

## Workgroup Summary

# Whole-of-Government Approach

### Overarching Goal:

Employ a proactive and fully resourced whole-of-government approach, with significant involvement by the fire service, to address threats — including fire — to the health and safety of our nation's population.

### Issue:

Our nation's fire and emergency services have an all-hazards role and mission that extends beyond the fire problem in the United States – ranging from responding to natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods as well as threats to homeland security to ensuring immediate care is provided to those experiencing overdoses, often serving as a healthcare “safety net” for people experiencing homelessness, and organizing and staffing mass vaccination clinics during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff shortages facing the career and volunteer fire services and the wellbeing of fire and EMS personnel have wide ranging impacts not just at a local and state level, but at the national level as well.

The fire service must be included in federal policy development when federal agencies develop policies and programs related to public safety, such as first responder mental health, building and fire codes, and the five mission areas of the National Preparedness Goal (prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery).

In 2011, fire departments responded to just over 30 million calls; in 2021, fire departments ran more than 36 million calls per year — a 22% increase. These calls are not just for structural fire, but wildfire and other natural disasters; emergency medical response, mutual aid, hazardous materials response, water rescue, active shooter and hostile events, and much more.<sup>37</sup>

The National Fire Protection Association estimates the total cost of fire in the United States (the collective of all net expenditure on fire protection and all net losses due to fire incidents) in 2014 was \$328.5 billion, which was 1.9% of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Losses that year were \$55.4 billion.<sup>38</sup>

Between 2013 and 2022, 37,295 people in the United States died from fire.<sup>39</sup>

The August 2023 Maui fire was the deadliest in modern history and early estimates indicate rebuilding could cost over \$5.5 billion with the overall economic toll estimated as high as \$16 billion.<sup>40 41</sup>

Beyond whole-of-government reactive responses to fire and other disasters, America also needs a proactive, resourced whole-of-government approach to our nation's fire problem. The most effective way to achieve this goal is through the United States Fire Administration (USFA), the lead federal agency, which represents over one million firefighters and emergency services personnel who serve a most vital role in protecting our communities from fire and other threats.

Many departments and agencies in the federal government administer programs that impact the fire and emergency services. These departments have a responsibility to engage with fire service stakeholders — inside and outside of the federal government — when developing policies, programs, and procedures impacting fire and life safety. Despite the fire service's significant footprint within these departments' missions, there is a lack of coordination and cohesive policy development among the agencies.

A whole-of-government approach to fire and emergency services could best be achieved by USFA coordinating these policies within the federal government and ensuring that the fire service

stakeholders can more effectively operate at that level. The United States Fire Administration needs to become more of a coordinator of multidisciplinary response, preparedness, and mitigation within FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security. The USFA must be fully funded and appropriately staffed in order to execute its mission. As many response agencies already have, each FEMA region should have a dedicated USFA specialist to assist in the planning and response to disasters.

Protecting our nation from fire and other threats to our citizens cannot be addressed in silos, it must be addressed holistically and proactively.

## Accomplishments:

- ▶ The national fire service organizations successfully advocated for the passage of legislation to reauthorize the United States Fire Administration and the AFG/SAFER grant programs.
- ▶ The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation requested and received a special Presidential Proclamation recognizing the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Ceremony in May 2024.
- ▶ CFSI submitted a request to the Office of Bureau of Justice Assistance to give the U.S. Fire Administrator a visible and active role in the Public Safety Medal of Valor Program.
- ▶ CFSI passed a consensus resolution, submitted by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, to endorse the work of the United States Fire Administration's Whole-of-Government Working Group.

## Recommendations:

### United States Fire Administration

- ▶ Need to develop an awareness campaign within the federal government and for the public of the United States Fire Administration.

**Background:** There is a lack of awareness about the United States Fire Administration. The United States Fire Administration was authorized as the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration by the Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974. Domiciled initially in the U.S. Department of Commerce, the agency had its name changed in 1978 and one year later was relocated to the newly formed Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1979. In 2002, Congress relocated USFA to the newly formed U.S. Department of Homeland Security when it approved legislation establishing the agency.

USFA represents over one million firefighters and emergency services personnel. Its leadership team possesses a broad range of experience and backgrounds in disaster response. Further, the training it provides to members of the fire and emergency services through the National Fire Academy increases our nation's capabilities to respond to all disasters that threaten our homeland. Despite the importance of USFA's mission to the security of our country, the agency and its leaders have been underutilized at the federal policy level since its inception. The United States Fire Administration deserves proper stature at the federal level because of its mission and the critical roles performed by its one million constituents in protecting our homeland.

USFA also needs to exert more effort in educating the public about its mission and the all-hazards role of our nation's fire and emergency services. Each day, the public witnesses fire apparatus and EMS vehicles responding to emergency calls.

Nevertheless, they lack an understanding of the staffing, training, and equipment needed to respond to approximately 37 million emergency calls each year, and the costs associated with maintaining a fire department.

### Research

- ▶ USFA should host a publicly accessible repository of fire prevention and safety research, including research funded through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants focused on firefighter health and safety,

fire prevention and life safety, and recruitment and retention.

**Background:** The Federal Emergency Management Agency released a report in December 2022 titled “Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grant Program Research and Development (R&D) Activity: Project Abstracts.” The beginning of the report provides general information about the grant program, including the number of research projects funded from FY05 through FY21 (137) and the aggregate amount of grant funding awarded (\$140,635,997). The report then provides abstracts of all the research projects, including potential outcomes stated by the applicants. At the time of publication, 31 of the 137 projects were active, while 106 were designated as closed. A repository that includes the results of this research with links to published papers would be of great value to the federal government, the fire and emergency services, and the general public.

The same applies to Fire Prevention and Safety grants: The FEMA grants office or the United States Fire Administration should develop a repository of fire prevention and safety programs funded with AFG grants. By creating such a repository, USFA can facilitate the dissemination of essential safety programs, fostering advancements in prevention programs and potentially reducing the number of deaths and injuries caused by fire.

- ▶ Proposal for an interagency committee chaired by the U.S. Fire Administrator, to enhance coordination of federal fire programs within various federal agencies.

**Background:** There are different interagency committees in the federal government that focus on specific issues. There are interagency committees for the wildland-urban interface, EMS, and environmental changes in public safety. Nevertheless, no committee provides coordination and cohesion for the broad spectrum of federal fire programs among the various federal agencies.

The report presented at the 2022 U.S. Fire Administrator’s Summit on Fire Prevention and Control showed a list of federal agencies overseeing federal fire programs.

These programs impact all aspects of fire and emergency responses. An interagency committee that can facilitate communications among the various agencies administering federal fire programs would strengthen the federal government’s role in supporting local first responders and create greater efficiencies in allocating federal resources to local first responders.

### **Federal Emergency Management Agency**

- ▶ The U.S. Fire Administrator, who holds the position of senior advisor to the FEMA Administrator, must be treated accordingly. Inclusion in policy discussions and pre-disaster and disaster-response meetings with the FEMA Administrator and other senior advisors is vital.

**Background:** “FEMA’s mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.” That is the first line of its mission statement. At the local level, firefighters and emergency services personnel primarily perform this mission. Therefore, the FEMA Administrator should engage the U.S. Fire Administrator in the highest-level discussions on policy matters and pre- and post-disaster response meetings.

- ▶ USFA should have a senior staff member assigned to each FEMA regional office to serve as USFA’s liaison with state and local fire agencies to facilitate the delivery of federal programs and resources that support the mission of state and local fire agencies.

**Background:** The Federal Emergency Management Agency has ten regional offices in different parts of the country, supporting state and local communities with pre-disaster planning and post-disaster recovery. They link local and state emergency operations and FEMA’s headquarters, facilitating communications between FEMA leadership and local and state emergency response operations. USFA should have a senior staff member assigned to each regional office, working directly with local fire and emergency response agencies to ensure that these agencies receive the federal resources needed to respond to large-scale disasters.

- ▶ The U.S. Fire Administrator should accompany the FEMA Administrator whenever the latter travels to communities devastated by disasters, especially when firefighters and emergency

response personnel are extensively involved in the rescue and recovery efforts. With access to resources and USFA personnel trained in recovering operations and incident command, the Fire Administrator can serve an essential function in recovery operations while offering support and technical information to the FEMA Administrator during meetings and media interviews.

**Background:** Quite often, when a large-scale disaster strikes a community, a high-ranking Administration official is dispatched to the scene to send a message to the public about the Administration's commitment to the recovery efforts. During their visits, they meet with local and state officials and conduct interviews with local media to discuss the federal government's role in the recovery efforts.

The U.S. Fire Administrator should accompany the FEMA Administrator whenever the latter travels to communities devastated by disasters, especially when firefighters and emergency response personnel are extensively involved in the rescue and recovery efforts. With access to resources and USFA personnel trained in recovering operations and incident command, the Fire Administrator can serve an essential function in recovery operations while offering support and technical information to the FEMA Administrator during meetings and media interviews.

- ▶ ESF-4 Emergency Support Function (ESF) #4 — The national fire organizations support USFA's initiative to explore how USFA can assume a more significant role in ESF-4.

**Background:** Emergency Support Functions are part of the National Response Framework which outlines how the nation responds to all types of disasters and emergencies. ESF-4 addresses coordinating firefighting activities and providing personnel, equipment, and supplies in support of local, state, tribal, territorial, and insular area agencies involved in wildland, rural, and urban firefighting operations. The United States Forest Service is the lead federal agency for implementing ESF-4.

For many years, USFA has expressed reasons why USFA should assume a more prominent role in ESF-4, primarily for fires in which structural firefighting crews are deployed. On May 1, 2023, USFA Administrator Moore-Merrell conducted a meeting to discuss USFA's role in ESF-4. Representatives for local, state, and national fire organizations attended, as did FEMA and the U.S. Forest Service representatives. Fire representatives agreed that USFA should assume a more significant role, citing USFA's understanding and experience with mutual aid and interstate agreements.

### Department of Homeland Security

- ▶ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA): Need better coordination between the agency and USFA on critical infrastructure programs and cyber and data security for fire departments and EMS agencies.

**Background:** The fire and emergency service falls under the Emergency Services Sector (Emergency Services Sector | Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency CISA), one of the 16 areas of critical infrastructure covered by the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency. CISA focuses on cybersecurity and also public safety communications interoperability through SAFECOM (SAFECOM | CISA). Fire departments continue to work to improve communications and interoperability and are at risk of cyber attacks. USFA should strive to develop a closer relationship with CISA to develop training and alert systems to help fire and EMS departments prepare for 21st Century threats.

- ▶ Science and Technology Directorate: The Directorate should maintain its commitment to disseminating information to the fire service regarding new research and technologies that benefit the firefighters and emergency services personnel.

**Background:** The mission of the Science and Technology Directorate is to "enable effective, efficient, and secure operations across all homeland security missions by applying scientific, engineering, analytic, and innovative approaches to deliver timely solutions and support departmental acquisitions." The operative work for the fire and emergency services is "timely." With emerging

threats placing greater responsibilities on local fire departments to protect their communities, it is imperative that the Department of Homeland Security, through the Science and Technology Directorate, continue its commitment to disseminate research and information on new technologies to the fire service on a “timely” basis.

### Department of Agriculture

- ▶ The United States Forest Service and the United States Fire Administration need to increase collaboration in providing information to the fire and emergency services about the Federal Excess Personal Property Program (FEPP) and the Firefighter Property Program (FPP).

**Background:** FEPP and FPP can provide fire departments with specific types of excess federal equipment and resources. It includes vehicles (pick-up trucks, sports utility vehicles, 2½ ton trucks), fire trucks, generators, trailers, hoses, nozzles, pumps, air compressors, and other equipment used by fire departments. Even though the

U.S. Forest Service is the lead federal agency administering both programs, the U.S. Fire Administration should assume a facilitating role to make fire departments aware of both programs.

### Department of Commerce

- ▶ The United States Fire Administration and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) need to continue their collaboration in developing and implementing a research agenda and distributing research findings to the fire and emergency services. Furthermore, the two agencies need to continue pursuing opportunities with the research community to leverage resources and share data, which will have a far-reaching impact on advancing the field of fire research in our nation.

**Background:** On November 5, 1997, representatives of the U.S. Fire Administration and the National Institute of Standards and Technology signed a Memorandum of Understanding. The purpose of the MOU was to improve and enhance the effectiveness of the cooperation between USFA and NIST in establishing research priorities, conducting the research, and sharing information about the research between the two agencies and the fire safety community. Twenty-five years later, on July 17, 2023, the two agencies reaffirmed their commitment to work together by signing another MOU.

Since 1997, the research community has assumed a more significant role in establishing the research agenda and performing the research. The shift can partly be attributed to the authorization of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program in 2000, which created a grant program for fire research. Since then, the grant program has awarded over \$140 million in federal grants to universities and research facilities for conducting research on firefighter health and safety. Separate from the AFG program, research facilities, such as UL’s Fire Safety Research Institute and the National Development Research Institutes’ affiliate, NDRI-USA, Inc., have been conducting research of their own, looking for solutions to existing fire safety threats with considerable success. And to their credit, UL’s Fire Safety Research Institute has sponsored the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation’s initiative to develop a national fire research agenda. NFFF has now published the 4th edition of its research agenda. As two leading federal agencies for fire research, both USFA and NIST should assume a more active role in this initiative.

### Department of Defense

- ▶ The Department of Defense needs to address the issue of civilian firefighters employed at military installations not being reimbursed for travel costs to attend National Fire Academy classes or backfill stations.

**Background:** Currently, military installations will not cover travel costs for civilian firefighters to attend classes at the National Fire Academy, nor will they cover costs to backfill their stations when these firefighters attend classes.

- ▶ The Department of Defense needs to establish a formal dialogue with the United States Fire

Administration to explore opportunities for technology transfers and surplus property transfers that can benefit the fire and emergency services.

**Background:** The Department of Defense, through the five branches' various research and training centers and the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA), among other offices, conducts extensive research to develop new technologies and training for our nation's military. This includes technologies that can track personnel movement and weather patterns, enhance communications at disaster scenes, detect chemical agents, and optimize resource deployment. This same technology can find applications in the fire service, giving firefighters next-generation equipment that will enable them to perform their work safely. First, however, the Department of Defense and the U.S. Fire Administration must lay the groundwork for a dialogue to initiate discussions on Department of Defense technologies that can benefit our nation's fire and emergency services.

- ▶ The Department of Defense should partner with USFA to ensure that active-duty military personnel who separate from military service are aware of opportunities in the fire and emergency services and that such career changes can be facilitated as seamlessly as possible — including waivers for transferable skills and certifications.

**Background:** Military veterans possess several skills and attributes that make them highly qualified to be firefighters and EMS providers. To help our veterans transition from military careers, the Department of Defense and USFA should develop either a marketing campaign or program that makes veterans aware of opportunities in the fire service. Furthermore, the two agencies should develop a review process to waive course requirements for Firefighter 1 certification based on specific skills acquired during military service as well as ensure military-trained EMS personnel are eligible to obtain National Registry certification.

### Department of Education

- ▶ The United States Fire Administration and the Department of Education need to increase collaboration in tracking and releasing data on incidents involving on- and off-campus student housing fires and carbon monoxide incidents.

**Background:** Both USFA and the Department of Education provide information and statistical data about fires on college campuses on their respective websites. USFA's information focuses primarily on fire prevention, whereas the Department of Education, by law, must compile annual reports of crimes and fires on college campuses using information submitted by colleges and universities.

Fire on college campuses is no longer the threat it once was due to smoke detector and sprinkler requirements in on-campus housing and classrooms; however, the threat of fire remains serious in off-campus housing. The challenge for public safety is determining just how great a threat it is. There is no reporting system for off-campus housing fires, and this problem needs to be addressed if we are to understand the true threat of fire on college campuses. In addition, we need to develop fire safety programs for colleges and local fire departments aimed at off-campus housing, using the synergy of the United States Fire Administration and Department of Education to carry out this initiative.

- ▶ Any action taken by the Administration or Congress to forgive student loans must include loan forgiveness for students employed or volunteering in public service, including the fire and emergency services.

**Background:** If the Biden Administration continues to pursue student loan forgiveness following the Supreme Court ruling, forgiveness should apply to loans held by individuals in public service, including fire and emergency services.

### Department of Health and Human Services

- ▶ USFA must assume a more substantial role in the decision-making process for releasing all COVID and future pandemic- and disaster-related resources from the Strategic National Stockpile.

**Background:** During the pandemic, the national fire organizations worked together to communicate the needs of the fire services to minimize the health and safety risks of COVID-19 to our nation's firefighters and emergency services personnel. They deserved priority access to pandemic-related resources from the national stockpile because they worked on the front lines treating COVID-19 patients, but they did not always receive it. USFA needs to assert itself more in future discussions and implementation of federal policy regarding pandemic response to ensure that our firefighters have a stronger voice at the federal level and acquire the resources they need to protect themselves when the next pandemic strikes.

- ▶ With the passage of the Empowering the United States Fire Administration Act (PL 117-246), the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and USFA will need to coordinate efforts to investigate large-scale fires and develop reports of their joint findings.

**Background:** PL 117-246 states the U.S. Fire Administrator is authorized to “send incident investigators, which may include safety specialists, fire protection engineers, codes and standards experts, researchers, and fire training specialists, to the site of the fire to conduct a fire safety investigation...” The law requires the Administrator to work in cooperation with other federal agencies that also have investigative authority. Although the law does not cite specific agencies, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives are two agencies that have such authority. USFA will need to work with these agencies and other agencies with similar investigative authority to ensure that they collaborate and avoid actions that may impede and negatively impact ongoing investigations.

- ▶ There is a sense among the national fire organizations that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) does not grasp the full operations of the emergency medical services system; therefore, USFA and CMS should formalize lines of communication between the two agencies to enhance the latter's understanding of the fire-service based EMS system in the continuum of emergency medical care.

**Background:** CMS continues to deny reimbursement to EMS agencies unless the patient is transported to a hospital. This failure to recognize the ability of EMS personnel to either treat patients on scene or transport them to alternative destinations of care forces fire departments to perform increasingly high amounts of unreimbursed care. Reimbursing EMS as a form of patient care, rather than simply a mode of transportation to a hospital, would allow fire departments to care for low- acuity patients in a more appropriate and economical manner. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as a whole should also give greater consideration to how EMS agencies, and specifically fire-based EMS agencies, are included in pre- emergency planning through the Assistant to the Secretary for Preparedness and Response as well as all other HHS entities. HHS recognition of the fact that fire departments are EMS agencies, and thus critical components of the overall healthcare system, is an essential component to improving both the day-to-day healthcare system as well as large-scale emergency plans.

- ▶ Emergency Support Function 8 (Public Health and Medical Services Annex): ESF-8 “provides the mechanism for coordinated Federal assistance to supplement state, tribal, and local resources in response to a public health and medical disaster, potential or actual incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response, and/or during a developing potential health and medical emergency.” While FEMA assumes the primary role within DHS to provide support in distributing medical supplies and transporting patients requiring medical aid, ESF-8 does not mention USFA. Yet, at the federal level, USFA represents the most extensive emergency medical delivery system: fire service-based EMS. ESF-8 needs to establish a role for USFA in coordinating and dispatching fire service-based EMS services.

**Background:** In 2007, the Fire Service-Based EMS Advocates released a report titled “PREHOSPITAL EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESPONSE: The Role of the United States Fire Service in Delivery and Response.” Five national fire organizations formed the foundation of the Advocates: the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI), International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF),

International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC). Summarizing the role of the fire service in delivering emergency medical care, the abstract stated:

Prehospital 9-1-1 emergency response is one of the essential public safety functions provided by the United States fire service in support of community health, security, and prosperity. Fire service-based emergency medical services (EMS) systems are strategically positioned to deliver time-critical response and effective patient care.

Fire service-based EMS provides this pivotal public safety service while also emphasizing responder safety, competent and compassionate workers, and cost-effective operations. As the federal, state, and local governments consider their strategic plans for an 'all hazards' emergency response system, EMS should be included in those considerations and decision-makers should recognize that the U.S. fire service is the most ideal prehospital 9-1-1 emergency response agency.

The abstract offers a compelling reason why USFA ESF-8 should clarify a role for USFA in the coordination and dispatch of fire service-based EMS services: the entity that USFA represents at the federal level — the American fire and emergency services — is the largest provider of emergency medical services in the nation and the first agency to respond to public health and medical disasters.

### **Department of Housing and Urban Development**

- ▶ The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and USFA need to increase their communication and collaboration to address fire and life safety in federally funded and insured housing.

**Background:** In 2022, two fires in federally funded housing properties claimed the lives of 29 victims, raising public concern about the existential threat of fire in public housing across the nation. These two fires prompted USFA to conduct a whistle-stop tour with national media events in New York City and Philadelphia to raise greater awareness about the threat of fire in public housing.

As the administrator of federal housing programs in this country, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has primary responsibility at the federal level to oversee compliance with fire codes in federally funded housing properties; however, there is no reason why the United States Fire Administration cannot serve an important safety role, offering support with technical guidance, public safety education programs, fire data, and information about detection and suppression systems.

### **Department of Justice**

- ▶ The U.S. Fire Administrator should have a more significant role in the Public Safety Medal of Valor Program, including the annual awards presentation at the White House.

**Background:** The Public Safety Medal of Valor Program is the highest national award for valor presented to a public safety officer - firefighters, law enforcement officers, and emergency medical services. Awarded by the President of the United States, in the name of Congress, the Medal of Valor is presented to officers who have shown extraordinary valor beyond the call of duty. Despite being the nation's highest-ranking fire service official, the U.S. Fire Administrator plays little to no role in the annual ceremony. This is a disservice to the members of the fire service who are honored every year with this prestigious award.

- ▶ Establish a cooperative agreement between USFA and the Bureau of Justice Assistance to share information about firefighter deaths and injuries.

**Background:** Both the United States Fire Administration (USFA) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) track firefighter line-of-duty deaths. Nevertheless, there is no formal interagency agreement to share information about line-of-duty deaths and injuries or the circumstances surrounding those incidents. A formal data-sharing agreement would help USFA and BJA identify causes of line-of-duty deaths and injuries, allowing the agencies to better determine best practices to avoid future deaths and injuries. A formal agreement will also enhance the review process for determining eligibility for being honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial.



## Department of the Treasury

- ▶ Needs to partner with USFA to inform businesses of tax incentives that support fire sprinkler retrofits.

**Background:** In 2018, Congress approved the Tax Cut and Jobs Act. The legislation included key provisions of the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act, which was first introduced in 2003 and would provide economic incentives to retrofit commercial properties with automatic fire sprinklers. National fire organizations developed the idea of the legislation following the Station Club fire in West Warwick, RI that claimed the lives of 100 victims.

There is plenty of data that demonstrates the efficacy of automatic fire sprinklers. Yet, there are a plethora of commercial properties across the country that lack sprinkler systems to protect against fires. The incentives are straightforward and financially beneficial. Working together, USFA and the Department of Treasury should develop an awareness campaign to alert eligible businesses about the incentive, which will save lives and property.

- ▶ Needs to partner with USFA to ensure fire and emergency services are aware of tax/retirement incentives for fire and EMS personnel (e.g., Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act).

**Background:** Smaller communities nationwide served by volunteer fire departments face a growing risk to their residents due to a shortage of volunteer personnel. There were just 676,900 volunteers in the U.S. in 2020, compared to 897,750 in 1984. Not only are there fewer volunteers, but the average age of volunteer firefighters continues to rise. According to NFPA, more than one-third of volunteers in small communities were over the age of 50 in 2020; in 1987, only 15.9% were.

To address this challenge at the federal level, Congress approved legislation that provides tax incentives for volunteer fire and EMS personnel, however (like the fire sprinkler incentive), there needs to be more awareness about the volunteer incentive. Utilizing their respective resources, USFA and the Department of Treasury should work together to promote the incentive to help the volunteer fire service with recruitment and retention campaigns.

## Department of Veterans Affairs

- ▶ The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should partner with USFA and the five military branches to ensure veterans are aware of fire and emergency services opportunities.

## White House

- ▶ Specifically, USFA should have a representative actively engaged with many of the offices/ councils under the Executive Office of the President, including (but not limited to):
  - ▶ National Economic Council
  - ▶ National Security Council
  - ▶ Climate Policy Office
  - ▶ Office of Science and Technology Policy
  - ▶ Office of the National Cyber Director
  - ▶ National Space Council

**Background:** The roles and actions of firefighters and emergency services personnel are of consequential significance to our nation's economy, environment, and security. Nevertheless, policy offices within the White House have a history of not engaging the U.S. Fire Administrator in the discussions at the highest levels on policy proposals. It is in the best interest of an Administration — and our nation's economic security and safety — to engage the U.S. Fire Administrator in such policy discussions.

- ▶ Participation in the annual National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Memorial Weekend that honors firefighters killed in the line of duty should be a high priority for the President and Vice President.

**Background:** Since the first National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Ceremony in 1981, only two Presidents have attended — President George W. Bush in 2002 and 2007, and President Barack Obama in 2015 — and no Vice President has.