



THE NORTH CAROLINA **FIRE MARSHAL**
JOURNAL

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... AND MORE!

As I travel across North Carolina and meet with firefighters, inspectors, investigators, emergency responders, and community leaders, I am constantly reminded of the dedication and professionalism that make our state safer every day. The work you do often happens behind the scenes and rarely seeks recognition, but its impact is felt in every community we serve.

This quarter's newsletter highlights just a few examples of that impact. From installing more than 2,000 smoke alarms during Smoke Alarm Saturday to providing more than \$12 million in grant funding to volunteer fire departments, these accomplishments are only possible because of strong partnerships and a shared commitment to public safety.

You'll also read about initiatives that are helping prepare us for the future, including wildfire readiness efforts, new training opportunities, advancements in fire protection systems, and the important role the fire service plays in shaping emergency management policy.

Behind every statistic is a firefighter answering a call, an inspector ensuring a building is safe, an investigator seeking answers, or a public educator helping prevent the next tragedy. Those efforts make a difference every day.

Thank you for all you do to protect the people of North Carolina. It is an honor to serve alongside you as we continue working together to build safer, stronger, and more resilient communities.

Brian Taylor
North Carolina State Fire Marshal



FEMA REFORM MUST INCLUDE THE FIRE SERVICE



As discussions continue about the future of FEMA, one lesson from Hurricane Helene stands out: the fire service must have a stronger voice in emergency response. Following the storm, the North Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal shared recommendations with FEMA leadership based on lessons learned during response and recovery efforts. Key findings highlighted the importance of local leadership, stronger public-private partnerships, and reducing administrative barriers that can slow disaster response.

Hurricane Helene demonstrated that local fire departments, emergency managers, and state agencies are often best positioned to make critical decisions because they understand the unique needs of their communities. The storm also showed how partnerships with utilities, communications providers, aviation operators, and private contractors can accelerate recovery efforts.

As FEMA considers reforms, OSFM continues to advocate for greater representation in national emergency response discussions.

With fire departments serving nearly every community in America and playing a central role in disaster response, their operational experience and expertise can help strengthen emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.

The lessons from Hurricane Helene reinforce a simple principle: effective disaster response depends on empowering local responders and ensuring the fire service has a seat at the table when emergency response policies are developed.

Wildland Fire Readiness: Preparing for North Carolina's Growing Threat

North Carolina faces significant wildfire risks. Following Hurricane Helene, thousands of acres of downed timber and storm debris created additional fuel loads across the state. Combined with dry conditions and increasing development in wooded areas, year-round wildfire preparedness is essential.

North Carolina's fire service works closely with the NC Forest Service through training, mutual aid agreements, aviation resources, and specialized equipment. Residents also play a critical role by creating defensible space around homes, properly disposing of yard debris, and following burn bans. Wildfire readiness remains a shared year-round responsibility between responders and communities.





SPOTLIGHT ON THE FIRE INVESTIGATION UNIT

When a fire occurs, determining where and how it started is critical. The OSFM's Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) was established in 2017 to strengthen the ability of the fire service and law enforcement agencies to investigate fires and fire-related deaths across North Carolina.

The FIU responds at the request of federal, state, county, and local agencies to help determine the origin, cause, and circumstances surrounding fires. Their work provides valuable support to local departments while helping ensure investigations are conducted thoroughly and efficiently.

THE FIRE INVESTIGATION UNIT (FIU)

The FIU consists of nine Certified Fire Investigators who focus on determining how and where a fire started. The FIU is trained to respond quickly and become involved in investigations from the earliest stages. Early involvement helps preserve evidence, improve documentation, and provide investigators with the critical information needed to determine the cause of a fire. One of the unit's primary goals is to provide additional investigative resources so local departments are not overwhelmed during major incidents and can remain staffed and ready to respond to emergencies in their communities.

NANCY THE IGNITABLE LIQUID DETECTION K9

One of the FIU's most valuable resources is Nancy, a certified Ignitable Liquid Detection K9. Nancy is a highly trained Labrador Retriever who works alongside her handler, CID Senior Special Agent Craig Jarman, to assist with fire investigations throughout North Carolina. Using her extraordinary sense of smell, Nancy can detect trace amounts of ignitable liquids that may have been used as accelerants, even after a fire has burned and been extinguished. Her work helps investigators determine whether a fire may have been intentionally set.

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS DIVISION (CID)

Four FIU Certified Fire Investigators are sworn CID Special Agents with statewide law enforcement authority, enabling FIU to assist local law enforcement with arsons, intentionally set fires, insurance fraud, and related criminal cases. CID Agents support local investigations or handle cases independently, with Special Prosecutors available for prosecution statewide. Together, OSFM and CID provide comprehensive fire investigations with professionalism and integrity across North Carolina.

WORKING TOGETHER WITH OTHER OSFM DIVISIONS

The FIU works closely with local, state, and federal partners during investigations. Depending on the incident, OSFM can provide Engineering support including Fire Protection Engineers, Electrical Engineers, Structural Engineers, and Fire Code Consultants. This team approach helps investigators determine fire origin and cause.

To request FIU assistance:
Senior Special Agent Craig Jarman at 919-628-2579.

Senior Fire Investigator Taylor Marsh at 919-621-7207

The FIU remains dedicated to supporting local agencies and protecting communities across North Carolina.



HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS: GETTING READY BEFORE THE STORM

Hurricane season runs from June through November, and preparation is one of the most important steps in protecting lives and property. Residents are encouraged to develop a family emergency plan, build an emergency supply kit, review evacuation routes, and stay informed through trusted sources. Store important documents safely and prepare for extended power outages, flooding, and communication disruptions.

North Carolina's emergency response agencies spend months preparing for hurricane season. The State Emergency Response Team (SERT) brings together state agencies, our local governments,

volunteer organizations, and private-sector partners to coordinate disaster response and recovery efforts. OSFM plays an important role within SERT, supporting emergency operations through fire service coordination, incident management, search and rescue resources, damage assessment, and recovery operations.

Recent storms have demonstrated the importance of preparation, coordination, and strong partnerships. Hurricane preparedness is a shared responsibility, and every step taken before a storm helps strengthen North Carolina's ability to respond and recover.



SHE LIT ONE SPARKLER. THEN EVERYTHING CHANGED: A BURN SAFETY DOCUMENTARY

Sparklers seem harmless. They're fun. They're festive. But they burn at 2,000 degrees, a heat hotter than molten metal. For severe burn survivors, the consequences of that split-second decision to light one can last a lifetime. NC OSFM goes beyond statistics to reveal the human impact of sparkler injuries and burn prevention.

Watch our newest Youtube video below to learn about one survivor, Ginger Peters, and her journey through the UNC Jaycee Burn Center after a near fatal sparkler accident.

**SCAN QR TO SEE
THE FULL VIDEO:**





FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEMS: SILENT GUARDIANS OF LIFE SAFETY

Smoke alarms, sprinkler systems, fire alarms, fire doors, and emergency lighting work quietly in the background every day to protect lives and property. While often unnoticed, these systems provide critical early warning and help control fires before they become catastrophic events. Many fire protection system failures are not caused by defective equipment, but by missed inspections, testing, or maintenance. Regular upkeep helps ensure these life safety systems perform as intended when an emergency occurs.

The OSFM Engineering Division works with building owners, fire officials, contractors, and design professionals across North Carolina to promote fire code compliance and improve safety. Every inspection completed and every deficiency corrected helps create safer buildings and stronger communities. The best fire protection success stories are often the ones that never make headlines because the systems worked exactly as designed.



A Verisk Analytics Business

NEW PARTNERSHIP AIMS TO STRENGTHEN FIRE SAFETY AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION

A new national partnership between the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) and Insurance Services Office (ISO), a Verisk business, designed to improve fire safety compliance and support stronger community fire protection efforts.

The partnership introduces a secure, cloud-based system that streamlines the tracking of inspection, testing, and maintenance records for fire protection systems, including fire sprinklers. By improving access to these records, communities can receive more accurate recognition for their fire protection capabilities during Public Protection Classification (PPC) evaluations.

The new system will help local fire marshals, fire departments, and related agencies share fire protection system information more efficiently and consistently. It also supports documentation of local fire prevention activities, inspections, staffing, and oversight efforts that contribute to safer communities.

The initiative is expected to enhance fire safety compliance, strengthen emergency response capabilities, and potentially improve insurance outcomes for property owners and businesses through more complete fire protection data.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE STATE ELECTRICAL DIVISION

SMOKE ALARM SATURDAY 2026 A SUCCESS ACROSS NC

This year's initiative focused on protecting older adults and ensuring residents have working smoke alarms and home escape plans. The campaign engaged 98 fire departments and community partners across 44 counties, resulting in 1,531 homes being checked and 2,020 new smoke alarms installed.

One of the most significant findings from the effort was that 928 homes visited did not have working smoke alarms, highlighting the continued need for fire prevention outreach and education across NC.

The statewide kickoff event was held in Winston-Salem, where firefighters and volunteers canvassed neighborhoods, installed smoke alarms, and shared important fire safety information with residents. The effort was supported by a donation of more than \$106,000 worth of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms from Kidde.

Smoke Alarm Saturday remains one of OSFM's most impactful fire prevention initiatives, helping ensure families across NC have the early warning they need to escape a home fire safely. OSFM thanks all participating fire departments, volunteers, community partners, and residents who helped make the 2026 campaign a success.

Every day, the State Electrical Division helps keep North Carolina homes, schools, businesses, and roadways safe. The division is part of Engineering's Field Operations Division within OSFM and works behind the scenes to oversee electrical safety across the state. They provide guidance on electrical codes, inspections, certifications, and investigations while working closely with the Codes and Interpretations Division and the Manufactured Building Division to ensure electrical systems are safe and meet state requirements. The State Electrical Division manages several critical functions statewide. These include interpreting the NC State Electrical Code and providing code updates to inspectors and contractors, overseeing qualified testing laboratories to ensure electrical products meet safety requirements, providing educational resources and technical assistance for inspectors and contractors, certifying school maintenance electricians, inspecting NC Department of Transportation traffic control equipment, and assisting with fire investigations involving possible electrical causes.

Their work ensures electrical systems remain safe, reliable, and compliant while supporting communities, schools, emergency responders, and industry professionals across North Carolina. From code enforcement and education to inspections and investigations, the State Electrical Division plays an important role in protecting lives and property statewide.



NEW PARTNERSHIP BRINGS MANUFACTURED HOME TRAINING UNIT TO NC ETC

OSFM and the NC Manufactured & Modular Homebuilders Association (NCMHA) announced a new partnership during the NCMHA 2026 Annual Meeting that will expand training opportunities for North Carolina's manufactured housing industry.

As part of the agreement, NCMHA will provide two homes to the OSFM Emergency Training Center in New London. The homes will serve as hands-on training environments for inspectors, installation contractors, transporters, manufacturers, and other industry professionals.

Expected to be operational by January 2027, the training units will offer a real-world setting for inspections, code compliance education, installation training, and industry collaboration.

The addition further enhances the Emergency Training Center's growing capabilities while supporting the continued advancement of the manufactured housing industry statewide. Additional details on construction and future training opportunities will be announced as the project moves forward.



OSFM AWARDS MORE THAN \$12 MILLION TO SUPPORT VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS

OSFM has approved more than \$12 million in grant funding through the Volunteer Fire Department Fund program to support volunteer fire departments across the state during Fiscal Year 2026. A total of 463 fire departments received funding, with more than \$12 million awarded for firefighter safety equipment, apparatus, and capital improvement projects. The grants help departments purchase critical resources needed to protect both firefighters and the communities they serve.

This year, turnout gear was the most requested item, with funding approved for nearly 2,000 pieces of protective equipment, including helmets, coats, pants, gloves, boots, and hoods. Grant funds will also support 21 capital improvement projects, the purchase of 13 fire apparatus, more than 400 fire hose requests, and 89 battery-powered rescue tools used in emergency rescue operations.

The Volunteer Fire Department Fund has supported North Carolina's volunteer fire service since 1987 and remains one of the state's most important investments in local emergency response capabilities.



SUMMER SAFETY STARTS AT HOME

Summer is a time for family gatherings, vacations, cookouts, and celebrations. It is also one of the busiest seasons for fire departments and emergency responders. Fortunately, many summer emergencies can be prevented through awareness and simple safety measures.

FIREWORKS SAFETY

Fireworks-related injuries increase around Independence Day each year. The safest way to enjoy fireworks is to attend a professional public display.

GRILLING SAFETY

Outdoor grilling is a favorite summer activity, but it remains a leading cause of home fires during the warmer months. Grills should always be used outdoors and positioned away from homes, decks, and overhanging structures. Never leave a grill unattended while cooking.

HOT CARS

Even on mild days, temperatures inside a vehicle can rise rapidly and become deadly. Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle for any amount of time. Before locking your vehicle, always check the back seat.

WATER SAFETY

Whether at a pool, lake, or beach, constant supervision remains one of the most effective ways to prevent drowning. Designate a responsible adult to actively watch children whenever they are near water.

WEATHER AWARENESS

Summer thunderstorms can develop quickly and bring lightning, flooding, and damaging winds. Stay informed through weather alerts and have a plan for seeking shelter when severe weather threatens.

Even on mild days, temperatures inside a vehicle can rise rapidly and become deadly. Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle for any amount of time. Before locking your vehicle, always check the back seat.





SOCIAL MEDIA TOPICS TO SHARE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

To help make public safety messaging easier and more consistent across the state, we've put together a Quarter 3 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.

JULY

- Firework Safety
- Hot Car Warnings
- Swimming & Open Water Safety
- Sparkler Safety & Awareness

AUGUST

- Back to School Safety Messages
- Teen Driving Safety
- School Bus Safety
- Pedestrian Safety

SEPTEMBER

- Hurricanes & Generator Safety
- Campus Fire Awareness
- CPS Week
- National Child Seat Check
Saturday

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NC OSFM



Safe Kids NC



OSFM Engineering



NC State Fire Marshal Brian Taylor



NC ETC



NC HILB

