



# THE NORTH CAROLINA FIRE MARSHAL JOURNAL

FIRST QUARTER | 2026



## 2025 FIRE FATALITIES REACH 158

Preliminary data shows that 158 people lost their lives in fires across North Carolina in 2025. While these numbers are still being finalized, they serve as a sobering reminder of why fire safety and prevention remain so important. For context, North Carolina recorded 123 fire fatalities in 2024 and 146 in 2023. A full 2025 Fire Fatality Report, including more detailed data and trends, will be released at the end of January.

We'll share more information soon and remain focused on working together to reduce these numbers in the year ahead.

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## MESSAGE FROM BRIAN TAYLOR NC STATE FIRE MARSHAL

*"As we begin 2026, I want to thank North Carolina's fire and rescue services and building officials for your continued dedication to protecting our communities. The work you do—on the ground, in training, and through prevention efforts—makes a lasting impact across our state.*

*This year, OSFM remains committed to strengthening partnerships, supporting our engineering services, fire and rescue services, and advancing programs that help keep both responders and the public safe. We look forward to building on our progress and working together in the year ahead.*

*Thank you for your service, professionalism, and commitment. I wish you all a safe and successful start to 2026."*



## LEADERSHIP UPDATE NEW CHIEF DEPUTY ANNOUNCED

Important leadership transition is following the retirement of the Chief Deputy Mike Williams. We extend our sincere thanks to Mike for his years of dedicated service and the lasting impact he has made across NC's fire service. Effective January 1, Brian

Wade has been appointed Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal. In this role, Wade will oversee the Fire and Rescue Services. Chief Wade brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position. A long-time volunteer fire chief and respected instructor, he has spent years working alongside firefighters at every level. His hands-on background, commitment to training, and deep understanding of the fire service make him well prepared to lead this next chapter. Join us in welcoming Chief Wade into this new role as Chief Deputy.



## VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT FUND GRANT OPENS JANUARY 1

The Volunteer Fire Department Fund Grant, which opened on January 1, 2026, provides financial support to volunteer fire departments across North Carolina for equipment purchases and capital improvements.

Eligible departments must be primarily volunteer-based, meet NC DOI requirements, and report to NFIRS. Funding includes tiered matching requirements based on annual budget, with grants up to \$40,000 per department. Full details and the online application will be available on the Volunteer Fire Department Fund webpage.

OSFM encourages eligible departments to apply early to strengthen safety and service in their communities.

## NERIS IS COMING: WHAT DEPARTMENTS NEED TO KNOW...



Starting January 1, 2026, all North Carolina fire departments will use the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) for incident reporting.

Continue reporting to NFIRS through December 31, 2025, and submit all 2025 reports by January 15, 2026, when NFIRS shuts down.

NERIS replaces NFIRS with a modern, accurate, and integrated reporting system. Departments can keep using their current RMS software, such as ImageTrend, ESO, First Due, FireWorks, or other approved vendors. Complete Phase 1 onboarding: log into NERIS, verify your department and GIS details, confirm contact information, and add your RMS vendor client ID. Onboarding emails were sent out on July 9, 2025. If you did not receive one, please contact NERIS.

For questions, contact Monna Gillespie at [monna.gillespie@ncdoi.gov](mailto:monna.gillespie@ncdoi.gov) or NERIS at [NERIS@UL.org](mailto:NERIS@UL.org)

# UPDATES

### **TRAINING PROGRAMS**

Several training programs are being developed with launches over the next two years. The Fire and Life Safety Educator program starts July 1, 2026. Updates to the Fire Officer and Fire Instructor programs begin January 1, 2027. The Firefighter and Driver Operator update follows July 1, 2027. Development is prioritized by need.

### **INSTRUCTOR QUALIFICATION**

The Instructor Qualifications process changes in 2026. Details with dates and locations for required updates or training will be announced soon. Departments and instructors should watch for these announcements to stay compliant and maintain credentials.

### **FIRE INVESTIGATION UNIT**

Since January 1, 2025, the Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) responded to 232 fire scene examinations, averaging 19 per month—a 36% increase from 171 in 2024. These incidents led to \$135 million in property damage, 69 fatalities, and 70 injuries, compared to 37 fatalities and 30 injuries last year. North Carolina recorded 158 fire-related fatalities from 136 incidents, according to the Fire Fatality Tracker. This year, FIU became 100% certified. All nine investigators hold NC-CFI certification; three also have IAAI-CFI credentials, showing the unit's commitment to professionalism and public safety.

# EVERYONE GOES HOME®

*Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation*

The NC Everyone Goes Home Team had a busy and impactful 2025, delivering 52 Leadership, Injury, and Line-of-Duty Death (LODD) Prevention classes to 617 attendees across NC. In 2026, the team will launch five brand-new classes focused on firefighter safety and leadership. Be sure to watch the OSFM website and the Everyone Goes Home Team Facebook page for upcoming announcements. Departments interested in scheduling one of the team's current classes can contact Tony Bailey at 919-218-9694 [tony.bailey@ncdoi.gov](mailto:tony.bailey@ncdoi.gov) or Bryant Pitchford at 252-213-5594 [pitchfordbryant590@gmail.com](mailto:pitchfordbryant590@gmail.com).



## NC Emergency Training Center

### Did you know?

The Swiftwater Training Channel and Village is now open and provides a 783-foot channel for boat operations, structure and vehicle searches, high-water vehicle rescues, swim and surface water training, and helicopter rescues from elevated structures.

The NC ETC is scheduling ARFF and Swiftwater Rescue classes for 2026. Firefighters can receive advanced, hands-on training. Departments can find details through the NC ETC website via OSFM. Boat Operator Pilot Classes are March 2–6, April 20–24, and May 11–15, 2026. These courses teach essential skills for flood, swift water, and water emergency response.

# XTRA UPDATES

### **RATINGS AND INSPECTIONS**

The updated Fire Department Administrative Rules are still under review with the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), with a tentative final approval date of March 1, 2026. The Class 9 Outreach Program had an outstanding year in 2025. Through targeted outreach, our team was able to rate or schedule 17 fire departments for the very first time. Thanks to this progress, we anticipate reducing the number of Class 9 departments statewide to just 114 by the second quarter of 2026. If your department is currently a Class 9 and interested in requesting a first-time survey, please contact Tony Bailey at 919-218-9694 or [tony.bailey@ncdoi.gov](mailto:tony.bailey@ncdoi.gov).

### **STATE FIRE MARSHAL ADVOCATES FOR FIRE SERVICE ROLE IN FEMA REFORM**

The FEMA Review Council was created in January 2025 by President Trump through Executive Order 14180. The council's mission is to review the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and recommend major reforms to improve how the nation prepares for, responds to, and recovers from disasters. North Carolina State Fire Marshal, who also serves as Vice President of the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM), has been a strong advocate for including the fire service in these discussions. Currently, the FEMA Review Council does not include any direct fire service representation, a gap the Fire Marshal believes must be addressed. To raise these concerns, the State Fire Marshal has sent formal letters to Homeland Security Secretary Noem and to each member of the FEMA Review Council, urging them to—  
(continued on page 4)



## MEET THE STATE PROPERTY FIRE INSURANCE FUND- PROTECTING NORTH CAROLINA'S PUBLIC ASSETS

When disaster strikes, it's essential that our state agencies and universities can recover quickly and keep serving the people of North Carolina. That's where the State Property Fire Insurance Fund comes in. This fund provides fire and lightning coverage for state-owned buildings, structures, and business personal property, ensuring critical public operations can bounce back after a loss.

### **What does the fund protect?**

All state agencies and universities, in addition to state-owned buildings and structures. This includes items such as business personal property (equipment, furnishings, and other assets inside those facilities).

It's a vital safety net that helps keep North Carolina running smoothly, even in the face of unexpected damage.

By providing financial protection and risk management support, the State Property Fire Insurance Fund

helps North Carolina recover faster from losses, maintain continuity of services and protect taxpayer investments. Agencies can also expand their protection to include damage from theft, water damage, and other perils beyond fire and lightning. These options help safeguard essential property and ensure that operations continue without major interruptions.

**Scan this QR to Learn  
More about the State  
Property Fire  
Insurance Fund**



— include fire service leadership in FEMA and U.S. Fire Administration reform efforts.

During the council's visit to Asheville to assess the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, the State Fire Marshal was invited to participate in a closed meeting. At that meeting, he provided the council with a written document outlining recommended improvements to disaster response and coordination.

Former FEMA Director and North Carolina native Brock Long has emphasized that FEMA and emergency management agencies are not response agencies. Instead, he has stressed that the U.S. Fire Administration and the fire service must be elevated within the national disaster response framework, specifically within Emergency Support Functions (ESF) 4, 9, and 10 at both the national and state levels. Over the past year, the State Fire Marshal has traveled across the country speaking to corporate and government audiences about lessons learned from Hurricane Helene and the need for meaningful disaster response reform.

Additional recommendations of NASFM and the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) agreed on as members of the National Advisory Committee (NAC) can be found in a report released by the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI). That report, along with the State Fire Marshal's letters to the FEMA Review Council, provides further insight into proposed reforms to strengthen disaster response nationwide.

## OSFM AWARDS PROGRAM RECOGNIZING SERVICE, COURAGE, AND IMPACT

Do you know someone who deserves to be recognized?

**Submit a nomination  
today and help us  
celebrate those who  
make a difference.**



We are proud to recognize outstanding work across North Carolina through the OSFM Awards Program. These awards honor individuals and departments who make a meaningful difference through service, leadership, prevention, and bravery. There are four award categories open for nomination:

### Save Award

Celebrates the success of Community Risk Reduction (CRR) programs by recognizing incidents where injuries or fatalities were prevented through proactive safety efforts.

### Service Excellence Award

Honors exceptional commitment, leadership, and dedication to service.

### Lifetime Achievement Award

Recognizes a distinguished career devoted to public safety and lasting contributions to service.

### Valor Award

OSFM's highest honor, recognizing extraordinary courage and bravery in the line of duty when individuals go above and beyond to protect life & property.

## UPCOMING TRAININGS & CONFERENCES

### Trainings

- February 2-19: Fire Investigation Technician (FIT)
- February 2-13: Hazardous Materials Technician
- March 16 to April 2: Fire Investigation Technician (FIT)
- April 6-24: Fire Officer III

Seats for these courses are limited, so departments are encouraged to register early.

### Conferences (held in NC)

- February 23-27: National CRR Vision 20/20 Conference
- March 3-6: NC FLSE Conference
- April 12-15: Electrical Institute
- May 4-7: Safe Kids NC Conference
- May 12-15: Mid-Winter Fire Chiefs
- August 26-28: National Kids In Motion

# SOCIAL MEDIA TOPICS TO SHARE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

## JANUARY

### Fire Safety

- Home heating safety, including fireplace and chimney reminders
- Winter storm safety: ice and fall prevention
- Carbon monoxide safety
- Community Risk Reduction (CRR) Week (Jan. 19–25)

### Safe Kids

- TV and furniture tip-over prevention
- Cold weather and hypothermia safety
- New Year Safety Tips: childproofing homes and creating a home escape plan

## MARCH

### Fire Safety

- Smoke alarm reminders for “Spring Forward” (March 8)
- Severe Weather Preparedness Week (March 2–8)
- Outdoor fire pit safety
- Spring cleaning safety, including electrical and appliance checkups

### Safe Kids

- Statewide Tornado Drill Day
- Operation Medicine Drop & National Poison Prevention Week (March 16–20)
- Hot cars safety reminders

**Like & Follow on  
Social Media**



NC OSFM



Safe Kids NC



NC ETC



NC HILB



OSFM Engineering



NC State Fire Marshal Brian Taylor

To help make public safety messaging easier and more consistent across the state, we've put together a Quarter 1 Social Media Communications Plan that local fire departments can use, share, or tweak to fit their communities. These monthly topics line up with seasonal risks, national awareness campaigns, and key fire service events.

## FEBRUARY

### Fire Safety

- National Burn Awareness Week (Feb. 1–7)
- Medical oxygen safety reminders
- American Heart Month: CPR awareness
- Super Bowl cooking safety tips

### Safe Kids

- TV tip-over prevention
- Valentine’s Day child passenger safety messaging

