

# *The Gateway Report*

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## *Issues Critical to North Carolina's Fire Service Leadership*

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

The Gateway VI Conference

***Senator Bob Martin Eastern Agricultural  
Center***

***January 18-20, 2006***

***Williamston, NC***

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## **Introduction**

At the invitation of NC State Firemen's Association President James B. Peele, on January 18, 2006 thirty-one 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 in Williamston, NC for the sixth 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 VI 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.

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## 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.

David Anders, Professional Firefighters & Paramedics of North Carolina  
Richard O'Brien, Professional Firefighters & Paramedics of North Carolina  
Cathy Lohr, NC Association of Fire Chiefs  
G. Winfield Abee, NC Community College System  
Alan Perdue, NC County Fire Marshal's Association, IAFC Fire & Life Safety Section  
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 Association of Fire Chiefs, NC Metro Chiefs  
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  
Joey Webb, Western NC Firefighters Association  
Rick Hall, NC Society of Fire-Rescue Instructors  
Steve Sloan, NC Fire & Rescue Commission  
Time Bradley, Commissioner of Insurance Office, NC Office of State Fire Marshal  
Vernon Ward, NC State Firemen's Association  
Wesley Hutchins, NC State Firemen's Association  
Scott Alderman, Piedmont Firemen's Association of NC  
David Taylor, Southeastern Fire Chiefs – NC Director  
A.C. Rich, NC Association of Hazardous Materials Responders  
Lowell Spivey, Eastern NC Firefighters Association  
Doug Hoell, NC Emergency Management  
Mary Young, NC Emergency Management  
Reggie Hassler, NC State Fireman's Association  
Larry Hughes, NC Office of State Fire Marshal  
Luther Fincher, National Fire Protection Association, International Association of Fire Chiefs – Metro Chiefs Section  
Phil Batts, NC Community College System

Bill Killen, President of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, was a special guest of the conference. He was 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.

Paul Brooks, Treasurer of the North Carolina State Firemen's Association and Vice Chairman of the Commission on Fire Accreditation International, served as the Gateway Conference Facilitator. Jeff Cash, also noted in the list of participants, served as the event coordinator working with the President and Executive Director of the NC State Firemen's Association.

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## **Vision**

The members of Gateway VI discussed and reaffirmed the original vision for Gateway 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.***

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## **Executive Summary**

The members shared opportunities to interact in both work sessions and a social event, allowing them to review progress on previous Gateway issues, identify current issues of significance to North Carolina's fire service industry, selected the single most important topic for Gateway VI efforts, and identified the on-going tasks for existing Gateway committee or task forces.

After considerable debate, the conference agreed to select a single issue and focus new efforts of Gateway and its participant agencies to make a significant change on that one issue to improve the safety and survival of our industry members and to provide a better and safer service to our citizens.

The primary issue selected for Gateway VI is firefighter safety & survival with a focus on emergency vehicle operation (EVO). The goal by which to measure success is a twenty-five percent reduction in firefighter deaths and injuries in five years.

## ***25 in 5!***

The critical elements of EVO are 1) mandatory use of seat belts, 2) operating emergency vehicles at a responsible speed, 3) institutionalizing requirements for emergency vehicle operator competencies, and, 4) addressing safer operations of Privately Owned Vehicles (POV.)

Action plans involve four strategies:

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| Education  | Heighten awareness and gain commitment at Chief Officer level.  |
| Training   | Identify and define scope of problem, issue position statements and promote training and certification. |
| Regulation | Seek elimination of exemptions and explore statutory or procedural options like licensing.              |

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## **Overall 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.

### **Fire Fighter Safety**

- Emergency Vehicle Operations and Drivers Safety
  - Change Attitudes From Chief Down
  - Update Instructional Materials
  - Mandate or Bribe
  - Establish Minimum Competencies
  - Institutionalize Seat Belt Use
  - Educate/Control Speed of Emergency Vehicles
  - Address Safe Use of POVs

### **Statewide Mutual Aid**

- Support/Promote Integration of Mutual Aid Systems
  - Intra/Inter State
- Support/Promote Resource Typing and Standardization
- Accelerate Access to Interoperable Radio Communication

### **Junior Firefighter Programs**

- Requirements for participation
- Seriously evaluate age issues
- May be exposing to unnecessary risk without proper training
- Eligibility for and Impacts upon benefits

### **County Wide Staffing Issues**

- Impacts of staffing on district insurance ratings
- Evaluate rating schedule
- Impacts upon rating for fire alarm response policies

### **EMT Training**

- Continuing education requirements
- OEMS issues

### **Fire Training**

- Promote Multi-agency/Multi-jurisdictional training
- Improve facilities and other resources
- Promote regional approaches

### **Reoccurring Issues**

Other topics that continue to generate discussion, and which were also identified during this conference were:

- Minimum Competencies
- Recruitment and Retention
- Organizational/Interpersonal Communications
- Political Involvement
- NC Fire Problem – At Risk Populations
- Mandatory use of NIFIRS
- Fire Fighter Wellness & Health Issues
- Benefits
- Training & Career Development
- Funding

## **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; and,
- Participate in coalitions or partnerships for solutions.

The members agreed that an overall strategic effort must be made to market Gateway initiatives and create a demand among our state industry for Gateway leadership, direction, and information.

### **Action Plans**

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

## **GATEWAY VI DIRECT ACTION ISSUE**

### *EMERGENCY VEHICLE OPERATIONS AND DRIVERS SAFETY*

#### **EDUCATION**

- Set a goal for measuring achievement, **25 in 5!**
- Develop a campaign to change attitudes and enhance awareness of emergency vehicle operation safety at the chief officer level.
- Analyze and define the scope of the problem to include geo-based data.
  - Display activity geographically and by county.
- Issue a position statement with simple guidelines and seeking commitment statements from the fire service leadership.

- Responsible Agencies:
  - NC Association of Fire Chiefs, Lead
  - Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics of NC
  - North Carolina State Firemen's Association
  - Volunteer Safety Workers Compensation Fund
  - North Carolina Association of Rescue and EMS

### **TRAINING**

- Promote training on EVO at all levels
- Advocate for certification of operators
- Seek out training resources from all available partners
  - VFIS
  - PFFPNC
  - NVFC
- Seek out and provide risk management training for fire service leadership
- Take strong position on evaluating and training for privately owned vehicle operations related to emergency incident response.
- Responsible Agencies:
  - Volunteer Safety Workers Compensation Fund, Lead
  - NC Association of Fire Chiefs
  - Office of State Fire Marshal
  - NC Department of Community Colleges
  - North Carolina Society of Fire-Rescue Instructors

### **REGULATION**

- Identify regulatory/statutory options
  - Could include EVO licensing options like CDL.
- Seek the elimination of exemptions to safety requirements.
- Responsible Agencies:
  - NC State Firemen's Association, Lead
  - NC Association of Fire Chiefs
  - North Carolina Association of Rescue and EMS
  - Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics of NC
  - NC Fire & Rescue Commission

## **GATEWAY VI IN-DIRECT ACTION ISSUES**

### *STATEWIDE MUTUAL AID*

- Members of the conference felt strongly that the issue of state-wide mutual aid and particularly interoperability issues are of major concern. After discussing the issue in depth, it was determined that lead state agencies and organizations are

already addressing this issue, but with much work to do. Gateway VI identified Fire Chief Johnny Teeters, NC Fire Chiefs Association, and Larry Hughes, Office of State Fire Marshal to serve as its liaisons with NC Emergency Management on this issue.

## **GATEWAY VI ON-GOING TASKS FROM PREVIOUS GATEWAY CONFERENCES**

- *RETIREMENT EQUITY BILL*
  - Task Force Members: Richard O'Brien, David Anders, Paul Miller, Johnny Teeters, Ken Mullins, Paul Brooks, Roger Bone
- *PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOV'T RETIREMENT BY COMBINATION DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES*
  - NCSFA to study the Charter School comparison and determine impacts of similar circumstances on the fire service.
  - Continue to advocate for inclusion.
- *FIRE FIGHTER HEALTH & SAFETY*
  - VSWCF and CC to coordinate delivery of Fire Fighter Risk Analysis class in every county at least once in next twelve months.
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- *INSTRUCTOR/FIRE MARSHAL/RESCUE WORKER BENEFITS*
  - NCSFA, NC County Fire Marshal and NC Fire Marshal Association, and NC Society of Fire-Rescue Instructors continue to advocate for equity in benefits and elimination of exclusions.
- *SPRINKLER PROTECTION FOR HIGH AT RISK POPULATIONS AND OTHER CODE DEVELOPMENT ISSUES*
  - NC County Fire Marshals and NC Fire Marshals to continue to advocate with an educational component targeted at Fire Fighters and Opposition (Builders, etc), Educate Building Code Council and advocate for appointments, pursue code enhancements at state and national levels.

**Follow-up**

The participants of The Gateway V Conference should meet at the Instructors Conference in Atlantic Beach, NC in May to follow-up on the recommendations of the Gateway Report and continue efforts to partner strategies for solutions.