

ONE MISSION | ONE GOAL | A SAFER MARYLAND



2025

OFFICE OF THE
**STATE FIRE
MARSHAL**

ANNUAL REPORT



firemarshal.maryland.gov



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JASON M. MOWBRAY

Welcome,

This report marks the official return of our comprehensive annual publication. Nearly two decades ago, the Office of the State Fire Marshal regularly produced detailed annual reports that set a high standard for documenting our agency's work. While we have continued to issue shorter executive briefs in recent years, the time is right to resume our tradition of a full, in-depth report.



The Office of the State Fire Marshal remains dedicated to public safety through our mission, vision, and goals. This publication presents data and analysis on our activities, accomplishments, and challenges across all sections, units, and regions. It highlights the contributions of our sworn and civilian personnel in fire investigation, code enforcement, engineering, and administration.

This document reflects the events, activities, and organizational structure of the Office of the State Fire Marshal as they existed in 2025, providing an accurate snapshot of our agency during this period. It also serves as a foundation for reviewing statewide fire, arson, explosive, and fire fatality data. Our targeted publications including the Maryland Fire Fatality Report, will continue to offer specialized analysis separate from this general overview.

A dedicated workgroup developed this presentation over the past several months. Thank you to Section Chief Joseph Walters, Master Deputy Oliver Alkire, Public Affairs Officer Ngan Ho, and the staff members who contributed content and photographs. We also extend our appreciation to our entire workforce for protecting Maryland's residents and visitors every day.

One mission, one goal, a safer Maryland.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason M. Mowbray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Jason M. Mowbray
Acting State Fire Marshal

MISSION

The mission of the Office of the State Fire Marshal is to ensure Maryland is a safe place to live, work, and visit.

VISION

To serve and protect the citizens of Maryland while remaining focused on our core values of integrity, fairness, and service.

ONE MISSION

ONE GOAL

A SAFER MARYLAND

VALUES

INTEGRITY

We act with honesty, uphold the public trust, and maintain the highest ethical standards.

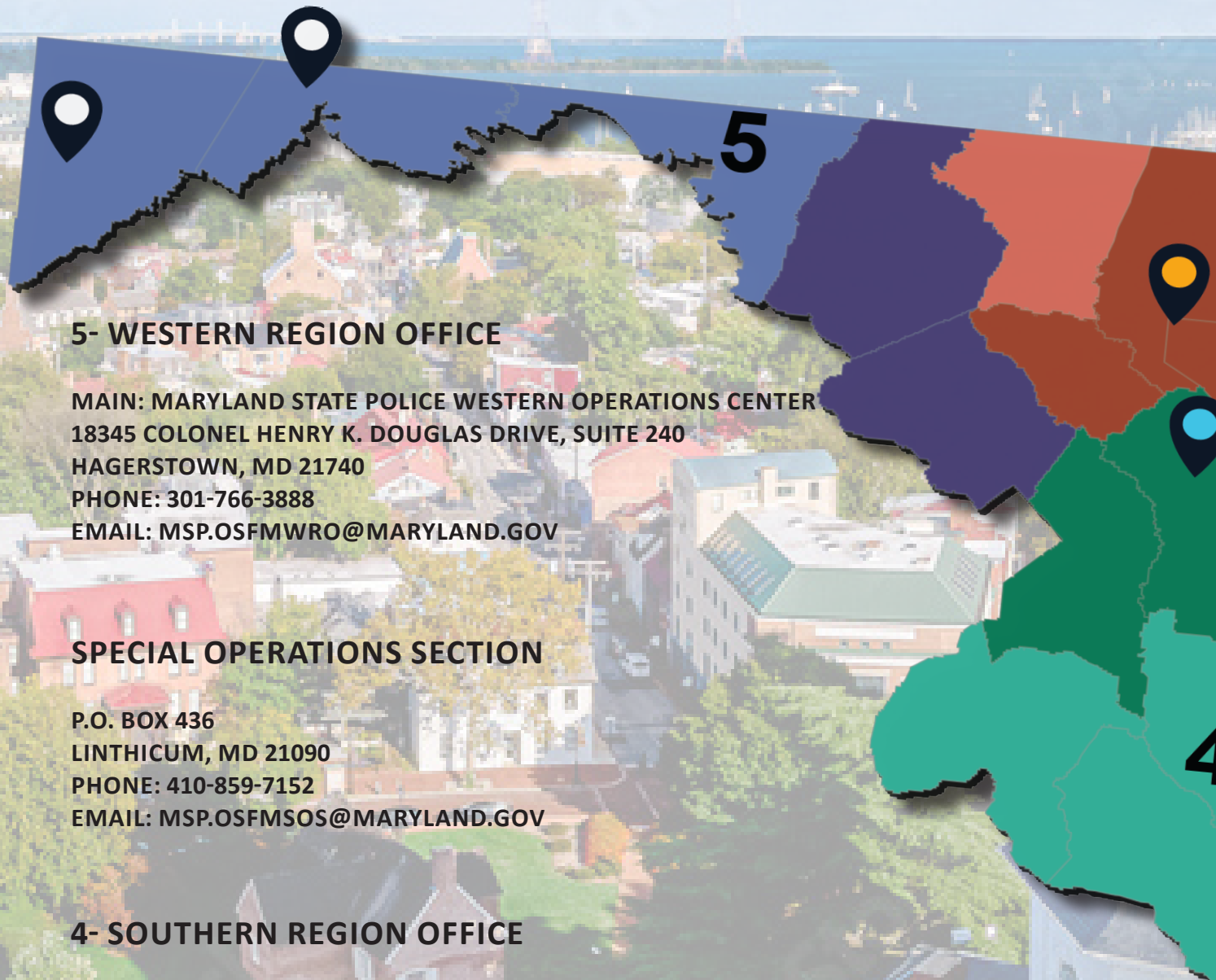
FAIRNESS

We treat all people with respect, dignity, and impartiality while protecting the rights of every individual.

SERVICE

We are committed to serving our communities with professionalism, compassion, and dedication.

AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY



5- WESTERN REGION OFFICE

MAIN: MARYLAND STATE POLICE WESTERN OPERATIONS CENTER
18345 COLONEL HENRY K. DOUGLAS DRIVE, SUITE 240
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4- SOUTHERN REGION OFFICE

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1- NORTHEAST REGION OFFICE

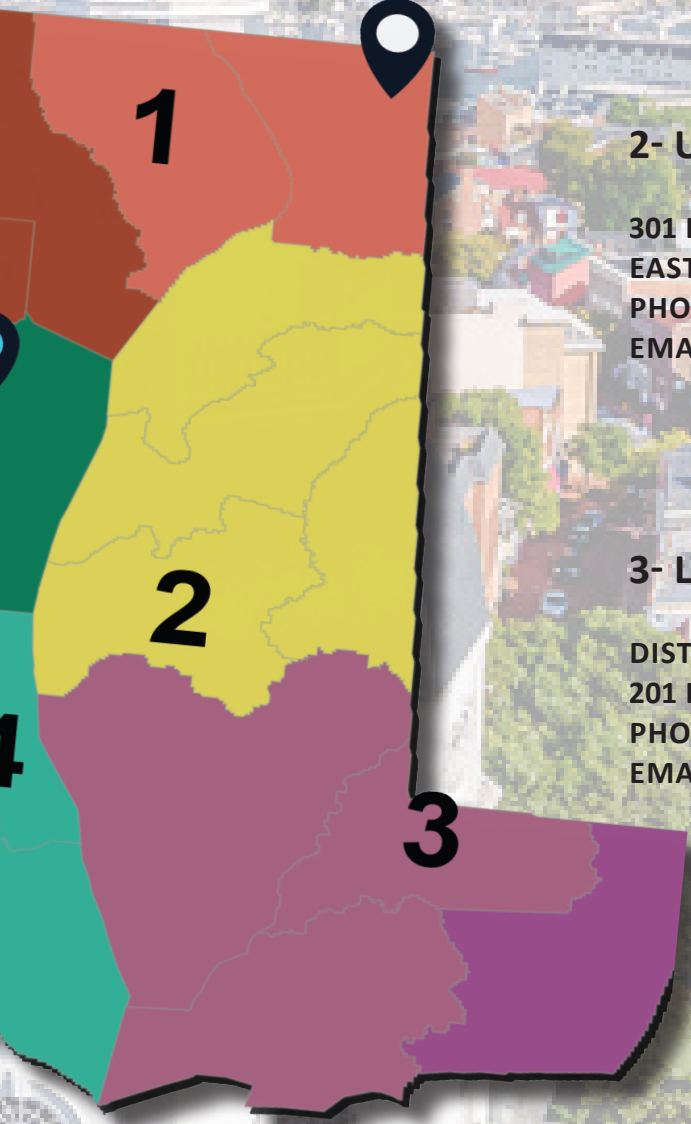
MAIN: MARY E. W. RISTEAU MULTI-SERVICE CENTER
2 SOUTH BOND STREET, SUITE 401
BEL AIR, MD 21014
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2- UPPER EASTERN REGION OFFICE

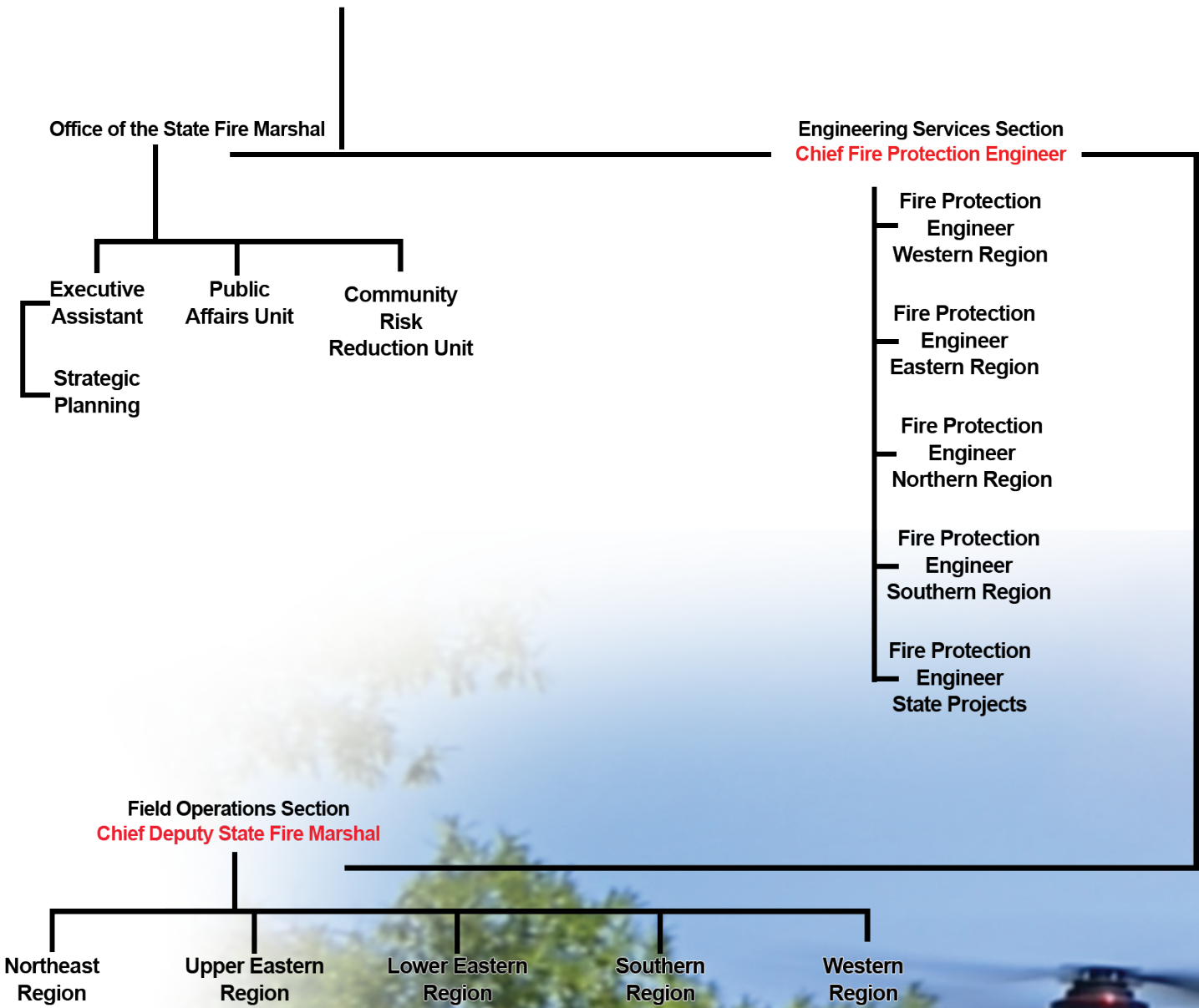
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3- LOWER EASTERN REGION OFFICE

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State Fire Marshal



OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Logistics & Technology Section Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal

Special
Projects Unit

Public
Information Act

Special Operations Section Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal

K9 Unit

Bomb Squad
Underwater
Hazardous
Devices
Team

Unmanned
Aerial Systems

Explosives
Licensing, Permits
Regulations

Personnel Services Section Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal

Training Unit



Note: The rank structure depicted in this chart reflects the 2025 organizational hierarchy of the Office of the State Fire Marshal. Subsequent organizational restructurings, including promotions and new positions, were implemented prior to the publication of this report, and will be reflected in the subsequent report.

UNION HOSE CO.

"SPARKIES"

ORGANIZED 1956

MIDDLETON AFFAIRS UNIT

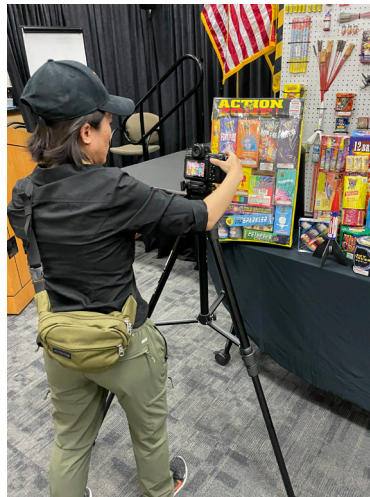


The Office of the State Fire Marshal has strengthened its communications operations with the addition of Public Affairs Officer Ngan Ho, who joined Public Information Officer Master Deputy State Fire Marshal Oliver Alkire to expand the agency's public information and outreach capabilities. Working as a team, Master Deputy State Fire Marshal Alkire and Ho have enhanced OSFM's ability to deliver timely, consistent, and visually engaging messaging across Maryland. Ho also serves in the Public Affairs Office of the Maryland State Police, positioning her to support coordinated, statewide public information efforts across both agencies.



Since joining the agency, Ho has expanded OSFM's video production and multimedia communications efforts, producing a series of professional videos supporting public outreach and education initiatives. Recent work includes a video commemorating the agency's 131st anniversary and a feature highlighting the life-saving impact of residential fire sprinklers statewide, along with additional seasonal fire safety messaging developed for recurring use across OSFM platforms.

The expanded communications team is expected to play an increasingly central role in advancing the agency's public outreach strategy, with Ho's multimedia capabilities and cross-agency experience positioned as a key asset in strengthening long-term messaging, engagement, and public safety communication efforts.



The Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) in October celebrated 131 years of protecting and educating Maryland residents and visitors on fire prevention and safety.

The anniversary event, held at the Maryland State Police Museum, brought together staff, fire service professionals, public safety officials, and community members to reflect on the agency's long-standing mission of protecting life and property.



This year's program spotlighted the history of Sparky the Fire Dog, with presentations from Sparky historian Jim Wealand and remarks from Kelly Ransdell, Director of Public Education at the National



Fire Protection Association.

Established on April 3, 1894, the Office of the State Fire Marshal is recognized as the oldest state fire marshal agency in the nation. This is the second consecutive year the agency has held a large-scale anniversary celebration recognizing its legacy and service to Maryland.

A ceremonial cake cutting, led by retired Chief Deputy Robert Thomas and Deputy State Fire Marshal Sierra Hawkins, symbolized both tradition and continuity within the organization. The event also featured a live fire demonstration by the Pikesville Volunteer Fire Company, illustrating the effectiveness of fire sprinkler systems in controlling residential fires.



In addition to the formal program, attendees took part in the agency's first chili cook-off and interacted with familiar public safety mascots, including Sparky, Smokey Bear, and the Maryland State Police mascot.

"The work of our deputies and civilian employees in the community every day is remarkable and makes a significant impact," said Acting State Fire Marshal Jason Mowbray. "We are incredibly proud of our 131-year tradition and our service to Maryland."





The Maryland Office of the State Fire Marshal brings fire prevention and public safety outreach each August into neighborhoods across Maryland as part of National Night Out—a nationwide effort aimed at strengthening trust between public safety agencies and the communities they serve.

For the Maryland Office of the State Fire Marshal, National Night Out is an opportunity to bring fire prevention and safety education directly to residents. Sworn and civilian personnel participate in events statewide, offering residents a closer look at fire and explosive investigations, fire prevention programs, and the inspections and enforcement efforts that help prevent dangerous and illegal activity.

Attendees are invited to explore fire apparatus and specialized safety equipment up close. Interactive demonstrations also engage younger audiences and offer a practical introduction to the work of fire investigators in a relaxed and hands-on environment.

During National Night Out 2025 in Harford County, Acting Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal Dexter Hodges led a demonstra-

tion featuring a bomb disposal robot, providing attendees with a closer look at the technology used in explosive threat response. Children watched the robot in action and, under supervision, had the opportunity to try on protective bomb disposal gear.

The event also highlighted collaboration between agencies, with the Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Maryland State Police Bel Air Barrack participating together. Through National Night Out and similar initiatives, the Office of the State Fire Marshal continues to emphasize its mission: protecting lives and property while fostering stronger connections with the communities it serves.



Steps to Safety™

Prevent Fire and Falls at Home

Train-the-Trainer

Welcome and Introductions

Maryland – March 21, 2026



IT'S A BIG WORLD. LET'S PROTECT IT TOGETHER.®

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**COMMUNITY RISK
REDUCTION UNIT**



The Community Risk Reduction Unit, led by Teresa Crisman, Community Education and Outreach Officer, is responsible for identifying and reducing community risks through data-driven prevention strategies, public education, community outreach, and strategic partnerships.

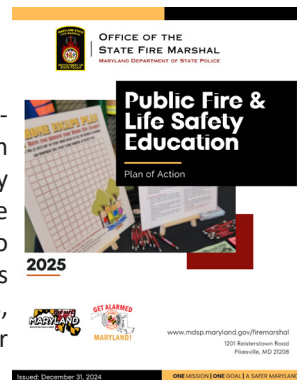
The Community Risk Reduction Unit supports the OSFM regional offices and local fire departments with educational programs by providing program coordination, educational resources, and strategic guidance to address identified community risks. In addition, the Unit collaborates with national and statewide agencies, schools, community organizations, and other stakeholders to implement fire and life safety initiatives that improve preparedness, reduce risk, and enhance the safety and well-being of Maryland residents.

In 2025, the Community Risk Reduction Unit expanded statewide fire and life safety initiatives through education, outreach, smoke alarm and carbon monoxide alarm distribution, and strategic partnerships with local fire departments and community organizations. These efforts focused on reducing risk, increasing public awareness, and improving the safety and preparedness of Maryland residents.

Community Risk Reduction efforts in 2025 resulted in increased fire and life safety outreach, expanded smoke alarm, and carbon monoxide alarm installations, and strengthened partnerships with local fire departments, community organizations, and educational institutions across Maryland. These coordinated efforts helped reduce community risks, improve public awareness, and provide residents with the knowledge and resources needed to prevent fires and respond safely during emergencies.

CREATION OF THE PUBLIC FIRE & LIFE SAFETY EDUCATION PLAN OF ACTION

In 2025, the Community Risk Reduction Unit developed the first Public Fire and Life Safety Education Plan of Action. The plan outlines a unified, statewide approach to Community Risk Reduction (CRR), shifting public safety efforts toward proactive fire prevention and education to dramatically reduce fire fatalities, injuries, and property damage across Maryland. The OSFM has adopted the U.S. Fire Administration's five-step planning process alongside the national Vision 20/20 strategy to deploy the Statewide Collaboration and Engagement Framework (SCEF). This framework focuses on expanding working smoke alarms, promoting CRR integration across all fire service disciplines, and fostering diverse national and local coalitions. The plan establishes concrete benchmarks for organizational growth.



COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION WEEKENDS

Twice a year in May and October the OSFM supports Community Risk Reduction (CRR) Weekends. Last year the weekends were held on May 17-18 and October 18-19. The purpose for the weekends is to coordinate local-level support for the installation and distribution of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms throughout Maryland. Each OSFM region identified high-priority areas using local needs assessments, incident trends, and community risk factors to ensure resources were directed where they would have the greatest impact. Regional personnel partnered with local fire departments to conduct home safety visits, install alarms, provide fire and life safety education, and assist residents in developing home escape plans. These collaborative efforts strengthened community partnerships, increased the number of protected households, and supported the ongoing goal of reducing fire-related injuries, fatalities, and carbon monoxide incidents across the state.

IMPLEMENTATION OF "SOUND THE ALARM"

In partnership with the American Red Cross the Regions have begun to work with the local chapters to support smoke alarm installations in communities where the need has been identified. This valuable partnership has opened the door to support not only fire and life safety efforts but also an all-important approach that ensures communities understand the key factors needed to keep their families safe.

The Regions have begun supporting local Boys & Girls Clubs throughout Maryland by providing educational opportunities and community outreach through the Sound Off with the Home Fire Safety Patrol educational program. These efforts focus on delivering fire and life safety education to youth and their families, emphasizing the importance of smoke alarms, home escape planning, and emergency preparedness. By partnering with Boys & Girls Clubs, OSFM is able to reach children in Title I schools and underserved communities, helping to build lifelong safety habits and extend critical



safety messages into homes throughout the state.



STEPS TO SAFETY™

PREVENT FIRE & FALLS AT HOME

THE NFPA STEPS TO SAFETY™ PREVENT FIRE AND FALLS AT HOME PROGRAM

The NFPA Steps to Safety™ Prevent Fire and Falls at Home program pairs fire and EMS professionals with community partners to educate older adults about home fire and fall safety through group presentations, home visits, and the creation of a local resource network. Formerly titled Remembering When™ A Fire and Fall Prevention

Program for Older Adults, the updated Steps to Safety™ (STS) program includes an online professional training curriculum and new digitized and print assets to support learning and behavior change in the older adult population. The approach is one that promotes independence, collaboration, engagement, and empowerment. Rooted in fire and behavioral science and sound educational principles, STS provides the framework and tools for fire and EMS professionals and their health and social service partners to impact their community to reduce incidence and injury from home fire and falls.

GET ALARMED MARYLAND PROGRAM

The OSFM Get Alarmed Maryland program offers free smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms to qualified residences. This important initiative provides one free smoke alarm and one free carbon monoxide alarm to homes that do not already have these lifesaving devices installed.

Working alarms are a critical first line of defense in protecting families and property during an emergency. Smoke alarms provide an early warning of a fire, giving residents valuable time to escape safely, while carbon monoxide alarms detect the presence of a colorless, odorless, and potentially deadly gas before it reaches dangerous levels.

In addition to improving home safety, the program assists residents in complying with Maryland's smoke alarm requirements and supports statewide Community Risk Reduction efforts by increasing alarm coverage in at-risk and underserved communities. Through education, outreach, and alarm distribution, Get Alarmed Maryland helps reduce fire-related injuries, fatalities, and carbon monoxide incidents while promoting a safer Maryland for all residents.





HONOR GUARD UNIT





The OSFM Honor Guard was established in September 2022 under Chief Deputy Jason M. Mowbray and former State Fire Marshal Brian S. Geraci. Six Deputy State Fire Marshals were selected, including Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal Zach Dell, who coordinates the unit. With the assistance of the Maryland State Police Honor Guard, members attended the Delaware State Police Honor Guard Conference in 2023, learning ceremonial protocols, rifle volleys, casket watches & exchanges, flag folding, and the presentation of those flags to the families of fallen officers and retiring police officers. Since their inception, the Honor Guard has been requested and present at nearly 30 events, including 12 in 2025. Members are identified by their gold cords on the left arm.







ENGINEERING SERVICES SECTION

Major infrastructure projects across Maryland continue to advance with fire safety built into every phase, supported by the Office of the State Fire Marshal's Engineering Section.

Led by Chief Fire Protection Engineer Kenneth Bush, the Engineering Section provides technical oversight on some of the state's most complex development projects. Its work spans transit systems, schools, healthcare facilities, civic buildings, and emergency response infrastructure, ensuring each project meets fire protection and life safety standards while supporting a growing Maryland population.

Despite operating with a small staff and facing ongoing recruitment challenges, the Engineering Section continues to hold the line, remaining steady and committed in the execution of its mission and day-to-day responsibilities.



**CHIEF FIRE
PROTECTION ENGINEER
KEN BUSH**

OVER 2000 PLAN REVIEWS AND 66 FIRE SAFETY INSPECTIONS WERE CONDUCTED IN 2025 BY ENGINEERING STAFF

PURPLE LINE: FIRE SAFETY IN TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE



Maryland's newest light rail system, the Purple Line, has been a major focus of the Engineering Section's work since the project's inception in 2002. Over the years, staff have provided critical technical oversight to support the safe design, construction, and future operation of the 16.2-mile corridor. This includes reviewing station layouts, tunnel and aerial crossover egress, ventilation systems, and rail vehicle construction to ensure compliance with fire protection and life safety standards.

The Engineering Section's responsibilities extended to controlled blasting operations, fire protection system inspections, and coordination with the Office's Bomb Squad and inspection teams. This work is carried out in close collaboration with the Maryland Transit Administration, Purple Line Transit Partners, and other stakeholders to ensure fire safety requirements are fully integrated throughout design and construction. When standard codes require adaptation, engineers apply performance-based solutions to maintain compliance without compromising safety.

Once complete, the Purple Line is expected to improve connectivity across Prince George's and Montgomery counties, linking major employment, education, and residential centers while easing congestion.

EDUCATION PROJECTS: MODERNIZING SCHOOLS

Beyond transit, the Engineering Section continues to support major capital projects across Southern Maryland.

In Calvert County, construction is underway on a new Northern Middle School, scheduled for completion in 2027. The 109,237-square-foot facility will serve nearly 800 students and replace an aging building constructed in 1976. Engineering staff are working with stakeholders and design teams to ensure the school meets current fire code requirements while supporting a modern learning environment.

In Charles County, La Plata High School is undergoing a large-scale renovation and expansion to increase capacity from approximately 1,200 to 1,500 students. Originally built in 1979, the school will see nearly 170,000 square feet of interior renovations, along with new additions and upgraded life safety systems. The project is expected to be completed around 2030. The Engineering Section has been involved from the initial concept through phased construction to ensure safety standards are maintained throughout.

CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE: EXPANDING COMMUNITY ACCESS

Additional public infrastructure includes a new Charles County library, a 27,000-square-foot, two-story facility designed to serve as both a community library and civic space. The building will replace a more than 60-year-old facility and improve access for residents, including those using public transportation. Engineers worked with architects and local officials to ensure safe egress and occupancy capacity while preserving open-concept design features.

PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITIES: SUPPORTING FIRST RESPONDERS

Public safety infrastructure is also expanding with the development of the Pinefield Emergency Medical Services Station in Charles County. The 11,940-square-foot facility will include three apparatus bays, office space, living quarters, and support areas. Built on the site of a former Maryland State Police barracks, the station is designed to strengthen emergency response capabilities. The Engineering Section worked with project designers to address the unique safety challenges associated with mixed-use public safety facilities.



HEALTHCARE INFRASTRUCTURE: SUPPORTING RECOVERY SERVICES

The Avenues Recovery Center at Prince Frederick represents a significant investment in behavioral health services. The 48-bed residential facility provides detoxification and inpatient rehabilitation services. A 5,000-square-foot addition will centralize key functions, including rehabilitation and dining space. Engineers reviewed the facility to ensure compliance with fire code requirements, supporting its mission to provide safe, continuous care for individuals in recovery. Taken together, these projects reflect continued growth across Maryland and highlight the Engineering Section's role in keeping fire protection, life safety, and engineering standards at the center of the state's evolving infrastructure.

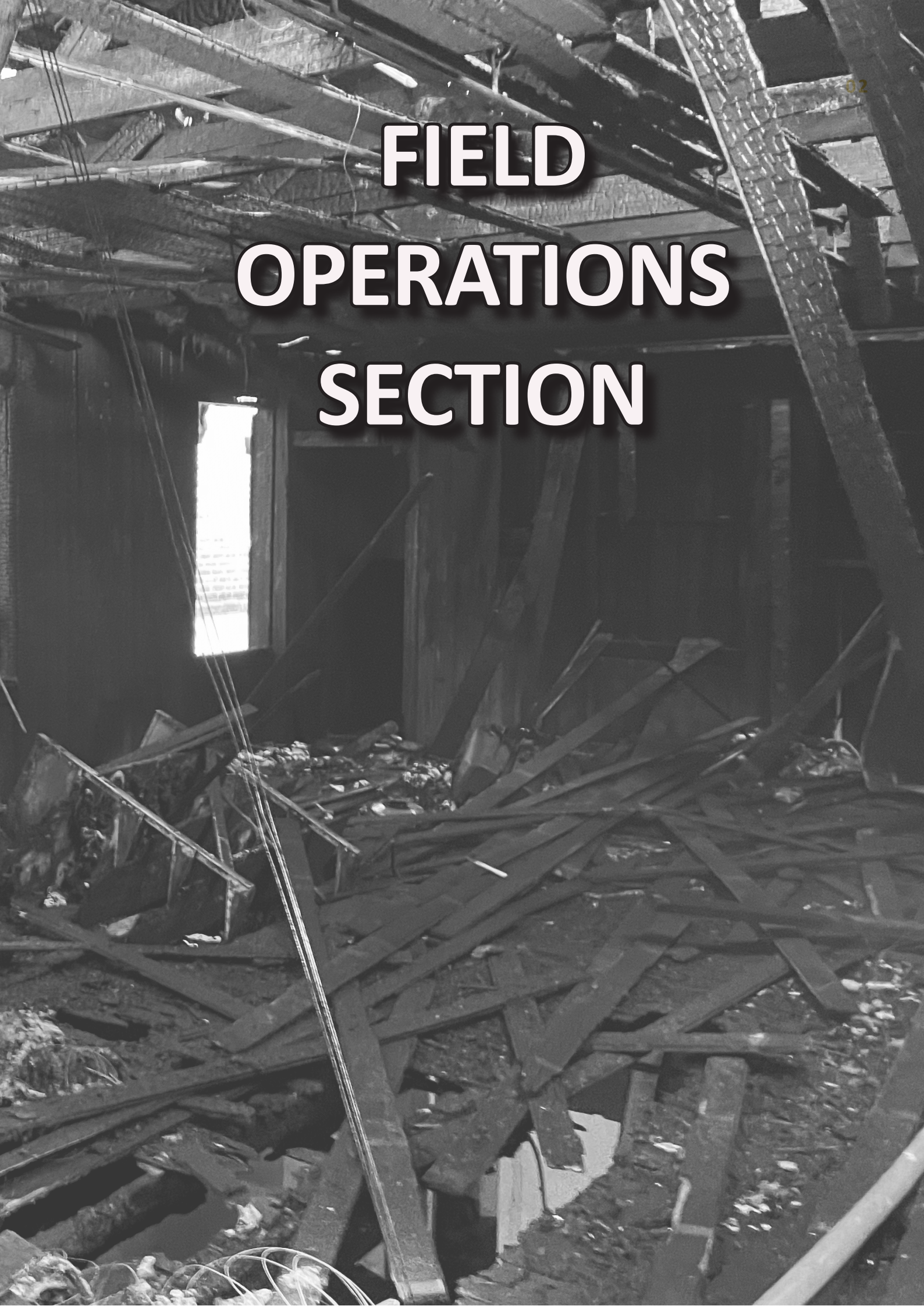
STATE FIRE PREVENTION CODE ADOPTION



The OSFM Engineering Services Section played a key leadership role in preparing stakeholders for the transition to the newly adopted NFPA codes and the updated State Fire Prevention Code. Their team, along with our partners at the NFPA, delivered focused training that clarified major code changes, explained technical updates, and ensured that fire officials, inspectors, and industry professionals were equipped to apply the new standards consistently.





A black and white photograph showing the interior of a severely damaged building. The floor is covered in a large pile of debris, including wooden planks, beams, and other structural elements. In the background, a window is visible, letting in bright light. The overall scene depicts a state of significant structural failure and destruction.

FIELD OPERATIONS SECTION

NORTHEAST

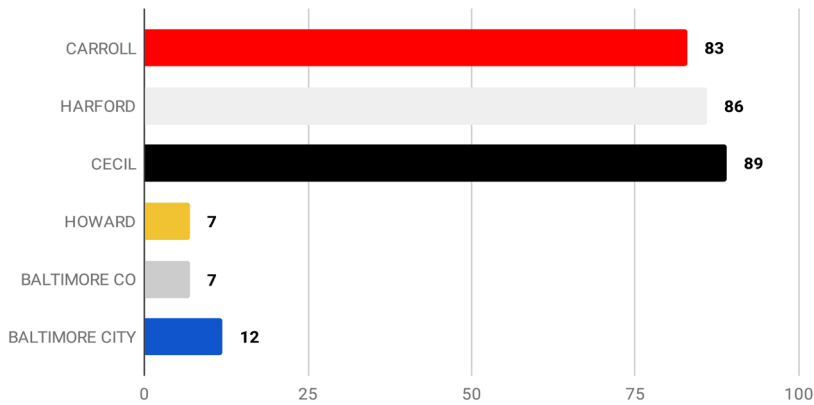


ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF
HOWARD F. EWING

The Northeast Region Office responded to a wide range of significant fires and criminal incidents throughout Baltimore City, Baltimore, Carroll, Cecil, Harford, and Howard counties in 2025. These efforts resulted in 284 fire and explosive investigations and seven arrests. Led by Acting Deputy Chief Howard F. Ewing, NERO operates with a team of 10 personnel, including six Deputy State Fire Marshals, three Fire Safety Inspectors, one Fire Protection Engineer, one Administrative Specialist, and accelerant detection K-9 Blondie. The Northeast Region Office serves Carroll, Cecil, and Harford, as well as state-owned properties within Baltimore City, Baltimore, and Howard counties.



Investigations by Jurisdiction



INVESTIGATION CAUSES:

ACCIDENTAL:	144
INCENDIARY:	24
UNDETERMINED:	66
INTENTIONAL:	2
EXPLOSIVES:	31
NATURAL:	2
OTHER:	15

ARRESTS:

6

FIRE SAFETY INSPECTIONS:

INSPECTIONS: 2,191

FIRE INVESTIGATION

Throughout 2025, the Northeast Region Office responded to a series of fatal fires and major criminal fire investigations across its jurisdiction, each requiring detailed scene examination under complex and often hazardous conditions.

In Harford County, investigators were called to an early morning fire in Aberdeen in February that claimed the lives of an adult male and female. The fire originated in a first-floor bedroom, though the cause remains undetermined.

In April, investigators responded to a mobile home fire in Earleville, Cecil County, where a lone adult female was found deceased. The fire originated in the center of the structure and remains under investigation.

One of the year's most significant criminal cases occurred in Carroll County in November, when deputies initially responded to a domestic disturbance at a home on Sherry Drive in Sykesville and found the residence actively burning. Investigators determined the homeowner had poured gasoline throughout the dwelling and intentionally ignited it. The suspect suffered burn injuries and was treated at a hospital before being taken into custody by Deputy State Fire Marshals. He was later charged with first-degree arson and related offenses following a joint investigation with the Carroll County Sheriff's Office.

In December, investigators returned to Carroll County



for another fatal residential fire in Taneytown. A deceased adult female was located in the basement after the fire had self-extinguished. The origin was traced to that area, though the cause remains undetermined.

Officials said these incidents reflect the range of fatal fire and arson investigations handled throughout the year, requiring close coordination between fire investigators and law enforcement, as well as careful post-incident analysis to determine origin, cause, and accountability.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Deputy Chief Dexter Hodges, Acting Deputy Chief Howard Ewing, Fire Safety Inspector Michael Hayden, and Fire Protection Engineer Derek Murgatroyd worked in close coordination with the Maryland Transportation Authority to bring the Fort McHenry Tunnel and Baltimore Harbor Tunnel into compliance with updated fire exhaust system standards. This is part of an annual inspection to ensure the ventilation systems function as intended during fire-related incidents in the tunnels. This effort was prioritized following a major vehicle fire in the Harbor Tunnel in 2022, which exposed significant life-safety concerns with the tunnel's ventilation system.



Ahead of the 150th Preakness Stakes in May 2025, NERO personnel carried out the first state inspection of Baltimore's Pimlico Race Course on March 25, 2025, marking the facility's initial review since the State of Maryland assumed ownership in 2024.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Master Deputy State Fire Marshal Michael Selvage in December earned the International Association of Arson Investigators – Certified Fire Investigator (IAAI-CFI) certification, a credential recognized internationally as a benchmark of professional competence in fire investigation, including fire science, investigative methodology, and legal procedures.



All investigators assigned to NERO now hold National Association of Fire Investigators – Certified Fire and Explosion Investigator (NAFI-CFEI) certifications, and four also hold International Association of Arson Investigators – Certified Fire Investigator (IAAI-CFI) credentials. The goal is for all investigators to achieve Certified Fire Investigator (CFI) certification by

late 2026.

In addition, Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal John Yedinak

continues to lead the Maryland Fire Rescue Institute Fire Investigator Program by providing instruction multiple times per year. The Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Maryland Fire Rescue Institute partner to support new fire investigators through a redesigned 80-hour training course aligned with National Fire Protection Association 1033 and Pro Board certification standards.

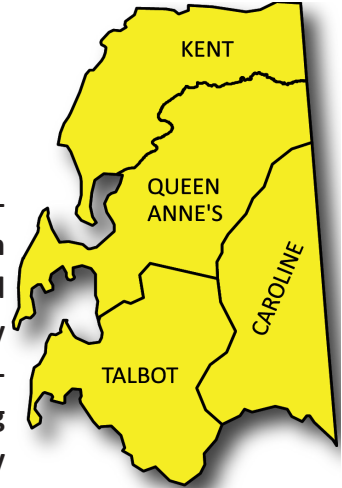


UPPER EASTERN

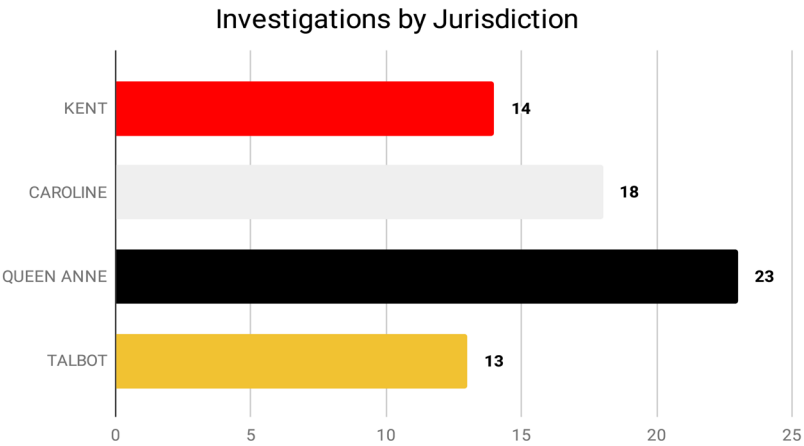


DEPUTY CHIEF
CARYN L. MCMAHON

The Upper Eastern Region Office conducted complex fire and criminal investigations in the region during 2025. These efforts resulted in 68 fire and explosive investigations and 10 arrests. Led by Deputy Chief Caryn L. McMahon, UERO operates with a team of eight personnel, including five Deputy State Fire Marshals, two Fire Safety Inspectors, and one Administrative Specialist. The Upper Eastern Region Office serves Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot counties. The team's commitment, professionalism, and teamwork positions UERO as a model of excellence and a strong workplace for those dedicated to public safety. The staff continues to ensure life safety inspections are completed to enhance the safety of all Marylanders, but they also strive to serve justice for those who are victim to arson.



INVESTIGATION	CAUSES:
ACCIDENTAL:	32
INCENDIARY:	12
UNDETERMINED:	10
INTENTIONAL:	0
EXPLOSIVES:	12
NATURAL:	2
OTHER :	0
ARRESTS:	8
FIRE SAFETY INSPECTIONS:	
INSPECTIONS:	1,133



FIRE INVESTIGATION

The year began in January with a double-fatal fire in Queen Anne’s County, discovered by a passing school bus driver. When firefighters arrived, they found a double-wide mobile home fully engulfed in flames. Deputy State Fire Marshals determined the fire was caused by the improper use of one of seven kerosene heaters inside the home. The victims, a mother and son, are believed to have had mobility limitations or medical conditions that prevented escape.



In April, Deputy State Fire Marshals responded to a fatal fire at the St. Mark’s Village Apartments in Easton. The Easton Police Department initially conducted a welfare check and found the resident suffering from fire-related injuries. Investigators determined the fire was accidental and occurred when the victim was smoking while using home oxygen equipment, resulting in smoke inhalation and burn injuries.

While early-year incidents centered on accidental fatalities, Deputy State Fire Marshals also handled several complex criminal investigations involving intentionally set fires. In August, investigators with the Maryland State Police were contacted after gasoline was found poured throughout a one- and two-family dwelling. Prior responses to the residence involved multiple domestic-related

calls. The investigation determined the suspect intentionally poured gasoline throughout the home in an attempt to ignite a fire or cause an explosion. The incident stemmed from an ongoing domestic dispute, and the suspect was later charged with second-degree arson and related offenses.

That pattern of intentional fire-setting continued into the fall. An ongoing investigation from 2024 led to the arrest of a tenant who set a residential fire to defraud her insurance company. Investigators determined the tenant removed most personal belongings before igniting a kitchen fire, which was intended to appear accidental. Evidence confirmed the fire was incendiary, and the tenant had discussed setting it for financial gain. The suspect was later charged with first-degree arson and related fraud offenses and entered a plea.



The year concluded in December with a major arrest in Caroline County. Deputy State Fire Marshals arrested a 26-year-old man following a grand jury indictment for attempted arson targeting a business. The case stemmed from a six-month investigation into Murphy's Transport in Ridgely, where investigators determined the company was targeted during an ongoing dispute between the suspect and the owner after fire damage and gasoline were discovered on multiple vehicles.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Last year was the first time the Upper Eastern Region Office maintained two Fire Safety Inspectors for the entire year. With the additional staffing, inspectors were able to allocate more time for follow-up inspections and deficiencies noted from initial inspections. This also allowed our sworn personnel to focus on fire and explosive investigations and core operational responsibilities.

The Upper Eastern Region Office also supported a state commission established under Maryland law (House Bill 468, Chapter 950) to improve lithium-ion battery safety across the state. Kenneth Bush, Chief Fire Protection Engineer with OSFM, served on the commission and provided fire protection expertise throughout the process. Over the course of the year, the commission held 15 public meetings, 16 subcommittee and planning meetings, and several recycling industry site visits and training sessions focused on lithium-ion battery safety.

Much of the coordination behind the commission's work relied on civilian support. Penny Doty, UERO's Administrative Specialist, managed scheduling, documentation, meeting materials, and records throughout the process. The combined efforts of Bush and Doty helped keep the commission organized, complete its final report, and ensure meeting materials and documents were made available on the OSFM website.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Upper Eastern Region Office continued growing its prevention and outreach efforts through the Youth Fire-Setting Prevention and Intervention Program, which helps address fire-setting behavior among at-risk youth. Deputy State Fire Marshal Brad Childress spearheaded efforts in bringing the program to communities in the region.

The program brings together the Department of Juvenile Services, Department of Social Services, State's Attorney's Offices, and UERO investigators to identify problems early and intervene before the behavior escalates. Youth participants complete an intake interview and attend structured sessions that focus on the dangers of misusing fire, the legal consequences tied to intentional fire-setting, and basic fire safety practices for both individuals and families.

Staff also took part in several National Night Out events, including those in Easton and Centreville and also attended fire department banquets throughout the year.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS



In June 2025, Penny Doty was recognized with a Commanders Award for her oversight of the Fire Sprinkler Licensing Program, transition of the Annual Fire Fatality report and her assignment to the Lithium-ion Commission Workgroup. Doty graciously took on the administrative role for the Commission Workgroup as required by House Bill 468 in 2024. This workgroup was formed to research and advance the knowledge of Lithium-Ion Battery Safety within the State of Maryland. In addition to handling the scheduling, organizing and recording minutes for the large Commission, she currently assists with the same tasks amongst the six sub-committees. Each sub-committee is responsible for a different research role outlined in House Bill 468. She has been highly commended for her work and organization of this Workgroup by many of its members. This committee worked throughout 2025 until the final report was submitted in December.

Senior Deputy John Grothe was selected as the Upper Eastern Region Office Deputy Fire Marshal of the Year for 2025. This year Deputy Grothe's work ethic was highlighted and acknowledged by his peers, as well as his supervisor. He handled twenty fire and explosive investigations, leading to five arrests and three juvenile referrals. He also devoted over 285 hours of training to his professional development and training for fire and explosive investigations. Additionally, he conducted several integral Life Safety Inspections to ensure the safety of all occupants and Marylanders. Grothe also served as a Bomb Technician, Firearms Instructor Task Force Officer with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and Field Training Officer. His ability to balance all of his tasks and responsibilities is admirable and deserving of this recognition.

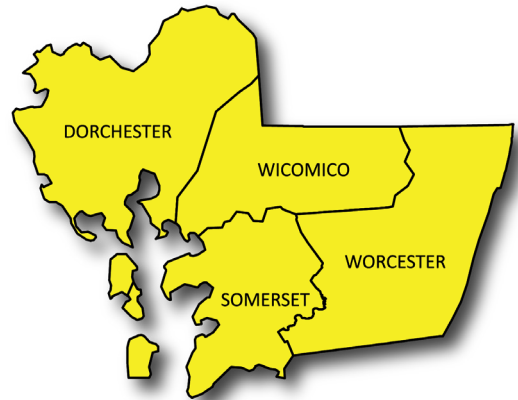


LOWER EASTERN REGION



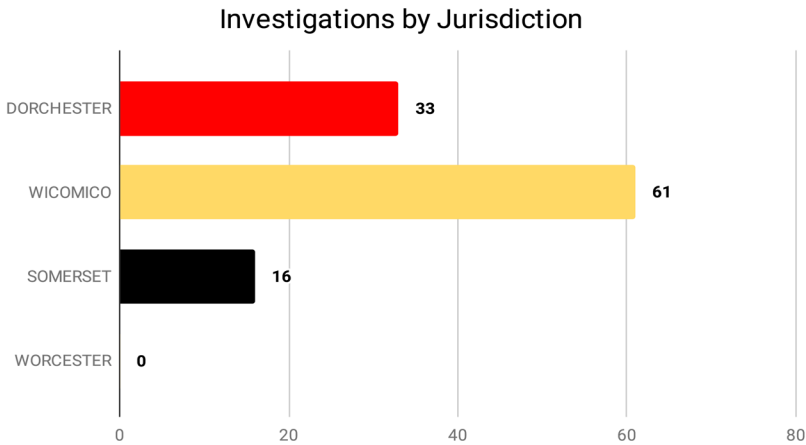
DEPUTY CHIEF
MATTHEW STEVENS

The Lower Eastern Region Office responded to and investigated multiple fires and criminal incidents in 2025. These efforts resulted in 109 investigations and eight arrests. Led by Deputy Chief Matthew D. Stevens, LERO operates with a team of 10 personnel, including five Deputy State Fire Marshals, three Fire Safety Inspectors, and one Administrative Specialist. The Lower Eastern Region Office serves Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties and is supported by accelerant detection K-9 Deacon and explosive detection K-9 Paulie.



Additionally, the Lower Eastern Region has one of the three Fire Investigation Unit vehicles used for large fire scenes, along with one of the five regional bomb squad robots. Some fire investigations in 2025 took LERO into extremely challenging conditions, including a large fire on Frank's Island in Somerset County, where investigators had to travel by boat and break through ice in freezing temperatures just to safely reach the scene.





INVESTIGATION	CAUSES:
ACCIDENTAL:	64
INCENDIARY:	17
UNDETERMINED:	20
INTENTIONAL:	2
EXPLOSIVES:	7
NATURAL:	0
OTHER :	0
ARRESTS:	8
FIRE SAFETY INSPECTIONS:	
INSPECTIONS:	2,248

FIRE INVESTIGATION

The year opened with LERO responding to one of its most challenging fire scenes: a blaze on a privately owned island in Somerset County. Accessible only by boat, the site required investigators to break through ice in freezing conditions as they crossed the water to reach the scene. The fire destroyed four buildings before firefighters from the Deal Island–Chance Volunteer Fire Company and neighboring departments brought it under control. Investigators conducted a full examination of the fire’s origin and cause, but scene conditions prevented them from determining a definitive conclusion, and the case was suspended pending new information. The incident underscores both the complexities of emergency response on Maryland’s Eastern Shore and the obstacles investigators face when accessing remote fire scenes.

In March, Deputy State Fire Marshals responded to Cambridge, Dorchester County, after a house explosion on Wood Duck Lane triggered a two-alarm fire and damaged neighboring homes. The blast caused an estimated \$750,000 in damage and left nearby residents shaken as emergency crews worked the scene. No injuries were reported. The case remains under investigation.



A few days later, Deputy State Fire Marshals from LERO arrested two Dorchester County men in connection with a fire in early March. The investigation began after crews were called to a duck blind fire at Bluff Point in Hoopersville, which also spread into nearby marshland before being brought under control by the Hoopers Island Volunteer Fire Company. The fire caused about \$2,000 in damage. Following an investigation, the suspects were located driving on Smithville Road in Taylor’s Island, where deputies conducted a traffic stop and took both into custody without incident. Both men were charged with second-degree arson, conspiracy to commit second-degree arson, malicious burning in the first and second degree, and reckless endangerment.

In late August, LERO responded to a house fire in Salisbury, Wicomico County, that soon turned into a criminal investigation. Deputy State Fire Marshals arrested a 17-year-old suspect after investigators determined the fire was set intentionally while two people were still inside the home, including an elderly occupant who needed help getting out safely. The suspect was charged as an adult with first-degree arson and attempted first- and second-degree murder. Fortunately, working smoke alarms activated and gave both occupants enough time to escape without injury. Investigators also learned the teen had a history of setting fires and was in the process of receiving medical treatment.

Also in late August, Deputy State Fire Marshals responded to a house fire in Parsonsburg, Wicomico County, that killed an 11-year-old boy. Investigators



worked alongside the Maryland State Police Salisbury Barrack and local fire departments, including the Parsonsburg Volunteer Fire Company, to determine how the fire started. Three adults were able to escape after smoke alarms activated. Investigators attribute the alarms to preventing additional deaths. The fire was traced to the rear of the home and ruled accidental, caused by an unattended candle. The case highlights the life-saving importance of working smoke alarms and the challenges investigators face when responding to fatal fires.



In September, Deputy State Fire Marshals investigated another house fire in Salisbury, that resulted in two fatalities. The fire originated in the living room and was later classified as accidental. Investigators noted the absence of working smoke alarms, a factor identified as critical in the loss of life.

CODE ENFORCEMENT



Ensuring a safe environment for tens of thousands of festival-goers, LERO personnel played a visible role in public safety operations throughout 2025, providing security and investigative support at large-scale community events in Ocean City. Working alongside law enforcement partners, personnel were deployed to ensure safe conditions for tens of thousands of attendees at major seasonal gatherings.

At the Oceans Calling Festival, Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal Christopher McIntyre and ATF explosive detection K-9 Paulie assisted with security operations during the multi-day music event, which drew an estimated 100,000 visitors daily. Their presence formed part of a broader coordinated effort to maintain public safety at one of the region's largest annual events.

The LERO K-9 teams later returned to Ocean City for Sunfest, where they conducted accelerant and explosive-detection demonstrations for attendees. The public-facing presentations offered insight into investigative techniques used in fire and explosive-related cases while reinforcing prevention messaging. These assignments demonstrated an operational model that integrated front-line security support with direct community engagement and public safety education, highlighting LERO's ability to extend its operational reach beyond enforcement into proactive public safety and prevention.





COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Personnel from LERO traveled by boat to Smith Island in May, going door-to-door in Ewell, Rhodes Point, and Tylerton to provide smoke alarms to residents. The effort marked the Office of the State Fire Marshal's first Community Risk Reduction event on the remote island community. Over two days, the team installed or distributed 51 smoke alarms with transportation support from the Westside Volunteer Fire Department. Deputy Chief Stevens, sworn and civilian staff, and Community Risk Reduction Director Teresa Crisman all took part in the initiative. Outreach efforts continued during CRR Week in October in Sharptown and Vienna, where LERO installed 21 smoke alarms and 12 carbon monoxide detectors, while also providing 15 additional smoke alarms to residents in need. These field-based initiatives reflect a proactive approach to fire prevention in harder-to-reach communities.

REGIONAL NEWS

Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal Timothy "TJ" McDonald of LERO was named the 2024 James C. Robertson Deputy State Fire Marshal of the Year during the Maryland State Firefighters Association convention in Ocean City in June. Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal McDonald was selected from six nominees representing regional offices and the Bomb Squad across the state.

Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal McDonald earned recognition for his professionalism, investigative work, and dedication to the Office of the State Fire Marshal. Earlier in the year, he also achieved Certified Fire Investigator credentials through the International Association of Arson Investigators, becoming only the fifth OSFM investigator to earn the certification. The award recognized years of investigative experience and commitment to fire and arson investigations across Maryland's Eastern Shore.

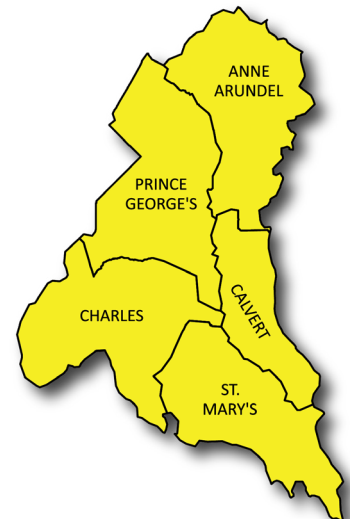


Administrative Specialist III Jessica Budd worked with headquarters staff to launch the redesigned 2024 Annual Fire Fatality Report. The updated report takes a clearer, more accessible approach to presenting fire-related deaths across Maryland. It features simplified graphics, interactive data visuals, and a detailed breakdown of each fatality by county and Baltimore City, making the information easier for the public and stakeholders to understand and use.

Retired Deputy State Fire Marshal Ruxton Bramble, 69, passed away in March. Bramble dedicated much of his professional life to the Office of the State Fire Marshal. Following his honorable discharge from the U.S. Air Force in 1977, he served as a firefighter with the Department of Defense before joining OSFM in 1984. Over the next 22 years, he worked as a Deputy State Fire Marshal and Bomb Technician, earning a reputation for skill and commitment. His service was recognized with a Governor's Citation Medal of Valor for his role, alongside fellow bomb technicians, in disarming 87 devices over a 36-hour period. He also received four Fire Marshal Commendations during his career. His final assignment prior to retirement was with LERO.



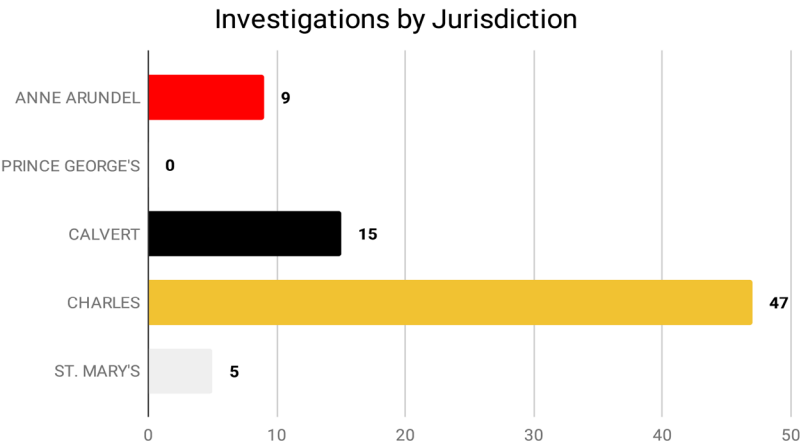
SOUTHERN REGION



DEPUTY CHIEF
JOHN A. NELSON

The Southern Region Office investigated 82 fire incidents in 2025, including 23 criminal fire investigations that resulted in 17 arrests. Personnel also conducted 3,210 fire and life safety inspections throughout the region. Led by Deputy Chief John Nelson, SRO operates with a team of 11 personnel, including five Deputy State Fire Marshals, four Fire Safety Inspectors, and one Administrative Specialist. The Southern Region Office serves Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties and is supported by accelerant detection K-9 Taylor. One of the region's most tragic cases was a catastrophic residential fire in Waldorf that killed six people, including four children.





INVESTIGATION	CAUSES:
ACCIDENTAL:	27
INCENDIARY:	23
UNDETERMINED:	30
INTENTIONAL:	2
EXPLOSIVES:	19
NATURAL:	0
OTHER :	0
ARRESTS:	14
FIRE SAFETY INSPECTIONS:	
INSPECTIONS:	2,741

FIRE INVESTIGATION

The Southern Region Office responded to multiple fatal fires in 2025, beginning in January with a house fire in Hughesville that claimed the life of a 94-year-old woman. Deputy State Fire Marshals determined the fire originated in the kitchen. In April, investigators responded to a double-fatal fire in Faulkner, where heavy hoarding conditions complicated firefighting and recovery efforts. Approximately 50 firefighters worked for about two hours to bring the blaze under control. One resident escaped without injury.



One of the year’s most significant enforcement cases involved a suspect arrested by Deputy State Fire Marshals in connection with multiple arsons and false 911 calls across Southern Maryland. The investigation began in February in Charles County after a vacant commercial building fire was linked to the suspect and social media activity. The individual was arrested again in March in St. Mary’s County on similar charges. A multi-jurisdictional investigation connected incidents across county lines and helped prevent further emergency response strain and public safety risk.

In a separate case tied to a June 2024 incident, the Southern Region Office and St. Mary’s County Sheriff’s Office responded to a disturbance at a motel on Three Notch Road in St. Mary’s County. Investigators found the suspect barricaded inside a third-floor room after an assault on another occupant. The suspect then set the room on fire, causing the evacuation of guests as the fire spread. Multiple fire departments brought the blaze under control, but several people were injured and the incident resulted in approximately \$750,000 in damage in California, Maryland.



In August, investigators responded to a catastrophic residential fire in Waldorf that claimed six lives, including four children. It was the year’s most tragic case for the Southern Region Office. The incident required a large-scale, multi-agency response involving local and federal partners, extended search and recovery operations, and coordinated scene management under unified command. The cause of the fire remains under investigation, with officials noting the complexity of operating during major fatal fire events.



In November, a multi-unit apartment fire in Chesapeake Beach displaced about 25 residents and caused an estimated \$1.5 million in damage, along with \$250,000 in contents loss. The fire destroyed 14 apartment units, and one resident was transported to the hospital. Deputy State Fire Marshals determined the fire started on a first-floor balcony, with high winds and the building’s exterior design contributing to rapid fire spread. Fire crews from Calvert County and surrounding jurisdictions responded, along with the North Beach Volunteer Fire Department, the Calvert County Sheriff’s Office, and the American Red Cross. The cause remains under investigation.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Southern Region Office spent 2025 taking part in community events across Southern Maryland focused on safety education and public engagement.



In May, ATF K-9 Taylor joined SRO staff and bomb technicians at SUPER Safety Day and Adventure Awaits Community Day, where teams demonstrated accelerant detection work and highlighted the role of the bomb squad in public safety operations. Later in the month, K-9 Taylor also participated in Charles County's Hometown Heroes Day, honoring military members and first responders alongside regional law-enforcement partners.

In August, DSFM Hales Valles, S/DSFM Mellisa Decker, and K-9 Taylor supported the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office during the annual "Shop with a Cop" program, pairing students with law enforcement for back-to-school support. In September, the Southern Region Office also participated in the Charles County Fair, where staff and K-9 Taylor met with attendees to share information on fire safety and agency operations.

The Southern Region team partnered with the Maryland State Police Leonardtown Barracks to take part in the Boys and Girls Club of St. Mary's County After School Program. Approximately once every other week a Deputy would go to the club and complete activities, play games or talk about our profession to the children. Staff also took part in their end of the school year celebration in June. This was one of the best community outreach programs of the year.

The Southern Region staff supported the Maryland State Police La Plata Barracks and K-9 Taylor during the No Hunger November food drive by setting up collection points at local businesses throughout Charles County. The initiative helped support the broader community effort to address food insecurity. Additionally, SRO staff also participated in the Child Hunger Food Drive in Waldorf.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Patti Ward retired in January after 45 years of state service. She joined the Office of the State Fire Marshal in 1995 and quickly became a steady, reliable presence within the agency. Over the years, her professionalism, deep institutional knowledge, and consistent commitment helped shape day-to-day operations. Her influence will continue to be felt across the organization.



The Southern Region Office also recognized the retirement of K-9 Zorro, who served under Deputy Chief Fire Marshal and OSFM K-9 Commander John Nelson. After graduating from ATF K-9 Class #117, K-9 Zorro spent eight years supporting investigative work across Maryland and assisting partner agencies in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Trained as a food-reward canine, he required ongoing daily training and reinforcement throughout his service. He has now retired from operational duty and will remain with his handler in retirement.

Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal Tim McDowell was selected as the Southern Region's nominee for the 2024 Deputy State Fire Marshal of the Year award. In 2024, SDFM McDowell led 14 fire and explosive investigations and assisted in 29 additional cases. Several of the cases he led were determined to be incendiary, resulting in multiple arrests, including two first-degree arson cases. He also served as lead investigator in the 2023 Line-of-Duty Death investigation of Firefighter Brice Trossbach in St. Mary's County, coordinating with OSHA, NIOSH, the Naval District Washington Fire Department, and local partners to produce a comprehensive and detailed report. Beyond fire investigations, SDFM McDowell expanded his operational capabilities in

2024 by becoming a certified bomb technician after completing the Hazardous Devices School in Huntsville, Alabama. He now serves on the agency's Bomb Squad, responding to explosive incidents statewide and supporting major security operations. He also serves as a Task Force Officer with the ATF, extending his ability to work complex cases alongside federal partners. Despite the demands of his operational responsibilities, he remains active in community engagement efforts, including Camp COPS, Touch-a-Truck events, and food drives such as No Hunger November. McDowell is also a lifelong learner, having graduated Summa Cum Laude from Columbia Southern University with a Bachelor of Science in Fire Administration, concentrating in fire investigation.



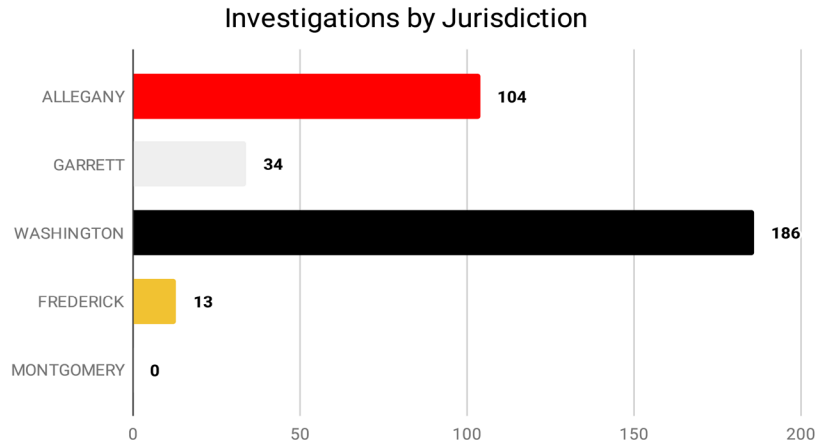
WESTERN REGION



DEPUTY CHIEF
BRANDON M. BEALL

The Western Region Office conducted fire investigations, arson examinations, and destructive device response operations throughout Western Maryland in 2025. These efforts resulted in 284 investigations and 70 arrests. Led by Deputy Chief Brandon Beall, WRO operates with a team of 10 personnel, including six Deputy State Fire Marshals, two Fire Safety Inspectors, and one Administrative Specialist. The Western Region Office serves Allegany, Garrett, and Washington counties and is supported by accelerant detection K-9 Quinn. One of WRO's most significant investigations in 2025 was a triple-fatal house fire that was later determined to be a homicide and led to the arrest of six suspects.





INVESTIGATION	CAUSES:
ACCIDENTAL:	99
INCENDIARY:	49
UNDETERMINED:	56
INTENTIONAL:	76
EXPLOSIVES:	57
NATURAL:	0
OTHER:	4
ARRESTS:	70
FIRE SAFETY INSPECTIONS:	
INSPECTIONS:	3,699

FIRE INVESTIGATION



In November, WRO responded to a triple-fatal fire at a single-story home in Clear Spring, Washington County. During the investigation, Deputy State Fire Marshals uncovered evidence of foul play, including accelerant alerts from a K-9 team and injuries inconsistent with the fire. The findings prompted a joint criminal investigation involving state and federal law-enforcement agencies, including the Maryland State Police Homicide Unit, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Hagerstown Police Department, and the Washington County Sheriff's Office. Autopsies later confirmed the victims had been fatally shot, and the deaths were ruled homicides. The investigation resulted in the arrest of seven individuals and was closely followed by the community.

Also in November, Deputy State Fire Marshals arrested a 33-year-old man following a fire investigation at Potomac Towers, a high-rise apartment, in Hagerstown, Washington County. The fire occurred in October on the 8th floor of a 14-story building, forcing the evacuation of nearly 200 residents and injuring one firefighter. During the response, crews rescued the suspect from his apartment balcony. Investigators determined the fire had been intentionally set at multiple locations in the home. They also found that a refrigerator had been placed on its side behind the front door, obstructing entry and appearing to delay firefighter access. Nearly 200 residents, some of whom were elderly or had limited mobility, were displaced after the fire.



The Western Region Office in April served a search warrant at a basement apartment in Frederick, Frederick County, as part of an investigation into suspected production and possession of explosive devices. The warrant was obtained after an investigation provided sufficient information for law enforcement to believe that homemade explosive materials were present at the residence. Investigators found multiple items commonly used to construct explosive devices, along



with a bag of fine black powder later identified as homemade energetic material. The suspect, a 20-year-old man, was taken into custody without incident.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

The civilian inspection staff completed 3,149 fire safety inspections throughout the year across three counties among the three inspectors. Their dedication and attention to detail play a critical role in ensuring that Marylanders remain protected through the enforcement of fire and life safety codes. Their hard work and commitment to public safety continue to make a significant impact across the communities they serve.

Effective July 1, 2025, the Washington County Division of Permits and Inspections assumed responsibility for fire plan reviews and fire inspections, responsibilities previously handled by WRO.

The WRO continues to oversee fire and explosive investigations, fireworks enforcement, new Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and ambulatory health care occupancies, state-licensed foster care and day care facilities, state-owned properties, and educational occupancies.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



Deputy State Fire Marshal Deanna Pelton assisted with the Western Maryland Youth Fire-Setting Prevention and Intervention Program throughout 2025. The program educates youth about safe and unsafe fire behavior, the legal consequences of intentionally setting fires, and personal and family fire safety. It uses hands-on activities, real-world fire scenarios, and follow-up assignments to reinforce fire safety concepts.

The program operates through the Hagerstown Fire Department, the Washington County Board of Education, and the Western Region Office of the State Fire Marshal. Referrals are received from parents, schools, and the Department of Juvenile Services, with participation being voluntary or court-ordered. The program received 24 referrals during the year, of which 11 students completed the program.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Fire Safety Inspector Joseph Goodrich retired from the Office of the State Fire Marshal on December 9, 2025, after eight years of dedicated service. Throughout his tenure, FSI Goodrich was a tremendous asset to the Western Region Office, consistently demonstrating professionalism, commitment, and a strong work ethic. His contributions to the Office and the communities he served were greatly valued. Fire Safety Inspector Goodrich is greatly missed by his colleagues, and we wish him all the best in his retirement.

In November, the Western Region office celebrated the retirement of Administrative Specialist Heidi Richie, marking the conclusion of an extraordinary 43-year career with the Office of the State Fire Marshal. Throughout more than four decades of service, Richie became a cornerstone of the Western Region team, providing unmatched institutional knowledge, historical continuity, and operational stability that shaped the evolution of the OSFM.

Richie's expertise extended far beyond her regional responsibilities. She served for many years as the Secretary to the Maryland State Fire Prevention Commission, ensuring the Commission's work was supported with accuracy, professionalism, and a deep understanding of the agency's mission. Her commitment to public service, attention to detail, and dedication to the fire prevention community earned her the respect of colleagues across the state.



Her retirement represents not only the departure of a valued team member, but the closing of a chapter defined by loyalty, consistency, and exceptional administrative leadership. The OSFM extends its sincere appreciation to Richie for her decades of service and wishes her the very best in her well-deserved retirement.

In the wake of historic flooding and record rainfall in Western Maryland in May, Deputy State Fire Marshal John Dowden of our Western Region quickly put on swift water gear and played a crucial role in rescuing over 150 students and 50 teachers from Westernport Elementary School. As dedi-



cated volunteer firefighter with the Bloomington Fire Company, Deputy Dowden acted without hesitation to ensure the safety of others.

The Western Region Office in November welcomed K-9 Quinn, a Black Labrador Retriever, as its first accelerant detection K-9 in more than two decades. Quinn and his handler, Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal Adam Rounds, graduated from the ATF National Canine Training Center in Front Royal, Virginia, and were deployed to assist fire investigations across the region.

Trained through the Puppies Behind Bars program and certified through a rigorous 12-week ATF course, Quinn is one of only 77 ATF-trained accelerant detection teams in the country. The program emphasizes fire scene investigation, scent detection, fire chemistry, and safety procedures, providing investigators with a precise and reliable tool for identifying evidence.



Stationed locally, Quinn is expected to reduce response times for fire investigations that previously depended on units from Baltimore or farther afield. His addition brings the state's total to six certified accelerant and explosive Detection Canine teams, all prepared to respond.



SPECIAL OPERATIONS SECTION

**BOMB
SQUAD**



SPECIAL OPERATIONS SECTION

The Special Operations Section (SOS) of the Office of the State Fire Marshal, led by Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal Duane K. Svites, provided statewide response capability in 2025 for complex incidents involving explosives, hazardous devices, underwater explosive ordnance, canine detection, and unmanned aerial systems. Operating as an integrated network of bomb technicians, underwater explosive specialists, canine teams, and unmanned aircraft operators, SOS supported fire investigations, hazardous device mitigation, underwater explosive operations, and large-scale security incidents. These coordinated capabilities strengthened public safety in Maryland and enabled SOS to respond to some of the state's most sensitive and high-consequence incidents.



LICENSING & REGULATORY OPERATIONS



The Explosives & Fireworks Licensing and Inspection program administered by the Special Operations Section serves as a foundational public safety control for Maryland's explosives and fireworks industry. By regulating who may manufacture, possess, use, and store explosives—and enforcing standards through background checks, testing, and facility inspections—the program helps prevent unsafe practices that could result in significant harm to the public.



In 2025, this oversight included 405 statewide explosive storage magazine inspections to verify compliance with state and federal safety and security requirements. Approximately 300 pyrotechnicians and over 600 public fireworks shows are permitted annually, and roughly 300 license holders along with about 50 additional businesses operate under state regulation. All are subject to background checks, proctored testing, and facility inspections.



These combined regulatory measures maintain continuous accountability within a high-risk sector where failures in handling or storage can have serious public safety consequences.

BOMB SQUAD UNIT

The Bomb Squad operates as a statewide specialized response unit supported by six full-time and nine regional bomb technicians. In 2025, the unit responded to 290 calls for service involving suspected explosive devices, suspicious packages, and hazardous ordnance across public, private, and critical infrastructure settings.

The unit is authorized for 17 bomb technicians and operated at 16 personnel following one retirement, with recruitment underway for additional FBI Hazardous Devices School candidates to sustain long-term capability. Across the year, technicians conducted 30 render-safe operations, 54 protective sweeps and security details for major events and dignitary visits, and recovered 34 pieces of military ordnance along with numerous illegal fireworks. Eleven controlled disposal operations were completed through coordinated public and private sector efforts.



Bomb technicians routinely operate in a low-profile manner, resolving potential threats quietly and efficiently to minimize public disruption and prevent unnecessary alarm. In many cases, successful outcomes occur without public awareness that a threat ever existed.



Equipment modernization continued in 2025 with the replacement of three robotic systems, and planning advanced for a dedicated explosive disposal



range on Maryland's Eastern Shore to strengthen long-term operational capacity.



Beyond response operations, the Bomb Squad maintained an active role in training and outreach, participating in 36 community engagement events and delivering seven instructional sessions at law-enforcement academies to strengthen initial response capabilities for explosive-related incidents by basic patrol officers.

UNDERWATER HAZARDOUS DEVICES TEAM



The Underwater Hazardous Devices Team (UHDT) is composed of nine members drawn from multiple partner agencies, supported by canine handlers and drone pilots who assist in operational response and preventive security missions. In 2025, the team conducted 11 deployments across Maryland and the National Capital Region supporting national special security events, including presidential inauguration activities, Fourth of July operations, and other high-risk events throughout the NCR.



A major deployment followed the January 29 midair collision between a commercial aircraft and a military helicopter, where UHDT personnel supported underwater search and recovery operations in severe conditions, including freezing water and strong currents. The team also supported community events such as the Special Olympics Polar Bear Plunge, Deep Creek Dunk, and Rocky Gap Hooley Plunge, providing water safety and standby coverage.

Operational readiness was maintained through two large-scale interoperability exercises in Baltimore waterways and Deep Creek Lake, involving federal, state, and local partners. All members completed recertification on the VIPER re-breather system, and three new candidates advanced through training pipelines toward FBI Underwater Bomb Technician certification, bringing the team to 12 members across multiple agencies.

UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS UNIT

Supporting maritime and dive operations, the Office of the State Fire Marshal maintains four Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) pilots strategically positioned across Maryland. Operating in coordination with Maryland State Police Aviation and other partner agencies, the UAS team provides critical aerial support during fire and explosive-related incidents, including aerial photography, scene surveillance, and real-time situational awareness. These capabilities allow responders to assess hazardous environments remotely, improving both operational safety and decision making. In 2025, the UAS unit supported 15 deployments statewide, enhancing scene assessment, operational planning, and overall incident response effectiveness.



K-9 Unit

The Office of the State Fire Marshal's K-9 Division proved in 2025 that when it comes to fire and explosive investigations, success often comes down to "nose-to-the-ground" precision. Accelerant and explosive detection K-9 teams responded to 188 incidents statewide, sniffing out critical evidence and identifying explosive threats that supported investigations and public safety operations across Maryland.

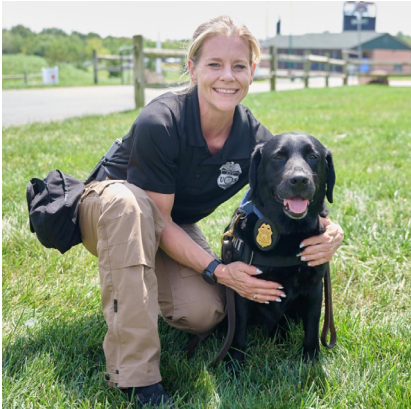
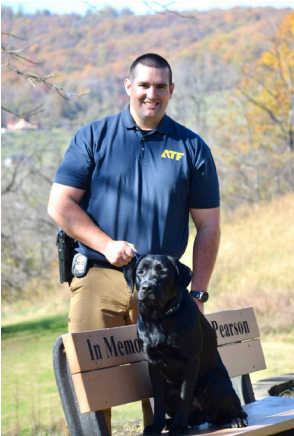
The division operates with four accelerant detection K-9s, two explosive detection K-9s, and one facility support dog. All detection canines are trained through the ATF and maintained under annual recertification standards. Teams train monthly in different Maryland regions and deploy using a food-reward-based methodology that reinforces precision, discipline, and consistency in the field. In 2025, the division expanded its capabilities with the addition of K-9 Quinn and continued to strengthen its community-facing



mission through Facility Hero Dog Sandy.

K-9 Quinn

K-9 Quinn, a 2-year-old Black Labrador Retriever, handled by Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal Adam Rounds is assigned to the Western Region Office. The team was added in 2025 as the fourth accelerant detection K-9 unit, following the retirement of Deputy Chief Nelson and K-9 Zorro. After graduating from ATF K-9 school in November, K-9 Quinn and Senior Deputy Rounds hit the ground running, responding to one of the most high-profile fire investigations in the region.



K-9 Taylor

K-9 Taylor, a 3-year-old Black Labrador Retriever, completed her first full operational year with the Maryland State Fire Marshal’s Office in 2025, quickly establishing herself as a reliable accelerant detection asset in both investigative and community settings. Working alongside Master Deputy State Fire Marshal Melissa Decker, the team responded to nearly 60 fire scene callouts and participated in approximately 40 community outreach events.

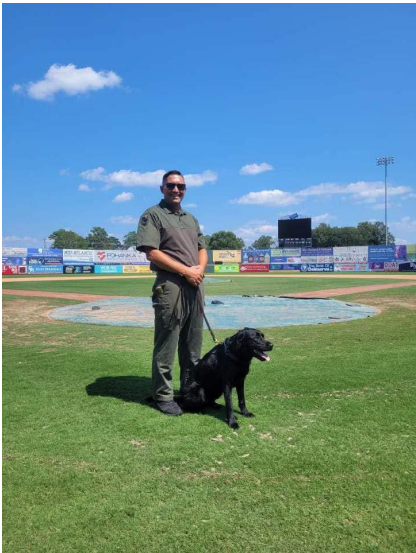
Taylor’s work extended beyond fire scenes into case support that contributed to successful prosecutions in Maryland and Virginia, as well as ongoing fire prevention education through school safety programs, youth reading initiatives, and training for police recruits and students at the high school and college level. Her outreach also included food drives, public open houses, and regular engagement with youth programs such as the Southern Maryland Boys and Girls Club. The duo is primarily assigned to Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary’s counties.

In 2025, Taylor and Decker also marked a first for the team, appearing in two popular Facebook video features produced by the Maryland State Fire Marshal’s Office. The first delivered a public fire safety message, while the second highlighted the OSFM “Fire Marshal Spotlight” series—showcasing the role of accelerant detection K-9 teams in both community safety and investigative work.

K-9 Paulie

K-9 Paulie is a 5-year-old black Labrador retriever handled by Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal Christopher McIntyre, who is assigned to the Office of the State Fire Marshal’s Lower Eastern Region.

In 2025, Paulie completed multiple operational deployments supporting both OSFM and allied agencies, conducting systematic explosive-detection sweeps across residential, urban and school environments. The team was regularly called to assist with high-risk, time-sensitive incidents requiring rapid scene clearance. Together, the team handled 20 incidents and special details and supported 18 community risk reduction events.



K-9 Deacon



K-9 Deacon, a 5-year-old yellow labrador retriever, serves alongside Master Deputy State Fire Marshal Jeff Thomas in the Lower Eastern Region Office. As MDFSM Thomas’s second K-9 partner, Deacon continued a proven investigative partnership in 2025, combining experience with consistent field performance.

Throughout the year, the team responded to 23 fire investigation callouts and contributed 54 hours to community risk reduction and outreach efforts. Deacon’s work supported both operational case development and public safety education, reinforcing the dual mission of fire investigation and prevention across the region.

K-9 Rosie



K-9 Rosie, a 9-year-old Black Labrador Retriever, serves alongside Master Deputy State Fire Marshal Matt Wrenn in the Bomb Squad. As a seasoned explosive detection K-9, Rosie continued to play a critical role in high-risk operations and complex investigations throughout 2025. In 2025, Rosie and Wrenn supported 9 incidents and high profile details and participated in seven community risk reduction programs.

K-9 Blondie

K-9 Blondie, a 6-year-old yellow labrador retriever, serves alongside Master Deputy State Fire Marshal Oliver Alkire in the Northeast Region Office. In 2025, the team maintained a steady operational pace, deploying 68 times to fire scenes and demonstrations across Maryland, including 13 responses in support of partner agencies.

Blondie's work proved especially impactful in Baltimore City, where her detection led to the discovery of key evidence inside a residence, contributing to an arrest. In a separate incident also in Baltimore City, she played a critical role in recovery efforts at a vacant structure fire, locating human remains that had not been identified during initial post-fire operations.

Through consistent deployments and precise detection work, Blondie continues to demonstrate the essential role accelerant detection K-9s play in advancing investigations and uncovering evidence that might otherwise remain hidden.



K-9 Sandy

K-9 Sandy serves alongside Senior Deputy State Fire Marshal Mike Redding out of the Bomb Squad. She is the first and only facility K-9 for the Maryland Department of State Police. Sandy is trained and certified by Hero Dogs, Inc.—an organization accredited by Assistance Dogs International. While not deployed for detection work, Sandy plays a vital role in supporting the emotional well-being of both first responders and the communities they serve.

Trained to recognize when someone is becoming overwhelmed or on the verge of an emotional breakdown, Sandy responds by moving in close, leaning in, nuzzling, or staying by their side to provide comfort.

In 2025, Sandy participated in 26 Community Risk Reduction events, providing comfort and support during outreach efforts and critical incidents. Her presence has become a valued resource in peer support settings and community engagements alike.

In local schools, Sandy works closely with children with special needs, offering a calm and supportive presence. One particularly notable interaction involved a young autistic student who was initially nonverbal and hesitant around Sandy. Over time, through repeated visits and gentle interaction, the student began speaking, gradually building confidence to the point of reading aloud to Sandy. Educators and caregivers reported that Sandy's consistent presence played a meaningful role in the child's developmental progress.

Sandy's impact is equally profound within the law-enforcement community. In August 2025, she assisted the Maryland State Police

Peer Support Team during a difficult time for the Forensic Sciences Division following the sudden loss of a valued administrative staff member. As personnel gathered to process their grief, Sandy provided a quiet, steady source of comfort—moving through the room, offering affection, and helping create space for healing. Staff expressed deep appreciation for her presence, noting the value of having such a resource available during moments of loss.



Through each visit, Sandy demonstrates that the role of a K-9 within the Office of the State Fire Marshal—like its personnel—extends beyond investigations, encompassing community engagement and meaningful emotional interactions.



LOGISTICS & TECHNOLOGY SECTION



LOGISTICS & TECHNOLOGY SECTION

The Logistics & Technology Section (LTS), led by Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal Joseph P. Walters III, continued to serve as a key support unit for the Office of the State Fire Marshal in 2025. The section provided operational, technical, and project management support across the agency, helping ensure personnel had the tools and resources needed to carry out the agency's public safety mission.

In 2025, the Logistics & Technology Section encompassed the Special Projects Unit (SPU), which assisted in several projects, including the transition documentation of the training coordinator after the retirement of Patti Ward and the State Fire Prevention Commission after the retirement of Heidi Richie.

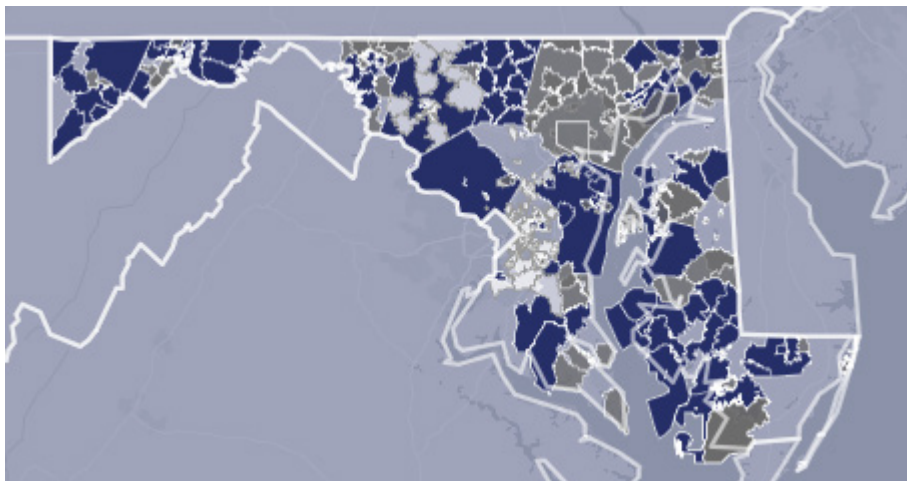


The section led the development and implementation of internal systems that allowed personnel to more accurately enter data, track activities, and maintain records. These improvements addressed longstanding challenges with data collection and reporting at OSFM, while increasing accountability, improving operational awareness, and providing a clearer picture of the agency's work and impact.

The Logistics & Technology Section also partnered with Maryland's Information Technology division to develop a new website that will give the Office of the State Fire Marshal its own dedicated online presence for the first time. Separate from the Maryland State Police website, the new platform will improve public access to information, modernize communications, and strengthen the agency's digital footprint for years to come.



NERIS Transition Support and Implementation



The Office of the State Fire Marshal's Logistics & Technology Section played a central role in Maryland's transition from the National Fire Incident Reporting System to the National Emergency Response Information System, a significant shift in how fire data is collected and analyzed statewide. Supporting more than 300 fire departments, the section assisted with onboarding, data migration, and complex reporting needs, particularly for multi-station and multi-jurisdiction agencies. Officials say the transition is expected to strengthen the state's ability to identify fire trends and guide data-driven decision-making across Maryland's fire service. The Office of the State Fire Marshal is responsible for statewide data collection.

The Logistics & Technology Section is responsible for collecting and analyzing internal and external law enforcement and fire department data. In July, Deputy Chief Walters attended the UL Research Institutes Research Symposium this week. He, along with several others, spoke on the human elements of building NERIS Data as a national data system. During the event, Deputy Chief Walters shared how the OSFM plans to utilize NERIS with our new Records Management System (RMS). This collaboration will enhance our data collection capabilities and support community risk reduction efforts.

Records Management System (RMS)

At the same time, the section advanced development of a new records management system aimed at modernizing how investigative data is stored and accessed. Personnel reviewed more than 300 pages of technical specifications with the selected vendor, monitored system development timelines, and secured funding for a specialized module dedicated to fire and explosive investigations. Once implemented, the system will replace the federal Bomb and Arson Tracking System, allowing the agency to maintain full control over its investigative records.

Technology and Equipment Modernization

Efforts to modernize technology and equipment also moved forward in 2025. The section procured rugged laptops to enhance field reporting capabilities and support the rollout of the new records system. Electronic plan review tables were also deployed to fire protection engineers, eliminating the need for paper-based reviews. Fleet operations saw continued progress through the agency's replenishment and replacement plan, with six new vehicles added and emergency vehicle outfitting contracted to local vendors to streamline turnaround times.

Facilities Improvements

Facility upgrades marked another area of progress. Phase one of a multi-phase renovation of the agency's primary office was completed, including new flooring and a full interior repaint. Additional funding has been secured for future phases of the project, as well as for improvements at the Lower Eastern Region Office in Salisbury, where flooring upgrades are planned in the next fiscal year.

Fleet Sustainability

The Logistics & Technology Section completed the 2025 OSFM Fleet Sustainability and Replenishment Plan which marks the first comprehensive fleet strategy in the agency's history, establishing a long-term framework for modernizing vehicles, reducing health impacts, and improving operational readiness. The plan outlines baseline fleet conditions, identifies aging and high-emission assets, and introduces data-driven replacement cycles to ensure reliability and cost efficiency. It also sets the agency's inaugural sustainability targets, including infrastructure planning and lifecycle-based budgeting. As the agency's foundational roadmap, it formalizes priorities that will guide fleet decisions for years to come.



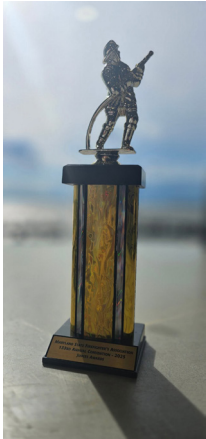
Staffing and Administrative Support

The Logistics & Technology Section experienced several staffing changes in 2025. The administrative specialist position was transferred to the Western Region Office following the retirement of Heidi Richie. The section also on-boarded a new Public Information and Records Retention Administrator. This position has significantly improved OSFM's response to Public Information Act requests and will continue to strengthen the agency's records retention program through the development and refinement of retention schedules. These changes enhanced OSFM's records retention program and improved response to Public Information Act requests. The section also on-boarded a hybrid information technology position. This position will be assigned to the OSFM Logistics & Technology

In 2025, the Logistics & Technology Section played a key role in replacing the agency’s 2003 marked Crown Victoria, the last remaining marked patrol vehicle in the fleet. The white marked vehicles were introduced during Fire Marshal Rocco Gabriele’s administration but eventually became obsolete as the agency expanded and the fleet modernized. Today, patrol operations are conducted using unmarked pickup trucks. However, the 2003 marked car was replaced with a 2015 Ford Interceptor SUV and redesigned to today’s branding. The marked car, car “8587” was unofficially dedicated to fallen hero Deputy Chief Sander Cohen. The vehicle had its official unveiling at the 2025 Maryland State Firefighters Association (MSFA) Convention and Conference, June 2025, where it won



Judges Award during the annual parade.



The Logistics & Technology Section also played an integral role in several events, including the 2025 Maryland State Firefighters Association Conference and Convention, the 131st OSFM Anniversary ceremony, the Mid-Atlantic Life Safety Conference, and the Phoenix Burn Society

Burn Congress in Covington, Kentucky, where the team supported audio/visual and logistics operations throughout the event.

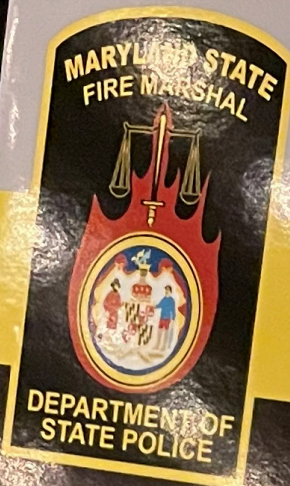
SPECIAL PROJECTS UNIT

In 2025, the Special Projects Unit (SPU), led by Senior Deputy Carl Witmer, supported a range of initiatives that helped improve continuity and efficiency across OSFM. One of its key efforts was completing a comprehensive Training Coordinator Desktop Manual that outlined responsibilities, policies, and procedures for the role. That manual became the foundation for supporting the smooth transition of the Training Coordinator position to the OSFM Personnel Services Section, helping ensure stability during the hand-off.



After the retirement of Heidi Richie, SPU also stepped in temporarily to handle the duties of the State Fire Prevention Commission secretary. During that time, the unit began developing a second desktop manual to support the transfer of those responsibilities to the incoming regional administrative specialist, reinforcing the agency’s focus on clear documentation, consistency, and long-term stability.

Beyond those transitions, SPU also worked closely with the Logistics & Technology Section Chief on a variety of operational needs, including fleet management, equipment oversight, respiratory protection programs, and the annual review of the OSFM fee schedule. These efforts highlight the unit’s flexibility, technical expertise, and steady support of day-to-day agency operations.



Integrity, Fairness, Service

OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL AGENCY PRIORITIES

OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL
MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE
1201 REISTERSTOWN ROAD
PIKESVILLE, MD 21208
410.653.8980
MDOSFM.WIXSITE.COM/BLOG



www.mdsp.maryland.gov/firemarshal



Prevent and investigate fire and explosive related incidents while supporting allied public safety agencies.



Enhance the safety of all Marylanders and visitors to our State by the enforcement of laws, regulations, and requirements pertaining to:
The prevention of fire, Explosives, combustibles, and other dangerous articles, Installation of equipment intended to control, detect, or extinguish fire, The suppression of arson



Support citizens and the communities in which they live by the implementation of fire safety programs and assistance in fire prevention matters.



Develop an efficient and effective workforce.







PERSONNEL SERVICES

PERSONNEL SERVICES SECTION

The Personnel Section of the Office of the State Fire Marshal is responsible for all hiring, recruitment trainings, and professional development for the agency. Led by Deputy Chief Derek Chapman, the Personnel Services Section worked through some major changes in 2025.

The training coordinator was transitioned from the Special Projects Unit to the Personnel Services Section, which enhanced the coordination of all training and professional development scheduling and record keeping.



DEPUTY CHIEF
DEREK A. CHAPMAN

RETIREMENTS AND SEPARATIONS

Administrative Specialist Patti Ward retired Jan. 1 after 45 years of state service, including nearly 30 years with the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Ward joined the agency in 1995 after beginning her state career in 1979. Over the years, she became a familiar and dependable presence, known for her professionalism, deep institutional knowledge and willingness to help others. Her steady support kept day-to-day operations running smoothly and provided valuable guidance to generations of employees.

Administrative Specialist Mary Bare of the Special Operations Section officially retired on January 1. Bare was widely known throughout the state and nation for her expertise in the explosives and fireworks field. She played a key role in developing the fireworks permitting process, establishing fireworks testing procedures, and shaping several licensing requirements for blasters and explosive handlers.

Bare retired with more than 20 years of dedicated service to the OSFM, following her earlier career with the Maryland State Police.



That same day, K-9 Zorro, partnered with Deputy Chief Fire Marshal John Nelson, also retired. Zorro is a graduate of ATF K-9 Class #117 and spent eight years supporting investigative work across Maryland. Zorro also assisted partner agencies in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Trained as a food-reward canine, the K-9 required ongoing daily training and reinforcement throughout his service. Zorro will remain with his handler in retirement.

In March, Deputy State Fire Marshal Christopher Fenzel also retired after a distinguished career with the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

He began his career in the Upper Eastern Region, where he conducted fire investigations and performed code enforcement duties. His passion for boating eventually led him to the Special Operations Section, where he finished his career as a bomb technician assigned to the Underwater Hazardous Devices Team.

In July, Deputy State Fire Marshal Jeffrey Frye retired from State service.

In November, the Western Region office celebrated the retirement of Administrative Specialist Heidi Richie, marking the conclusion of an extraordinary 43-year career with the





Office of the State Fire Marshal. Throughout more than four decades of service, Richie became a cornerstone of the Western Region team, providing unmatched institutional knowledge, historical continuity, and operational stability that shaped the evolution of the OSFM.

Fire Safety Inspector Buddy Meadows and Fire Safety Inspector Joseph Goodrich, and Administrative Officer Charynce Leslie separated from OSFM.

Retired Deputy Fire Marshal Richard (Dickie) Powell passed away on November 29, 2025. He was hired by the Office of the State Fire Marshal in 1980 and assigned to the Northeast Region Office (which at the time included Kent, Harford, and Cecil counties). He was later assigned to the Eastern Region Office, becoming the only Deputy Fire Marshal to serve in two different offices. He served in the fire service industry for over 70 years, including many years and positions with Galena VFD and MSFA. Additionally, he served

in the Army National Guard and the Air Force.

APPOINTMENTS

In June, Cristy Cardenas was appointed to the Special Operations Section to fill the role which was made with the retirement of Mary Bare.



Deputy Fire Marshal Deanna Pelton joined the Office of the State Fire Marshal in June after previously serving with the Hagerstown Fire Marshal's Office.



In July, Office Clerk Rosalyn Loney was converted back into a full-time position. After the conversion, Loney transitioned to our training coordinator and will support the agency under the Personnel Services Section. Also, in July, Fire Safety Inspector Lawrence Palmer joined the OSFM and is assigned to the Northeast Region Office.

In September, Ngan Ho was appointed as the Office of the State Fire Marshal's Public Affairs Officer. Previously assigned to the Maryland State Police Office of Media Communications, Ho brought a background in journalism and videography to the role.

Since joining the office, Ho has helped expand the agency's digital presence by producing short-form videos and visual content that better connect with the public and engage audiences across social media platforms.



In October, the Office of the State Fire Marshal filled another newly created position with the appointment of Danielle Hackett as the agency's Public Information Act and Records Retention Officer.



In this role, Hackett manages Public Information Act requests, including the review and redaction of body-worn camera footage, while overseeing the agency's records retention program and helping ensure compliance with state records requirements.

The Maryland Office of the State Fire Marshal appointed Dexter Hodges as Acting Chief Deputy, expanding his leadership role within the agency.

Previously serving as Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal and commander of the Northeast Region, DCSFM Hodges oversaw operations in Harford, Cecil and Carroll counties. A longtime member of the agency, he has held a variety of investigative and supervisory assignments and continues to support fire investigation operations and public safety initiatives across Maryland.



PERFORMANCE AWARDS COMMITTEE

In 2025, several OSFM staff were recognized for outstanding service and contributions.

Administrative Specialist Penny Doty received a Commanders Award. In 2024, Doty was recognized by her commander for consistently completing all extra tasks and special assignments without exception. In addition to the daily activities and duties of the Upper Eastern Region Office, Doty also assisted in the transition of a new administrative specialist for the Lower Eastern Region Office. She took great pride in ensuring that our new administrative specialist was familiar with all the administrative tasks she might encounter in the day-to-day operations of a region. Additionally, she assisted with the transition of the Fire Fatality Report to our newest Administrative Specialist. Doty set aside extra time to ensure our new administrative specialist was educated and confident in this assignment. Doty tackled the administration and oversight of the Fire Sprinkler Licensing Program. This program offers statewide certification and licensing of fire sprinkler companies to operate legally within Maryland. Taking on this new program required Doty to learn the new dynamics of statewide requirements for licensing as a Maryland business and adhere to the Life Safety Code.



In addition to her previously assigned duties, Doty graciously took on the administrative role for the Commission Workgroup. This workgroup was formed to research and advance the knowledge of Lithium-Ion Battery Safety within the State of Maryland. In addition to handling scheduling, organizing, and recording minutes for the large Commission, she currently assists with these tasks among the six subcommittees. Many of its members have highly commended her work and organization of this Workgroup.



The Underwater Hazardous Devices Team (UHDT), including Deputy Chief Duane Svites, Senior Deputy Dale Ednock, Senior Deputy Retired Chris Fenzel, Senior Deputy William Potts, and Firefighter Jonas Brooks of the Annapolis Fire Department, received citations for actions on March 26, 2024, when the Francis Scott Key Bridge was struck by a cargo ship and collapsed, with reports of individuals in the water. The OSFM UHDT received an urgent request from the Maryland State Police Dive Team to deploy divers and a remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV).

The UHDT boarded one of Maryland State Police's vessels with the ROV and began scanning the collapsed bridge debris for victims while also assessing the cargo ship for any indications of an intentional act, including terrorism. Throughout the day, as search and rescue operations continued, the team was assigned multiple objectives, including locating vehicles that were on the bridge at the time of the collapse.

The first day pushed the team to exhaustion, with members working late into the night until operations were suspended due to safety concerns. In the following days, UHDT continued to deploy, using the ROV to conduct GPS mapping of the debris field, a critical task that supported recovery and salvage operations.

The UHDT operated at the highest level under extreme conditions, pitch-black darkness, freezing temperatures, and long hours. Each team member who responded to this historic event demonstrated exceptional dedication and professionalism.

Master Deputy Oliver Alkire received a Commendation Award from 2024. He was recognized by his commander as a multifaceted and invaluable asset to the agency. Master Deputy Alkire's excellent time management skills and tireless work ethic have greatly enhanced the Northeast Region Office's productivity.

Master Deputy Alkire consistently demonstrates exceptional commitment to his work, colleagues, and the public. Beyond his primary investigative responsibilities, he serves as the OSFM's Public Information Officer and spokesman. He also contributed significantly to the agency's communications, coordinating new monthly submissions to the Maryland State Police IMPACT newsletter, the MSFA Volunteer Trumpet, and the Maryland Fire Chiefs' Association Back-step Newsletter. His daily updates on OSFM social media outlets demonstrate his proactive approach to keeping the public informed and engaged, reflecting his exceptional communication skills and commitment to transparency.



Master Deputy Alkire's dedication to public service extends well beyond his duties within OSFM. He frequently assists the National Fire Academy and the Maryland Fire & Rescue Institute by conducting K-9 scans for their origin and cause classes. Additionally, he has represented Maryland at the Florida Insurance Fraud Education Committee conference annually, sharing his expertise and expanding the agency's influence nationwide.

Master Deputy Alkire also plays an integral role in the OSFM Honor Guard Unit, which trains quarterly with the Maryland State Police and other allied agencies. His participation in this unit underscores his unwavering respect for the agency's values and commitment to honoring those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Master Deputy Alkire's pursuit of professional development is equally commendable. In May 2024, he earned the Certified Fire Investigator (CFI) certification from the International Association of Arson Investigators. Additionally, he holds certifications as a fire and explosion investigator and instructor through the National Association of Fire Investigators.

Master Deputy Alkire has consistently received outstanding performance reviews for his time management, productivity, and overall positive impact on the Northeast Region Office and the entire agency. These accomplishments are a testament to his skill set and unwavering commitment to the OSFM and the citizens of Maryland.

Deputy Fire Marshal Timothy McDonald receives James C. Robertson Deputy State Fire Marshal of the Year award.

Throughout 2024, Deputy McDonald demonstrated exceptional dedication to the mission of fire safety and investigation across Maryland. He made himself available after hours and on his scheduled days off, assisting fellow deputies in challenging fire scene investigations and victim interviews. His readiness to serve has made him a vital asset to his team and the broader community.

In 2024, he completed over 100 hours of specialized training, covering explosives awareness, tactical operations, fatal fire investigations, NFPA 921, lithium-ion battery fires, Weapons of Mass Destruction response, and appliance fire investigations. He also recently earned his Certified Fire Investigator (CFI) certification through the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI).



In 2024, he conducted 59 fire safety inspections and led 21 fire investigations, resulting in 14 arrests related to arson. Notably, his investigation into a string of Molotov cocktail attacks led to the swift identification and arrest of two serial arsonists.

Deputy McDonald was nominated along with Master Deputy Oliver Alkire- Northeast Region, Senior Deputy Timothy McDowell- Southern Region, Master Deputy William Potts- Special Operations Section, Senior Deputy John Grothe- Upper Eastern Region, and Senior Deputy Adam Rounds- Western Region.





In February, OSFM staff attended the 35th Congressional Fire Services Institute's National Fire and Emergency Services Dinner & Symposium in Washington, D.C.



During the dinner, Community Risk Reduction Specialist Teresa Ann Crisman was honored on the national stage. Crisman was the recipient of the 2025 CFSI/IFSTA Dr. Anne W. Phillips Award for Leadership in Fire Safety Education. The award recognizes individuals for outstanding lifetime achievement in fire safety education at the national level.

The award presentation took place on February 13 at the 35th Annual National Fire and Emergency Services Dinner in



Washington, D.C., attended by approximately 1,200 fire and emergency officials nationwide.

In July, Deputy Chief Dexter Hodges joined family, friends and former colleagues to honor retired Deputy State Fire Marshal and K-9 handler Frank Rauschenberg for his decades of dedicated service.

He spent more than 30 years with the Office of the State Fire Marshal, much of that time assigned to the former Metro Office, where he investigated fires throughout Carroll, Frederick and Howard counties before retiring in 1998.

Deputy State Fire Marshal Rauschenberg was one of the original members of the K-9 Unit in the mid-1980s and was partnered with K-9s Sam, Fred, and Archie. In the 1970s, he successfully infiltrated the KKK and thwarted a bombing. Deputy Chief Hodges presented him with several items in recognition of his dedicated service, including a State Fire Marshal Certificate of Recognition.



Deputy State Fire Marshal Rauschenberg was a member of the Taneytown Volunteer Fire Company and Vigilant Hose Company. He was a U.S. Navy and Army veteran who served in Vietnam and later retired from the Maryland National Guard with more than 20 years of service.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

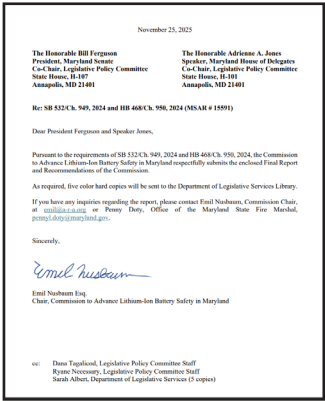


COMMISSION TO ADVANCE LITHIUM-ION BATTERY SAFETY IN MARYLAND

In 2024, Senate Bill 532/Chapter 949 and House Bill 468/Chapter 950 established the Commission to Advance Lithium-Ion Battery Safety in Maryland. The growing risk associated with the improper use, storage, and disposal of rechargeable batteries has contributed to a rapid increase in serious incidents nationwide and throughout Maryland.

The Commission was formed to study lithium-ion battery safety issues and recommend ways to reduce risks, improve public safety, and support the responsible reuse and recycling of batteries across the state. The Commission focused on best practices, standards, and guidelines related to lithium-ion batteries.

The Commission met regularly, holding 19 meetings, hearing testimony from 17 subject-matter experts across multiple topic areas, and conducting four site visits. The Commission achieved a quorum and unanimously approved its final report on November 25, 2025.



WORKGROUP TO DEVELOP FIRE SAFETY BEST PRACTICES FOR PRE-1974 HIGH-RISE APARTMENT BUILDINGS

Workgroup to Develop Fire Safety Best Practices for Pre-1974 High Rise Apartment Buildings

HB823/Ch. 744(2), 2024
Final Report – June 30, 2025

Approved by the full Workgroup on June 30, 2025
Submitted by:
Acting State Fire Marshal, Jason Mowbray, Workgroup Chair

Maryland’s House Bill 823/Chapter 0744 established a workgroup to create fire safety best practices for pre-1974 high-rise apartment buildings. The workgroup focused on studying fire safety risks in high-rise apartment buildings that do not have automatic sprinkler systems or other fire safety technology. They recommended a layered approach to improving fire safety in pre-1974 high-rise apartment buildings that lack sprinkler systems.

The Workgroup met over the course of nine months and held 16 public meetings, resulting in an interim report submitted to the Maryland General Assembly in December 2024 and a comprehensive final report in June 2025.

NON-ARC-RESISTANT JACKETED CORRUGATED STAINLESS STEEL TUBING

Effective June 1, 2025, Maryland expanded the Flynn and Laird Act under House Bill 222 to completely close a major safety loophole by banning the sale, transfer, and distribution of non-arc-resistant corrugated stainless steel tubing (CSST) across the state. While the initial 2022 legislation prohibited the installation of standard yellow-jacketed CSST in new construction and major renovations, the 2025 update prohibits suppliers and retailers from selling remaining inventory.

Consequently, all CSST products distributed in Maryland must now feature arc-resistant jacketing that meets the rigorous Listing Criteria 1027 standard, protecting gas lines from punctures that can lead to structure fires during lightning strikes. The law is enforced through civil penalties of up to \$1,000 per violation.

The law honors fallen Maryland firefighters Nathan Flynn and Joshua Laird. It also mandates a comprehensive joint safety study by the Maryland Department of Labor and the Office of the State Fire Marshal, with a final report due by September 1, 2026.

OFFICE OF THE MARYLAND
STATE FIRE MARSHAL
MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE

LEGISLATION UPDATE
MD PUBLIC SAFETY CODE § 12-206
Construction Requirements for Natural Gas and Liquefied Propane Piping Systems
Effective June 1, 2025
Expands the Flynn-Laird act from 2022

Prohibits the use of the non arc-resistant CSST in:

- (1) the new construction of a customer-owned natural gas or liquefied propane piping system in a building;
- (2) a natural gas or liquefied propane piping system in a renovated property if the renovation affects more than 50% of the total square footage of the property; or
- (3) a natural gas or liquefied propane piping system that requires the addition of a new gas line to the gas piping system.

A PERSON WHO VIOLATES THIS SECTION IS SUBJECT TO A CIVIL PENALTY NOT EXCEEDING \$1,000

For more information visit our website at <https://mdsp.maryland.gov/firemarshal>

ONE MISSION | ONE GOAL | A SAFER MARYLAND

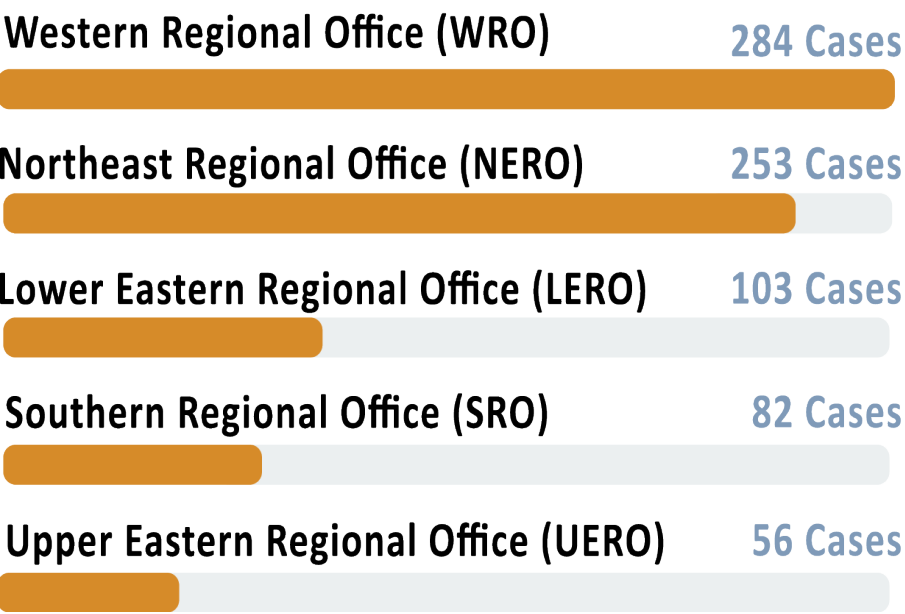
AGENCY STATS & MARYLAND FIRE INCIDENT REPORTING



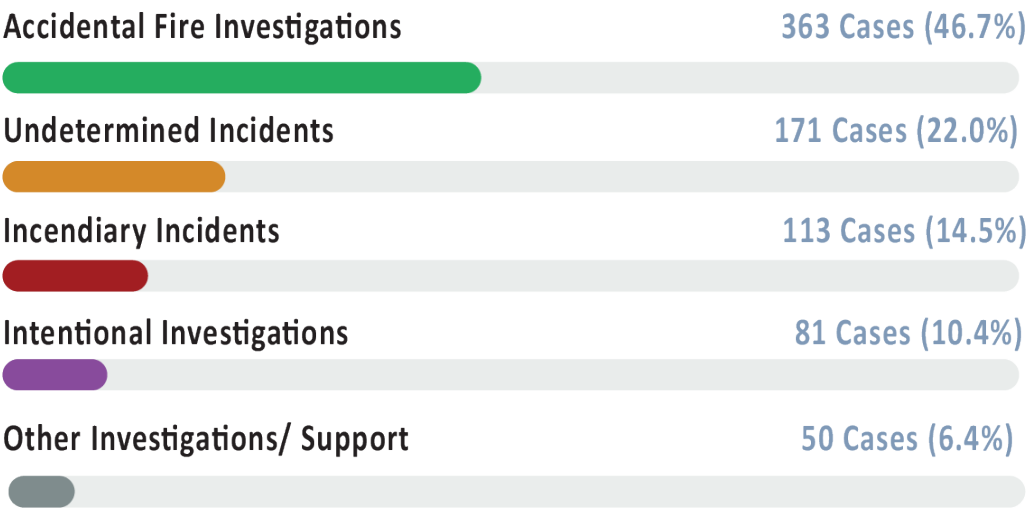
AGENCY STATS



INCIDENTS BY REGION

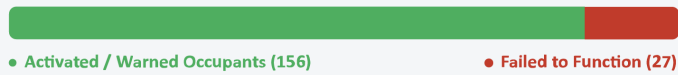


INCIDENT CLASSIFICATION TYPOLOGY



LIFE SAFETY DEVICE PERFORMANCE

SMOKE ALARM OPERATIONAL STATUS (WHEN PRESENT)



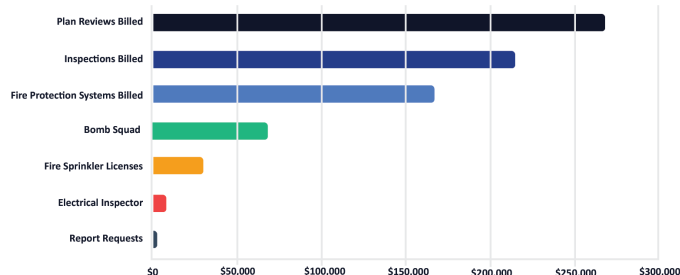
COMMERCIAL SPRINKLER SUPPRESSION STATUS



CASE WORKLOAD BY MONTH

JAN 77	FEB 69	MAR 84	APR 65
MAY 61	JUN 52	JUL 77	AUG 42
SEP 61	OCT 61	NOV 67	DEC 57

Revenue Stream Distribution



INCIDENTS BY COUNTY

Washington County	156
Allegany County	97
Cecil County	87
Harford County	77
Carroll County	68
Wicomico County	55
Charles County	42
Dorchester County	32
Garrett County	29
St. Mary's County	25
Queen Anne's County	18
Caroline County	17
Somerset County	16
Calvert County	13
Baltimore City	12
Kent County	12
Talbot County	9
Baltimore County	6
Howard County	3
Frederick County	2
Anne Arundel County	2

\$759,018.04
Revenue Generated

2,646
Total Billed Operations

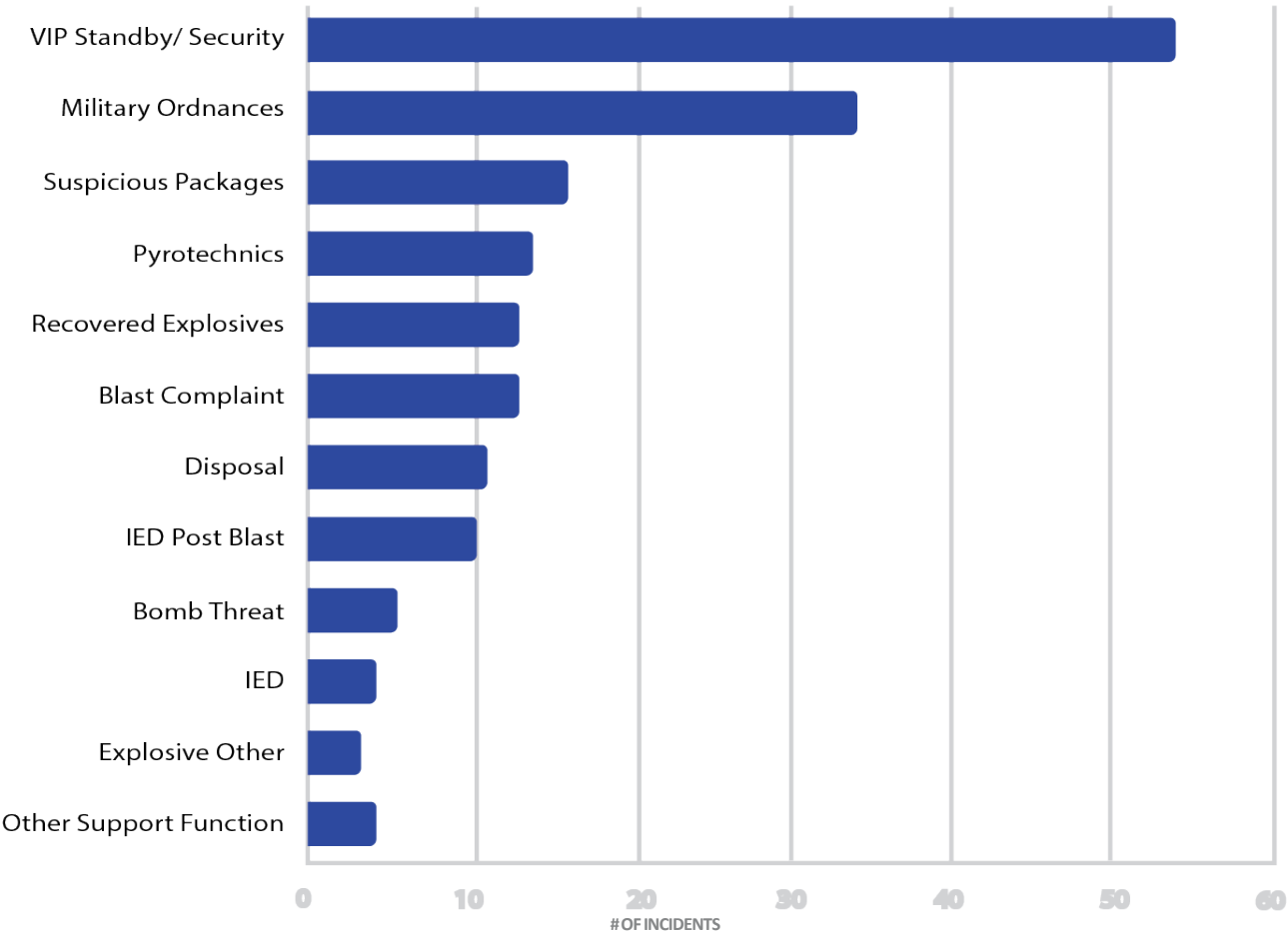
652
Permitted Firework Displays

651,633.04
Core Operations Revenue

2025 SPECIAL OPERATIONS AGENCY OVERVIEW

183 Deployments	111 Overtime Incidents	118 Cases Closed	11 Cases Suspended
2 Avg Manpower per Case	1hr 40 min Avg On-Scene Time	13 OSFM Bomb Technicians	36.59% Percent of DFM Bomb Technicians

Incident Responses by Operational Category



2025 K-9 UNIT AGENCY OVERVIEW

188

TOTAL DEPLOYMENTS

735

TOTAL SCENE HOURS

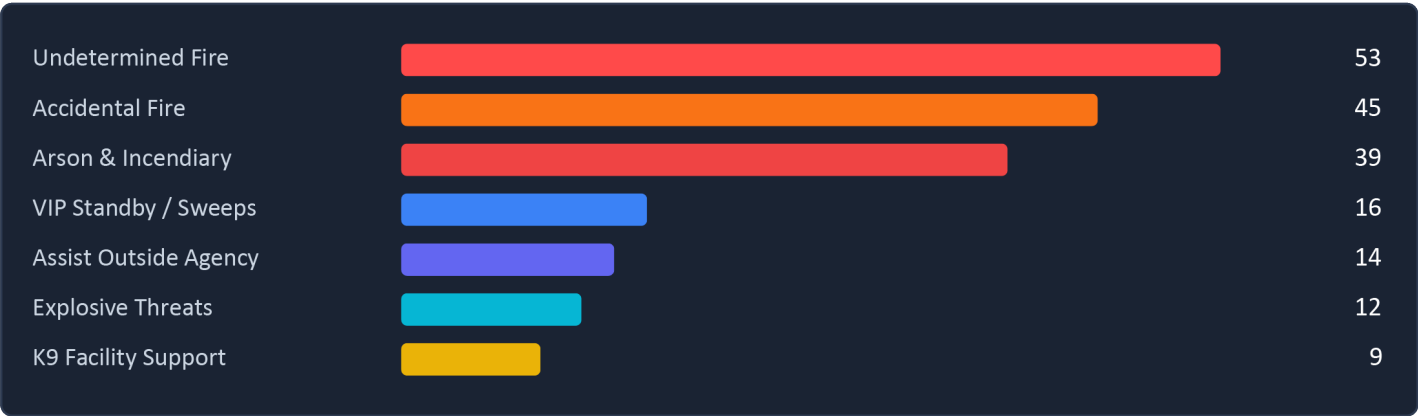
65

MOST CALLS (ALKIRE/
BLONDIE)

HANDLER & K9 TEAM RESOURCE UTILIZATION

HANDLER / K9 TEAM	SPECIALIZATION / SPECIALTY FOCUS	CALLOUTS	SCENE HOURS	SHARE (%)
Alkire / Blondie	Accelerant Detection (ADC)	65	191	35%
Decker / Taylor	Accelerant Detection (ADC)	61	247	32%
Thomas / Deacon	Accelerant Detection (ADC)	27	134	14%
McIntyre / Paulie	Explosives / Weapons (EDC)	15	100	8%
Rounds / Quinn	Fire Origin / Cause (ADC)	8	24	4%
Wrenn / Rosie	Explosives / Search Warrant (EDC)	7	51	4%
Redding / Sandy	Facility Support / Comfort Dog	5	18	3%

INCIDENT PROFILE DISTRIBUTION



STRATEGIC TACTICAL MILESTONES

-  **100% Lab Accuracy:** Canine field alerts directly achieved total correlation with subsequent positive laboratory forensic test confirmations.
-  **Special Event Safety:** Swept critical infrastructure and vehicle checkpoints for major regional events (UMD Terps Football, Commanders Stadium NFL games, Oceans Calling Concert, SU Graduation).

2025 CODE ENFORCEMENT AGENCY OVERVIEW

11,783

INITIAL INSPECTIONS

762

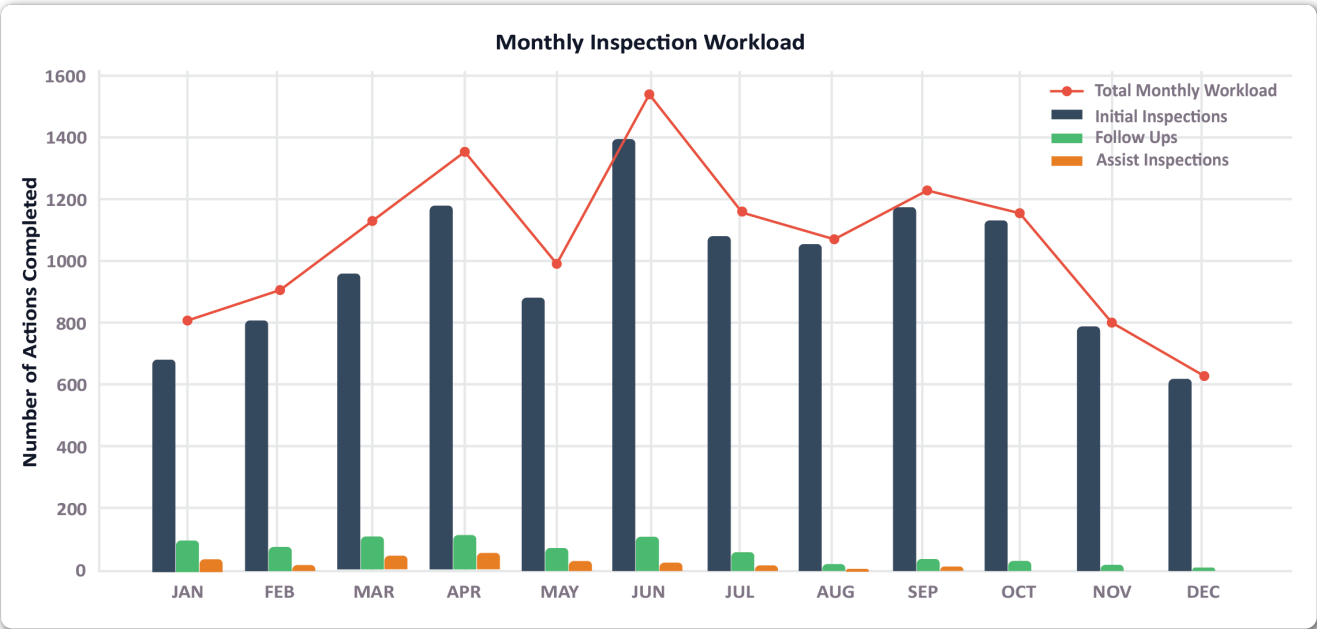
FOLLOW-UP VISITS

254

ASSISTS

12,799

TOTAL INSPECTIONS



997

TOTAL SYSTEMS PLANS RECEIVED

104

TOTAL SYSTEMS PLANS REVIEWED

1357

TOTAL ARCHITECTURAL PLANS RECEIVED

1392

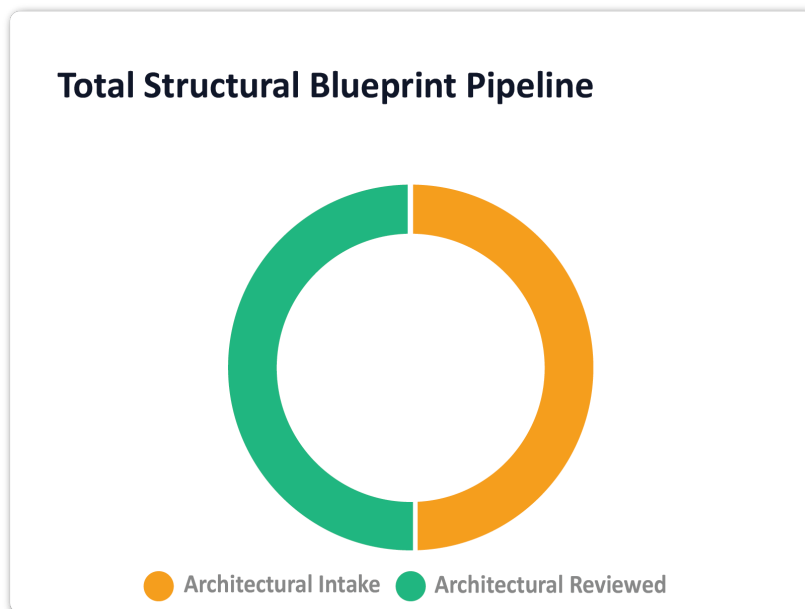
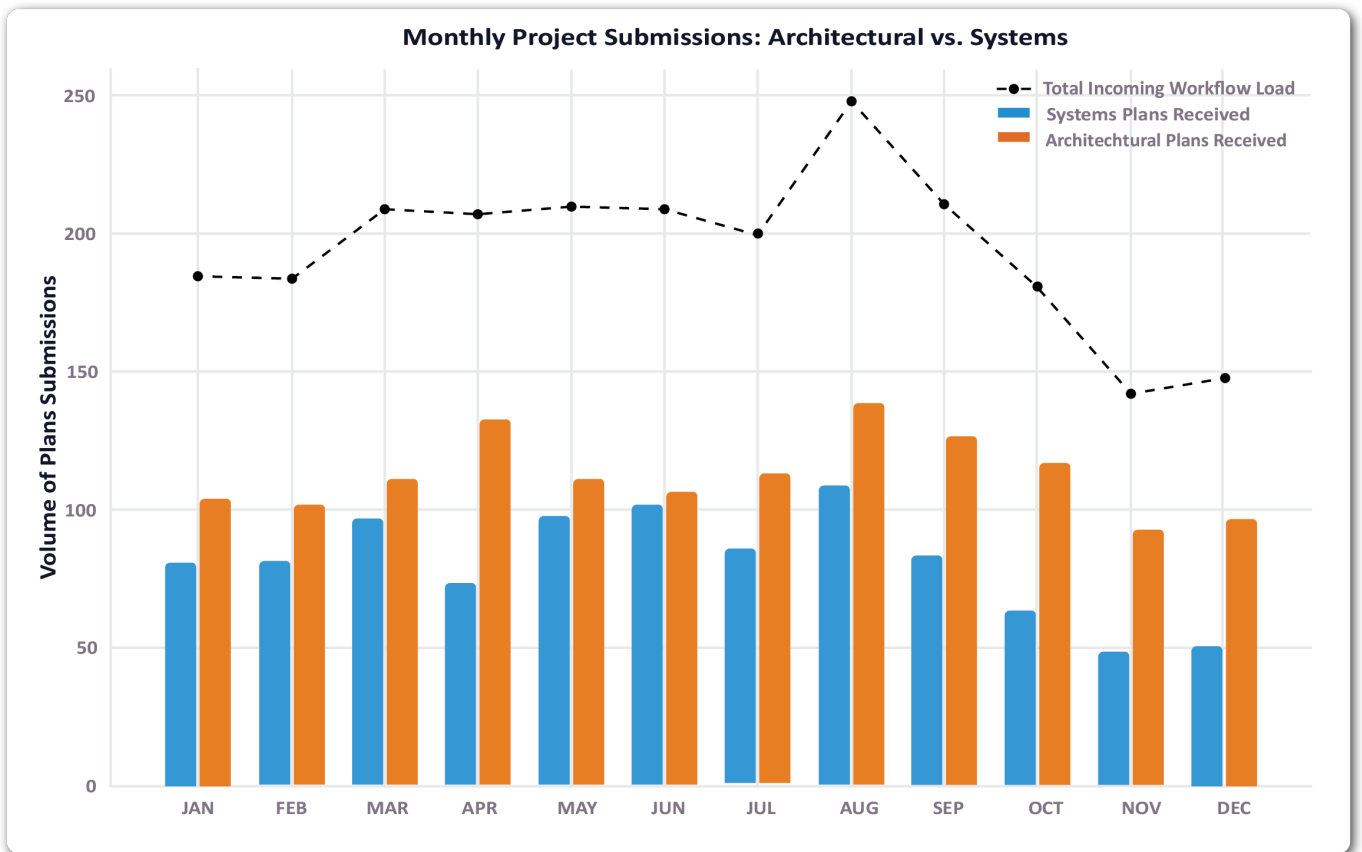
TOTAL ARCHITECTURAL PLANS REVIEWED

1496

TOTAL PLANS REVIEWED

72

TOTAL FIRE INSPECTIONS BY ENGINEERING STAFF



2025 COMMUNITY EVENTS

TOTAL EVENTS

142

Statewide Activities

TOTAL STAFF ENGAGED

363

Personnel engagements

COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS

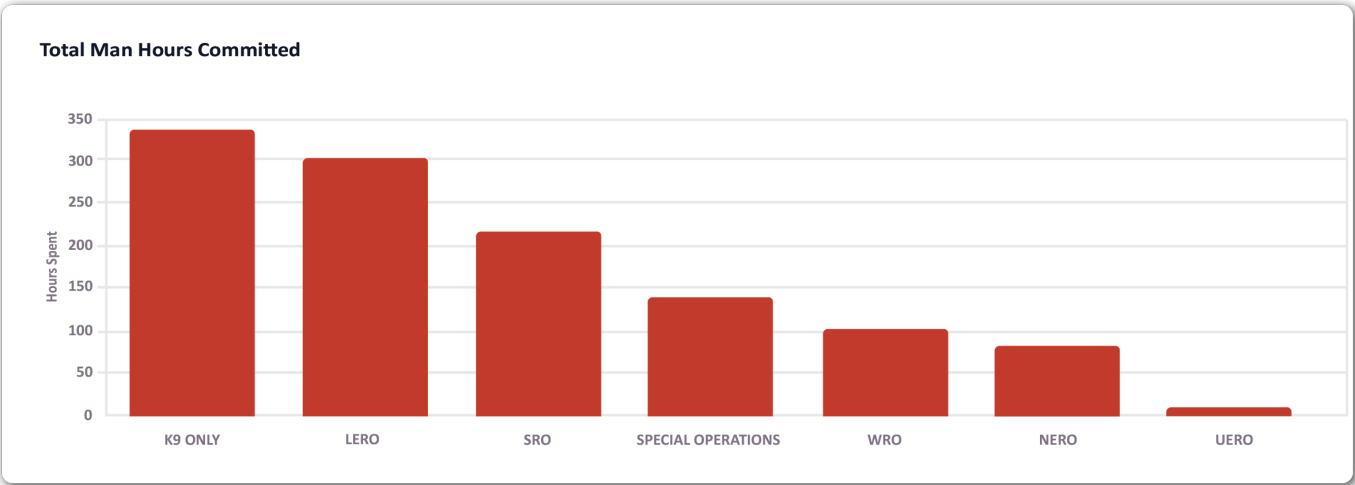
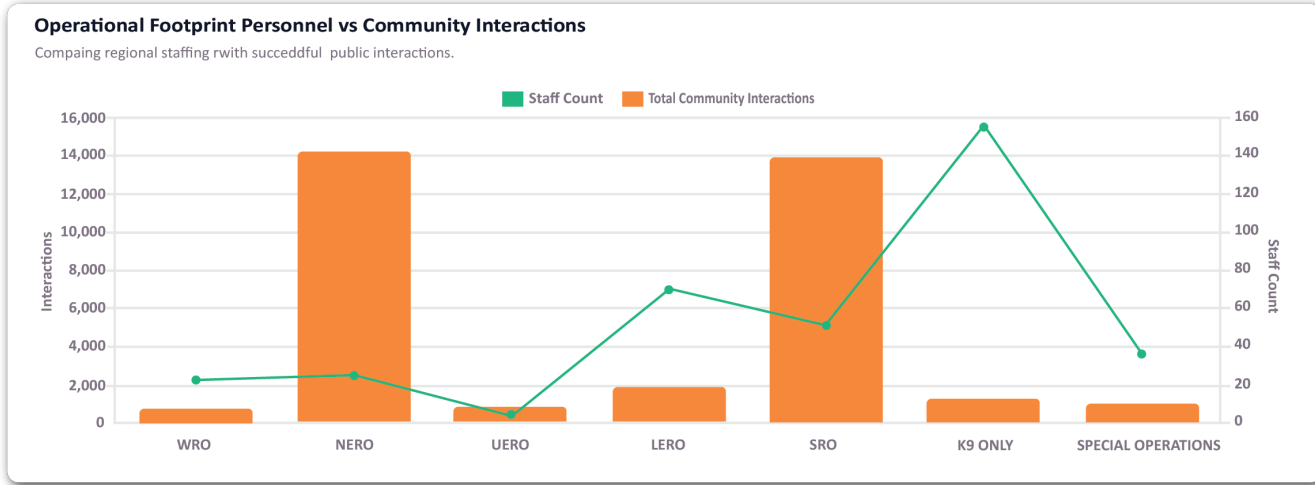
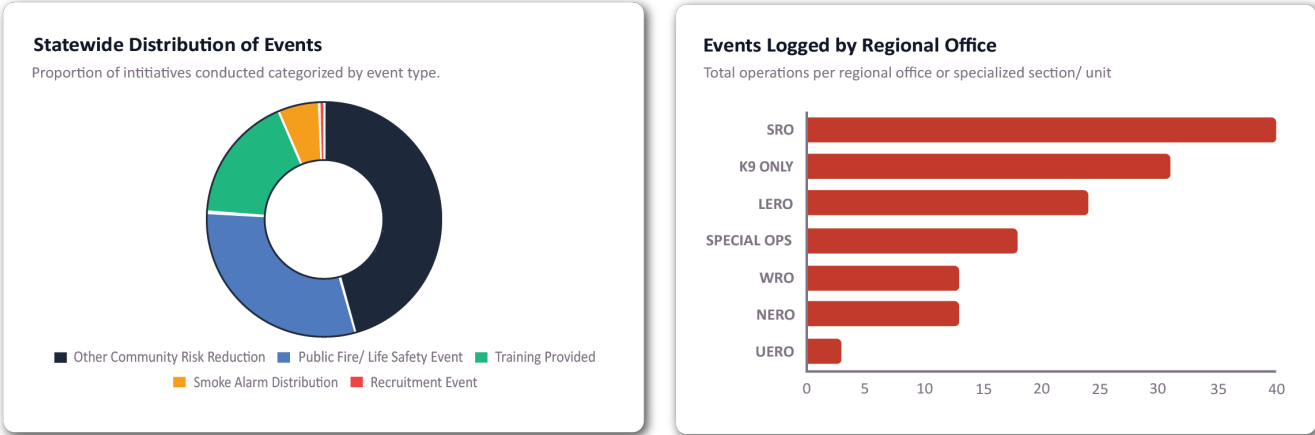
33,046

Direct public reaches

TOTAL MAN HOURS

1,195

Hours dedicated



MARYLAND FIRE INCIDENT REPORTING

12,492
TOTAL FIRES

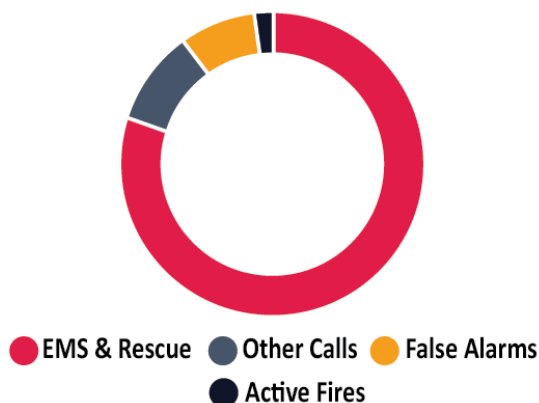
ESTIMATED PROPERTY LOSS
\$231.1 M
Structural & Vehicle Damage

CIVILIAN FATALITIES
71

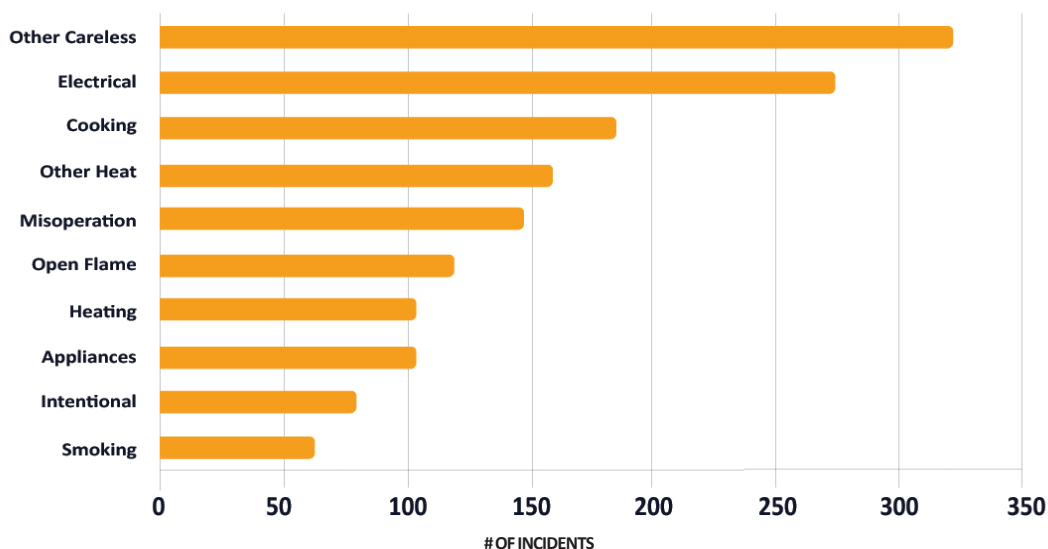
TOTAL EMERGENCY RESPONSES
678,331
Fires, EMS & False Alarms

All data is as reported by the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) for 2025

Total Dispatched Call Volume



Primary Fire Cause



2025 FIRE FATALITIES

1 & 2 FAMILY DWELLINGS

45 Cases

63.4% of Total Fire Deaths

APARTMENTS & MOBILE HOMES

11 Cases

10 Apartments | 1 Mobile Home

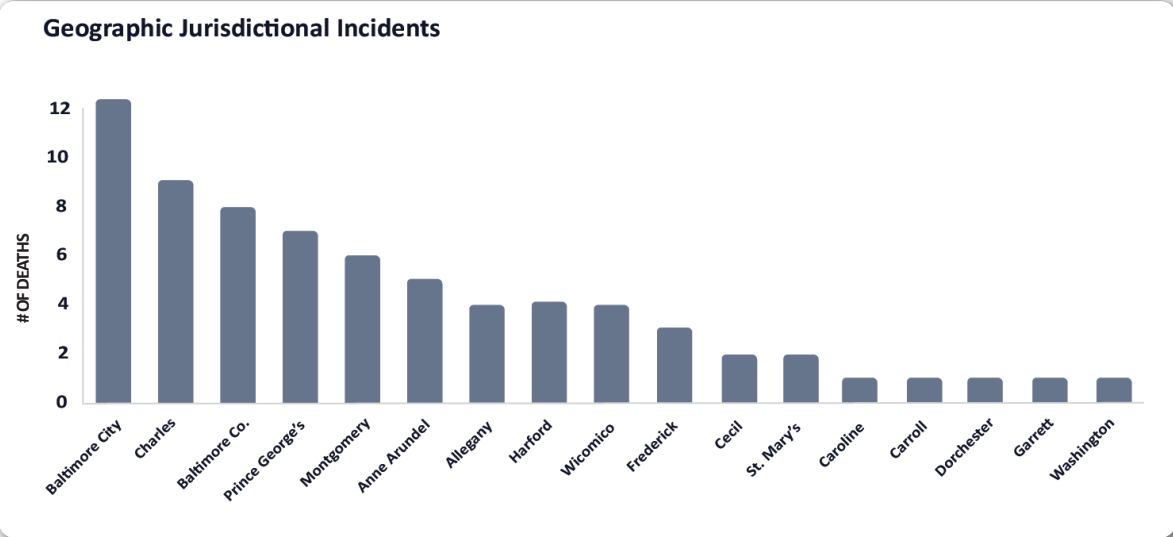
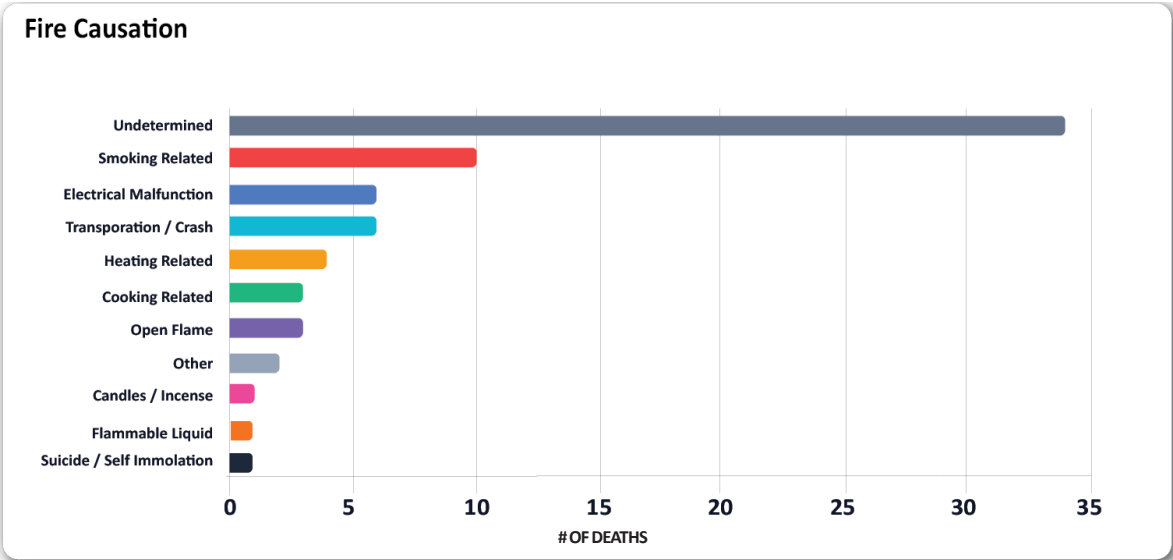
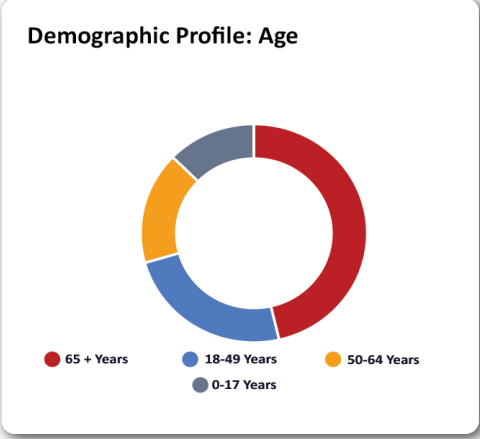
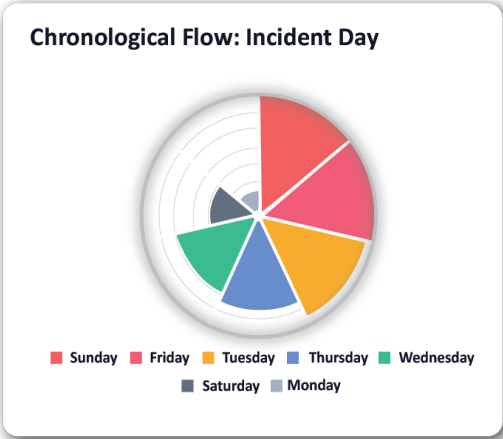
SENIOR DEMOGRAPHICS (65+)

33 Cases

46.5% Senior Fatality Density

TOTAL FIRE FATALITIES

71





**ONE MISSION.
ONE GOAL.
A SAFER MARYLAND.**



OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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2025