

The Gateway Report

Issues Critical to North Carolina's Fire Service Leadership

***A report presenting the conclusions and
recommendations from the participants of***

The Gateway V Conference

***Pinecroft Sedgefield Fire Department
Greensboro, NC
September 7-9, 2004***

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Introduction

At the invitation of NC State Firemen's Association President Vernon Ward, on September 7, 2004 twenty-nine elected or appointed fire service leaders from sixteen state organizations or agencies, the Southeastern Association of Fire Chiefs, the National Volunteer Fire Council, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and the Commission on Fire Accreditation International met at the Pinecroft-Sedgefield Fire Department for the fifth annual Gateway Conference. The title for "The Gateway Conference" recognizes that we stand in the "Gateway" to our future. We have the opportunity to lead our industry through a portal, or gateway, of positive change. This leadership opportunity gives us a chance to reflect upon lessons learned from past experience, and plan for our future direction. The following is a report documenting the discussions, conclusions, and recommendations of the participants of the conference. The hope is that the fire service in North Carolina will benefit from the experiences of our leadership in attending the conference, and act upon the issues and recommendations in this report. Action should come at the association level, and at the individual level. Above all, it is hoped that the contents of this report will stimulate additional, continued thought and discussion on these and other issues relevant to our fire service. May these discussions create a passion to seek out improvement in all aspects of our service to the community we protect, and to those dependent upon us for leadership.

Purpose

The purpose of "The Gateway V Conference" was to facilitate a meeting among the leaders of North Carolina's fire service to foster consensus on key major issues facing our industry and develop a vision for working towards those issues in a consolidated manner.

Goals

Five goals were established for the conference.

1. Provide an environment for leaders from different arenas to meet and network.
2. Provide individual leadership development.
3. Identify the means to success and the roadblocks that create failure.
4. Identify 4-6 issues that all participants can agree upon as being "key" major issues to advancing our industry.

5. Develop a strategic vision and plan for partnering solutions to the key issues.

Participants

The participants of The Gateway Conference represent almost every professional fire service association in North Carolina, along with representatives of national and regional organizations from inside and outside the State.

Bill Jones, Eastern NC Firefighters Association
Bobby C. Riddle, Professional Firefighters & Paramedics of North Carolina
Brian King, Chaplain
Cathy Lohr, NC Association of Fire Chiefs
Chuck Barham, NC Community College System
G. Winfield Abee, NC Community College System
George Frye, Jr., NC County Fire Marshal's Association
Gordon A. Joyner, NC Association of Rescue and EMS
Jeff Cash, National Volunteer Fire Council - NC Director
James Peele, NC State Firemen's Association
Johnny Teeters, NC Metro Chiefs
Kenneth Crews, NC Fire Marshal's Association
Mike Hill, Volunteer Safety Workers Compensation Fund
J. David Pruitt, NC Fire & Life Safety Education Council
Paul F. Miller, NC State Firemen's Association
Red McKinney, NC Community College System
Richard Sales, Western NC Firefighters Association
Rick Hall, NC Society of Fire-Rescue Instructors
Alex Stanland, NC Association of Fire Chiefs
Steve Sloan, NC Office of State Fire Marshal
Time Bradley, NC Office of State Fire Marshal
Vernon Ward, NC State Firemen's Association
Wesley Hutchins, Piedmont Firemen's Association of NC
David Taylor, Southeastern Fire Chiefs – NC Director
Alan Perdue NC County Fire Marshals Association, IAFC Life Safety Section

The following were special guests of the conference. They were invited to attend and participate to provide leadership development for conference participants, share national perspectives on issues, share success stories from similar endeavors, and stimulate global thought and consideration during group activities.

Bob Dipoli, President

International Association of Fire Chiefs

Heather Schafer, Executive Director
National Volunteer Fire Council

Paul Brooks, Gateway Conference Facilitator
Treasurer, North Carolina State Firemen's Association
Vice Chairman, Commission on Fire Accreditation International

Vision

The members of The original Gateway Conference developed a vision of the fire service in North Carolina from the discussions of issues, priorities, and potential solutions during their 2-½ day experience. This vision has been reaffirmed by each of the four subsequent conferences. It is the desire of the members that the participating agencies adopt the same vision for North Carolina's fire service.

Gateway Vision

A fully inclusive NC fire service that fosters consensus on major issues facing our members and the citizens we serve, and that develops coalitions for working towards solutions.

Issues

The following issues were identified by the group as the most significant issues facing the fire service in North Carolina today. The issues relate to both the citizens of North Carolina, who depend upon our industry for protection, as well as members of our industry and the environment in which we work. The issues are relevant to all of the more than 60,000 members of the North Carolina's fire and rescue services, whether from volunteer, paid, or combination departments, and regardless of the size of the community.

The issues fall under seven categories. Issues were evaluated to determine who was most affected, and who could most influence solutions for, each issue.

Key: Whose issue? U = Us, O = Others
What Level to work? L = Local, S = State, N = National

Fire Fighter Safety

- Improve apparatus operator training (U;L,S)
- Enhance emphasis on wellness programs (U;L,S)
- Improve Fire Fighter Safety (U;L,S)

Political Involvement

- Create and or support a political action “network” (U;S)
- Develop and portray political unity (U;S)

Fire Problem

- Address Fire problem in NC (O;S,N)
- Pursue stronger sprinkler requirements (target occupancies with at high risk populations) [O;S,N]
- Promote Prevention and Fire Safety Programs (O;S)
- Lead by example. Example - install sprinklers in fire stations. (O,U;L,S)

Benefits

- 25 Year Retirement (U;S)
- Instructor Line of Duty Benefits (U;S)
- HB-1884 (fed. Bill to Amend IRS regulations for non-profit employees to participate in local government retirement) (U;N)
- Volunteer Tax Incentive (U;S)
- Volunteer Retirement Option (U;S)

Training & Career Development

- Leadership cultivation (succession planning) (U;L,S,N)
- Improve entry level training and minimum competency (U; L,S,N)
- Improve training in use of technology (U; L,S,N)
- Improve use of technology in training (U;L,S,N)

Communications

- Getting information out to members of our industry (U, O;L,S)
- Improve the Image of the Fire Service (U;S,N)
 - “Raise the Bar”
- Engage industry members to increase involvement (U;S)

Funding

- Redundancy of fire and Rescue Services at County Level (U;L)

- National funding for Federal programs (U;N)
 - NFA
 - SAFER
 - Fire Act
- Workers Comp Funding (U;S)

Recommendations

Strategic Recommendation

Each agency agreed to the following strategic actions to address implement the Gateway Plan:

- Create talking points in a briefing paper for distribution;
- Each participating association include the Gateway Vision, Issues and Priorities presented in The Gateway Report to update their own strategic plan;
- Each association will disseminate a briefing paper or executive summary to association members to provide awareness of major issues and priorities;
- Give Gateway update reports at each association meeting;
- Participate in coalitions or partnerships for solutions; and.

Action Plans

The members developed specific objectives upon which participating associations could partner together in developing action plans. Each objective was prioritized and are presented in priority order with their action plans. Specific associations or individuals are identified with each action plan.

PRIORITY DIRECT ACTION ISSUES

Fire Fighter Health & Safety

- Take action to achieve Mandatory Emergency Vehicle Driver Certification (NCAFC and VSWCF)
- Distribute educational seatbelt slides to every instructor in State and request every CC fire course/class to begin with brief presentation. (VSWCF, CC, and OSFM)
- FF Risk Analysis Class in each County 1 yr. (OSFM & CC)

Political Action Network

- NC County Fire Marshal and NC Fire Marshal Assoc. will organize a fire & rescue political action network

Sprinkler Protection for High at Risk Populations

- NC Co. FM and NC FM
- Educational component targeted to FF and opposition (Builders)
- Educate Building code Council
- Pursue Code Enhancements

Fire Problem

- Task Forced to develop recommendations to require NFIRS reporting by all departments (Brooks, Sloan, Frye, NCAFC Appointee)

Study Fire & Rescue Retirement

- NCSFA to study issue of volunteer retirement programs; follow and advocate for HR 1884 (allows paid members of combination departments to participate in NC Local Government Retirement.)

PRIORITY INDIRECT ACTION ISSUES (WORKING THROUGH OTHERS)

Succession Planning
Workers Comp Funding
Funding Federal Programs

ONGOING TASKS (FROM GATEWAY IV)

Minimum Competencies
25 Yr Retirement/Multiplier
Instructor Benefits
Communications

Follow-up

The participants of The Gateway V Conference should meet at the NCAFC's Mid-Winter Conference in Atlantic Beach, NC in February, and at Fire College in May, to follow-up on the recommendations of the Gateway Report and continue efforts to partner strategies for solutions.

Means to Success and Potential Roadblocks to Successful Implementation

Success

The members of the Gateway V Conference identified the following as the means for a greater chance of success in improving our State fire and rescue services.

- Maintaining open forums for the discussion and debate of critical issues.
- Develop and support a system to follow through on specific issues identified in the action plans.
- Create and maintain networks and relationships among agencies, associations, and individuals.
- Promote and maintain a high level of current awareness of issues among the members of our industry.
- Think and act strategically.
- Be consistent in communications and actions.
- Maintain a willingness to participate in constructive debate.

Roadblocks

The members of the Gateway V Conference identified the following as opportunities for improvement in our State fire service, which if addressed, could help remove potential obstacles to successful solutions to issues.

- Apathy
- Lack of unity on some issues.
- Poor communications.
- Failure to follow through.
- Lack of political network or strategy.
- Personal Agendas.