

# July 2010 Newsletter

## Year 5 Wrap-Up

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## Oklahoma Firefighter Seat Belt Study and Survey

The purpose of this study is to capture an academically based, empirically grounded product that develops the picture of seat belt use among Oklahoma firefighters. Many national statistics will be utilized to show a need for this study and explain the findings. The United States Fire Administration has tracked firefighter fatalities in the United States since 1977. The leading cause of firefighter fatalities involves heart related injuries caused by stress and/or overexertion. While cardiac studies are incredibly important, I feel the second leading cause is often overlooked.



# INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT

Spotlighting one of the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives each month

Initiative #9 - Thoroughly investigate all firefighter fatalities, injuries, and near misses.

- » Firefighter Near Misses: [www.firefighternearmiss.com](http://www.firefighternearmiss.com)
- » Research Database: [Historical and Safety Management Documentation](#)
- » USFA: [NETC Learning Resource Center](#)

More Information: [16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives](#) | Share a Resource: [editor@everyonegoeshome.com](mailto:editor@everyonegoeshome.com)

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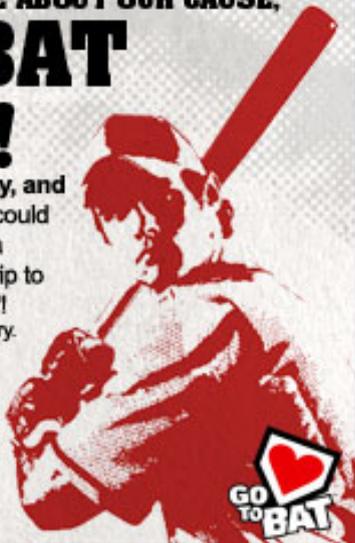
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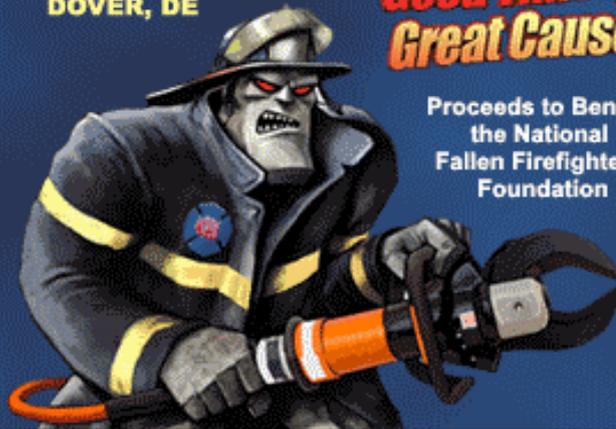
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# Year 5 Wrap-Up

## Deputy Director of Fire Service Richard Marinucci Northville Township Fire Department

Year 5 of the *Everyone Goes Home*® program has ended. While there is no time to rest to continue the fine work of many, it is appropriate to look back on the previous year and acknowledge the successes that have occurred. Statistically, there was a reduction in line-of-duty deaths (LODDs) comparing 2009 with 2008. If you look at the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) numbers you will note a significant drop. This is important to note because the NFPA has maintained its criteria for an LODD which makes comparisons from year to year more consistent. This is not noted to create any controversy with other agencies that track LODDs, but more to evaluate the trends.

The annual drop in LODDs are the result of many and through the efforts of many organizations and individuals. The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) has certainly expended resources in an effort to significantly reduce the number of preventable LODDs. Others such as the IAFC (and its Safety and Survival Section and Near Miss Reporting system), IAFF, NVFC, USFA, the Secret List (thank you Chief Billy Goldfeder) and CVVFA to name a few have been aggressive in their efforts to improve firefighter safety. Within the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and its *Everyone Goes Home*® program there have been many individuals that have made contributions that have had a positive impact on firefighter safety. Through the continued support of Executive Director Ron Siarnicki and the funding provided by a FIRE Act grant, work on addressing many of the 16 Life Safety Initiatives has continued.

Reports on our various programs from the past year have been submitted and will be shared with all on our website. You will see a summary of the things that are being done to continue to promote firefighter safety. While there are many people that deserve recognition, there are too many to name here. I do wish to thank Ron Siarnicki, Billy Hayes and all the Advocates, Ron Dennis, JoEllen Kelly, George Haddow, Jane Bullock, Bob Colameta, Steve Kimple, and the newest addition to the Foundation, Victor Stagnaro, not only for their fine work but their support of everything we are trying to do.

Clearly the work is not done. There are still too many preventable deaths. The work cannot stop and must intensify. There has been some success at addressing some of the issues but more effort will be needed to get to the more challenging causes of LODDs. It is about changing a culture that has been around for centuries without affecting the noblest reason for being a firefighter - that being to help your neighbor. Firefighters must become as proficient and competent as they can be, starting with their first day on the job until they retire. And they can never become complacent - no one knows when the next unfortunate event might happen. LODDs are not planned incidents and are not expected. Prepare and act as if your life, and those in your crew, depends upon you being good at your job because it may.

Personally, I thank everyone who has committed effort to the *Everyone Goes Home*® program. I am encouraged that progress is being made and understand that this is no time to let up. I look forward to Year 6 and the changes that are being made to do our work even better. My best to all and please remember your basics and safety lessons so EVERYONE GOES HOME!!!

# What Are The Odds?

**Azarang (Ozzie) Mirkhah, P.E., CBO, EFO, CFO, MIFireE**  
Courtesy of [Firehouse.com](http://Firehouse.com)

I read the report entitled, "[Families of 'Charleston 9' Reach Partial Settlement](#)," posted on [Firehouse.com](http://Firehouse.com) and the memory of that tragedy got my blood boiling again. What a shame! Nine firefighters died in that disaster and now three years later in these tough economic times, their families are settling for mere "chump change" - less than one million dollars a piece!

Compared to some of the lucrative settlements that you read about in the papers, the fact of the matter is that it seems that firefighters' lives are not viewed too highly. I don't put a price on lives and in my mind no amount of money would bring our lost brothers in Charleston back to their loved ones.

Outside of our own fire service circle, which is focused on the fire and safety of its community, it appears that the business world is focused on money. Everything, including human life, has a price tag. Decisions boil down to a cost/benefit analysis. Simply put, what benefits are delivered for what cost.

As we look at the economic challenges that face our country, it is evident that the cost of providing for the safety of our public and our firefighters is not at the top of the priorities list for many municipalities throughout the country. Take a quick look around you and see all the brown outs, fire station closures, and firefighter layoffs that impact most fire departments across the country. How will our public be served and protected in the future? What about the safety of our firefighters? I truly understand that we face challenging times, and as a result, the tough organizational decisions our elected officials and decision-makers have made to make the ends meet. If done correctly and with full knowledge of the consequences, it is easier to justify the wisdom and much more palatable to digest.

Look at it this way, households make budgetary decisions and have a priorities expenditure list. Decisions to spend money on food and shelter come before entertainment and leisure. If, or when, one of the breadwinners of the household loses their income, then health insurance, one of the highest priorities for families, may be put on hold. Families would most likely decide to put food on the table for their kids rather than keep health insurance.

Across the country too many families are faced with making these decisions despite knowing the consequences of not having health insurance. They hope nothing happens and they won't get sick. The same also applies with automobile insurance. They just take a chance and "roll the dice." It is not right, but then there are plenty of uninsured motorists around.

The same basic economic principles apply to our jurisdictions during these tough economic times. Jurisdictions take a leap of faith, too, and "roll the dice," believing the probabilities of catastrophic fires and emergencies are minuscule. All across the country, municipalities have cut fire departments' budgets.

Are elected officials and policymakers fully aware of the consequences of their decisions? In my mind, such cuts will undoubtedly have a drastic impact on their communities' fire protection and life safety, but also on the safety of their firefighters. Are elected officials fully aware of what is truly at stake? Are they willing to accept those consequences for many years to come? Or, are they looking ahead to the next election so that short-term gains are more appealing than the safety of their communities? In that case, is the public fully aware of those issues

and the consequences?

I believe that we must educate our elected officials and public administrators. We must provide them with a true community risk assessment and fire loss management plan. This will allow them to make well-informed decisions based on the community's needs and the availability of current resources while being fully cognizant of the long-term impacts of their decisions. We also must do a better job of informing our public so that they are well aware and willing to accept the consequences of the decisions that are made on their behalf. Decisions made today may have adverse effects for many years to come.

The bottom line is that as public servants, based on our professional obligations and fiduciary responsibilities, we can inform and provide the public and our elected officials with detailed risk assessments so they can make educated decisions for their communities. It is all about being fully aware of the real magnitude of the problem and knowing what are the stakes.

After all is said and done, just like anything else in life, it all boils down to being able to live with the consequences of decisions. At the end of the day, if elected officials decide to cut the level of fire protection for their community, then so be it. Their decision will be fully obeyed. Firefighters will have to adjust and reduce service delivery to the levels desired by the community. Quite similar to when the loss of income forces the head of household to prioritize spending.

When it comes to downsizing within the fire department, the same logic should apply to our decision-making process. When it comes to making a decision on where and what to cut, we in the fire service must also take the time to analyze the long-term consequences and impacts of our decisions, too. We must not be too "trigger happy" as we have historically been and cut our public education and fire prevention programs "at the drop of a hat" and with the first signs of budgetary problems. Unfortunately, there are too many examples of public education and fire prevention programs bearing the brunt of the budget assaults and losing staff, if not the entire division.

I intentionally started this article by referencing the Charleston fire tragedy. The panel's investigation report showed that the Charleston disaster was as much about the fire prevention neglects as the tactical fire suppression errors. Yes. There could have been a fire in Charleston and yes, there probably would have been the same types of tactical errors on the fire ground since they were trained to do so for many years. However, as the Charleston investigation panel reports showed, the severity and consequences of such a fire would not have been as devastating and nine firefighters would not have lost their lives if they had a good fire prevention program.

The panel's investigation report indicated that six years prior to the Charleston tragedy, they had cut their fire prevention program. The majority of the constructions were done without any review and permit and without inspections. The report indicated that discontinuing the fire prevention and inspection programs contributed directly and significantly to the size and progression of the fire and the magnitude of the tragedy in Charleston.

It was not only the tactical firefighting decisions that were made on the scene that particular night that led to that tragedy but, also the decisions made many years earlier to ignore fire prevention programs and to discontinue fire inspections. The Charleston Sofa Super Store fire was an overnight tragedy yet we must never forget that this tragedy was the direct result of many years of accumulated neglect and disregard for the fire prevention and inspection programs. We, in the fire service, must learn that lesson with the hope of not repeating the same mistakes anywhere else in the future.

Is Charleston the only jurisdiction in this country that systematically ignored and did not have a high priority for the fire prevention programs? Indeed not. Fire prevention is about the fire that did not happen and just like the

story of "the fish that got away" it is rather hard to prove its value. Unfortunately though, our story and the fire code are written with blood and sacrifice. The tragic loss in Charleston attests that not only fire prevention is important to the safety of our public and community, it also has a direct impact on firefighters' safety, making sure that they go home safe to their loved ones at the end of each shift.

Let's face it. The heart of the problem is that we in the fire service do not truly recognize the importance of the fire prevention programs in protecting our own communities. Why? Because we still view fire prevention programs as non-essential and in a support role function and without any direct relevance to firefighters' safety.

We don't view that fire prevention programs actually save firefighters' lives. Nine of our brothers in Charleston paid the ultimate price because their leadership displayed just such archaic views of fire prevention and eliminated their fire inspection and maintenance programs.

Philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it." When are we going to truly learn from our past mistakes and stop repeating them over and over in future?

Take a look around you my friends. We have cut too deep and public education and fire prevention programs around the country have taken a big hit and have been drastically reduced. We have forgotten the past and are condemned to repeat it in future.

Albert Einstein defined insanity as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." From all the historical fire loss lessons similar to Charleston's, why do we expect any different results next time around when we have virtually eliminated public education and fire prevention programs? What would good 'ole Albert think of us?

We certainly don't view the tremendous value that fire prevention brings to the table in protecting our own firefighters, as we should. Thus, as they say here in my gambling town of Las Vegas, we in the fire service simply "roll the dice" on fire prevention programs.

What we tend to downplay is the conceptual relationship between frequency and probability of an event versus the consequences and the final outcome. The frequency and probability of having a fire like they had in Charleston might be small but, as we saw, the consequence of such fire is tragic. Fire prevention programs assist us in lowering the probabilities of such events occurring and drastically decrease the magnitude of the consequences. Logically then, fire prevention programs must be viewed as an integral part and one of the most significant functions of all fire departments. It must be viewed as a much higher priority for the fire service.

It is time that we recognize that by cutting fire prevention programs, not only do we "roll the dice" and risk the safety of our community but, also the lives of our own firefighters. Fire prevention is just as much about the protection of our own firefighters as it is for the safety of our community. Cutting public education and fire prevention programs during tough economic times is nothing more than "rolling the dice" on probabilities and gambling on future outcome. The consequences could far outweigh the perceived immediate cost savings.

What are the odds? Well, take it from a local, a heck of a lot higher than the probability of becoming a millionaire by hitting the mega jackpot in Las Vegas.

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# Oklahoma Firefighter Seat Belt Study and Survey

**Mathew C. McNabb, B.S.**

The purpose of this study is to capture an academically based, empirically grounded product that develops the picture of seat belt use among Oklahoma firefighters. Many national statistics will be utilized to show a need for this study and explain the findings. The United States Fire Administration has tracked firefighter fatalities in the United States since 1977<sup>(1)</sup>. The leading cause of firefighter fatalities involves heart related injuries caused by stress and/or overexertion. While cardiac studies are incredibly important, I feel the second leading cause is often overlooked.

The intent for this project is to study the second leading cause of firefighter fatalities and that is vehicle accidents<sup>(2)</sup>. "Since 1984, motor vehicle collisions (MVCs) have accounted for between 20 and 25 percent of firefighter fatalities annually. Approximately 27 percent of fatalities in MVCs were ejected from the vehicle at the time of the collision; only 21 percent of these firefighters were reportedly wearing their seatbelts prior to the collision."<sup>(3)</sup>

This study incorporated firefighters from all across the great state of Oklahoma and surveyed their behavior toward seat belt use while on duty. Departments of varying type and size were included to get as "holistic" a picture of Oklahoma firefighter behavior as possible. Hopefully, departments across Oklahoma and America can benefit from this product produced by the brave men and women of the Oklahoma fire service. It is time for firefighters to think about themselves so that they can better care for their families and their community.

(1) [www.usfa.dhs.gov/fireservice/fatalities/statistics/history.shtm](http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/fireservice/fatalities/statistics/history.shtm)

(2) [www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/ff\\_fat08.pdf](http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/ff_fat08.pdf) (page 22) 2008 is used only to show most recent.

(3) United States Fire Administration. 2002. Firefighter Fatality Retrospective Study 1990-2000

## **Related:**

» [Oklahoma Firefighter Seat Belt Study](#)

» [Appendix A](#)