Roscoe Fire Department
David Worrell, Belvidere Fire Department
Tom Jones, Boone County Fire Protection District
Steve Ferdinand, North Park Fire Department
Don Carlson, Cherry Valley Fire Protection District
Bill Beeman, Rockford Fire Department
Phil Fooley, Loves Park Fire Department
Harry Tallason, Black Hawk Fire Protection District
Joe Corl, Fire Fighters Union of the Rockford Fire Department

July 26, 2002 - Palos Hills, North Palos Fire Protection District Training Facility

Robert M. Buhs, Orland Fire Protection District
George Beverly, Lockport Township Fire District
Patrick J. Kenny, Hinsdale Fire Department
Dan Hermes, Pleasantview Fire Protection District
Terry Lipinski, Bridgeview Fire Department
Dick McKeon, North Palos Fire Protection District

August 6, 2002 – Springfield, Springfield Council Chambers

Frank Edwards, Springfield Fire Department
Brian Aarup, Mechanicsburg Fire Protection District

Rich Coon, Sherman Fire Protection District
Bruce Osborne, Chatham Fire Protection District
Dominic M. Vespa, Riverton Area Fire Protection District

August 8, 2002 - Norwood Heights, Norwood Park Township Fire House

Dennis Stefanowicz, Norwood Park Fire Department
Lois H. Pallo and Members, Summerdale Improvement Association

August 15, 2002 – Murphysboro, Davis McCann Building

Stan Lewis, Lake Egypt Fire Protection District
Dennis L. Wright, Tower Rock Fire Protection District
Kevin Reeves, Murphysboro Fire Department
Jim Cross, Anna Fire-Rescue
Patrick Ferguson, Dongola Illinois Fire Department
Russell J. Eaton and Terry E. Wilson, Ava Volunteer Fire Department
Charles Fritsche, Ft. Bluff Fire Department

August 21, 2002 – Sycamore, DeKalb County Farm Bureau Building

Lanny Russell, DeKalb Fire Department
Greg Bish, Hinckley Fire Department
Tim Clark, Malta Fire Department
Bill King, Sandwich Community Fire Protection District
Frank Ottengheime, Shabbona Fire Department
Pat Colford, Somonauk Fire Department
Bill Riddle, Sycamore Fire Department
Edwin Bowman, Waterman Fire Department

August 29, 2002 – Belleville, Belleville City Hall

Jerome Brewer, O'Fallon Fire Department
David Martinson, Belleville Fire Department
Mike Foley, Madison Fire Department
Terry Ford, Office of the State Fire Marshal
Bob Belba, Fairmont City Fire
Jack Quigley, Madison County EMA
Chris Tell, Swansea Fire Department
John McGuire, Swansea Fire Department
Darrell Kirkman, Marissa Fire Department
Ed Hagnauer, Granite City Fire Department

Greg Renoir, Signal Hill Fire Department
Dennis Oaks, Northwest Fire Department
Darryl Elbe, St. Clair Co. ESDA
Bob Knight, St Clair Co. 911
Dean Juenger, Mascoutah Fire Department
Don Feher, Fairview Fire Department
Tom Chappell, Alton Fire Department
Michael Mitchell, Godfrey Fire
Lee Smith Freeburg Fire Protection District
Raymond Mix, Washington Park Fire Department
Kevin Robbins, Cahokia Fire Protection District
David Nulsen, Cahokia Fire Department
Al LaPointe, French Village Fire Department
Bill Newgent, French Village Fire Dept
William Lendaiu, Smithten Fire Department
Steven Allen, Villa Hills Fire Department
Jeffrey Perry, Alorton Fire Department
Ocie Whitehone, Church Road Fire Department

September 10, 2002 – Cuba, Cuba Fire Station

Ken Barrick, Cuba Fire Protection District
Tom Shubert, Canton Fire Department
Jerry Hanlin, Fairview Fire Protection District
Larry Hobensock, Rural Havana Fire Protection District
Art Slater, Ipava Fire Protection District
John Spotloe, Lewistown Fire Protection District
Mike Henderson, Smithfield Fire Protection District
Chuck McElvain, Avon Fire Protection District
Mike Peterson, Farmington Fire Protection District
Jim Maxwell, Buckheart Fire Protection District
Eric Marlin, Astoria Fire Protection District

September 19, 2002 – Addison, Addison Fire Protection District Headquarters

Tim Deutsche, Addison Fire Protection District
Greg McDonald, Itasca Fire Protection District
Debra Jarivs, Oak Brook Fire Department
Don Markowski, Glenside Fire Protection District
Lawrence M. Walsh, Illinois Fire Service Association
Mark Bodane, Carol Stream Fire Protection District
Tim Marrocco, Bloomingdale Fire Protection District

September 26, 2002 – Marion, Marion Fire Station

Tom Burton, Johnston City Fire Department
Charles Heyde, Marion Fire Department
Shannon Clark, Sesser Fire Protection District
Robert Partee, Zeigler Fire Department

September 30, 2002 – Centralia, Centralia City Hall

Ann Blomberg, Sedlack Engineering
William Thouvenin, Centralia Fire Department
J.T. Somer, Salem Fire Protection District
Greg Earle, Centralia Fire Protection District
William Guile, Hoffman Fire Protection District
Lonnie McDonald, Kell Fire Department
Sylvester Revermann, Huey-Ferrin-Boulder Fire Protection District
Tom Ling, Marion County 911
Dennis Hoake, Hoffman Fire Protection District
Leon Duis, Iuka FPD and South Central Illinois Fire Chiefs Association
Charles Pollmann, Becky-Wade Fire Department
H.L. Myers, St. Elmo Fire Protection District
Bill Johnston, Greenville Fire Protection District
Dwight Volhmar, Mulberry Grove Fire Protection District
Mike Holmeyer, Huey-Ferrin-Boulder Fire Protection District
Ken Brumley, Beckemeyer Fire Protection District
Jack Boczek, Ashley Fire Protection District
Wayne Maschhoff, Hoffman Fire Protection District

October 8, 2002 – Gardner, Gardner Fire Department

Richard Kamerad, Kankakee Fire Department
Harold Holsinger, Coal City Fire Protection District
David Cheshire, Manteno Comm. Fire Protection District
Patrick Shelton, Braceville Fire Department
Junior Zilm, Braceville Fire Department
David Riddle, Channahon Fire Protection District
Andy Bacidore, LaSalle Fire Department
Stanley Dorsey, Crescent-Iroquois Fire Protection District
Randy Wilkey, Gardner Fire Department
Matthew Wilsterman, Gardner Fire Department
Ken Hossack, New Lenox Fire Department
Lou Helis, New Lenox Fire Department
Ronald Clavey, Mazon Fire Department

October 18, 2002 – Albany, Albany Fire Station

Boyd Van Ollen, Fulton Fire Department
Chuck Smalley, Cordova Fire Protection District
Jon Kavanuagh, Cordova Fire Protection District
Mike Winckler, Erie Fire Protection District
Roger Stancliff, Osco Fire Department
Tom Weston, Kewanee Fire Department
Lynn Neulich, Annawan Alba Fire Protection District
Steve Yenny, Savanna Fire Department
Deb Housenga, Fulton Fire Department
Richard Mitton, Hillside Fire Protection District
Leo Geerts, Albany Fire Protection District
Steve Makshang, Sterling Fire Department
Mike Poel, Port Byron Fire Department
Gary Cook, Rock Falls Fire Department

November 20, 2002 – Springfield, State House

Matt Bettenhausen, Deputy Governor for Public Safety
Richard J. Jaehne, University of Illinois Fire Service Institute
Mike Chamness, Illinois Emergency Management Agency
Ernest E. Russell, State Fire Marshal
Dave Foreman, Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois
Charles Vaughn, Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts
John Cratty, Illinois Fire Chiefs Association
Margaret Vaughn, Illinois Fire Safety Alliance & Illinois Fire Inspectors Association

Other Representatives that made great contributions to this task force include Representative Mike Boland, Representative Gary F. Forby, Representative Patricia Reid Lindner, Representative Mary K. O'Brien, Representative Raymond Poe, and Representative David A. Wirsing.

For extra copies of this report, please contact either of the co-chairmen:

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Copies of the report are also available on-line at:

www.housegop.state.il.us or www.housedem.state.il.us/members/smithm

If any witness' name is not listed in this report, or is incorrectly spelled, the co-chairmen sincerely offer their apologies. Witnesses are asked to please contact either chairmen listed above to correct the official record.