Around the State

A Word from our Fire Service Partners

From the Editor: The following column is intended to provide our readers an update on fire service activities from around the state.

Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal

Fire Prevention Week is a tradition that dates back more than a century, rooted in the lessons learned from the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. It reminds us that prevention is not just an idea, it is a responsibility and a foundation of safety in every home, school, business, and community across our state.

This year's theme, "Charge into Fire Safety: Safe Charging Is a Superpower," gives us an opportunity to talk about one of the most important and evolving fire-safety issues facing our communities.

Lithium-ion batteries power so much of our everyday lives from phones and laptops to e-bikes, scooters, power tools and other devices. When they are damaged, improperly used, or charged incorrectly, they can create serious fire risks.

But Fire Prevention Week is also an opportunity to think beyond one topic and even beyond fire prevention itself. As we continue to build Community Risk Reduction awareness across Illinois, I want to challenge each of us to think outside the box.

Ask yourself: What are the risks in my community, and what can my department do to help reduce them?

What are the risks within my department and how can we reduce those risks helping to keep our members safer?

Maybe that means talking about safe charging and smoke alarms. But maybe it also means addressing fall prevention among older adults, connecting residents with healthcare resources, promoting carbon monoxide safety, helping families prepare for emergencies, addressing mental health and wellness, or partnering with other organizations to address the specific risks identified in your community. Our communities don't experience risk in separate categories so our approach to reducing risk shouldn't be limited to one category either. That is the true power of Community Risk Reduction.

CRR gives us a framework to look at the data, identify the risks that are affecting our residents, and develop strategies that address those risks before they result in an emergency. And we have more information available to us than ever before. As CRR continues to take hold and expand across Illinois, the quality and depth of the data we collect continues to improve. For that, we sincerely thank all of you.

Thank you to the departments that continue to work hard to submit accurate and timely information. We know there may be bumps in the road as NERIS continues to evolve, but please know that support is available, and your efforts are making a difference. That data is more than a report. Data tells a story. It can tell us where fires are happening, who is most at risk, what types of incidents are occurring, and where we have opportunities to intervene before the next call comes in. When we use that information to demonstrate that a prevention program is reducing risk, we can tell an even more powerful story. We can show our elected officials, community leaders and residents that prevention works. We can demonstrate that our efforts are not only saving lives and reducing emergencies but potentially reducing the demand on our emergency response system and helping communities use their resources more effectively.

And that brings us to another important part of Community Risk Reduction —economic incentives. One of the five E's of CRR is Economic Incentives. When we can demonstrate through data that we're reducing risk, there can be financial benefits to our communities. Prevention and risk reduction efforts can contribute to a community becoming a lower-risk place to live and do business, which can have implications for things such as insurance costs and ISO evaluations. That gives us another reason to collect the data, analyze it and most importantly use it. We shouldn't just be able to say, "We held a program." We should be able to say, "We identified a risk, we implemented a strategy, and here is the data showing the difference we made." That is how we demonstrate the value of prevention.

I'm incredibly proud of the work being done by fire departments across Illinois. Departments large and small are visiting schools, hosting open houses, installing smoke alarms, conducting community outreach, helping residents understand battery safety, working with vulnerable populations and building partnerships that extend well beyond the traditional fire service.

I want to encourage you to keep doing that but don't be afraid to try something different. Look at your community. Look at your data. Talk to your residents. Talk to your healthcare partners, senior organizations, schools, businesses, emergency managers and other community organizations. Find

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out what is creating risk in your community and ask what role your fire department can play in reducing it. Sometimes the best prevention program may not look like a traditional fire prevention program at all. Every one of effort has the potential to make our communities safer and everyone gives us another opportunity to build relationships and demonstrate the value of the fire service. That is the power of partnership. That is the power of data. And that is the power of Community Risk Reduction. The tools and technology will continue to change. Our data will continue to improve. The risks facing our communities will continue to evolve. But our mission remains the same: to save lives, protect property, reduce risk and build safer, stronger communities across Illinois.

Illinois State Fire Marshal Michele Pankow

The Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM) announced the application period is now open for the FY27 Small Equipment Grant Program. OSFM will award a total of $6 million to eligible fire departments, fire protection districts and not-for-profit ambulance services across Illinois to purchase small firefighting and emergency medical equipment.

For FY27, OSFM has increased the maximum grant award to $50,000, nearly doubling the previous maximum of $26,000.

During the FY26 grant cycle, OSFM awarded nearly $6 million to 264 fire departments, fire protection districts and EMS providers across the state.

Interested departments and ambulance services must submit applications electronically utilizing the application portal that can be found on the agency's website.

This program is an innovative approach to a problem that has long caused difficulties for the fire departments and not-for-profit ambulance services in Illinois, particularly those that have hardships in generating the necessary revenue for small equipment. The grants allow eligible applicants the opportunity to purchase small tools and equipment that they may otherwise not be able to purchase. Most Illinois fire departments, fire protection districts, and township fire departments are eligible to apply. In addition, stand-alone, not-for-profit ambulance service providers are eligible to apply.

It's important to note that applicants must meet certain pre-qualification requirements in order to be considered for a grant. These include:

- Being NFIRS and NERIS compliant for the previous two years (October 2024 – September 2026)
- Being pre-qualified with SAM.gov and the State of Illinois Grantee Portal.

Additional information including the application can be found at: https://sfm.illinois.gov/currentfocus/fy-27-small-equipment-grant-.html

Michele Pankow
Illinois State Fire Marshal

Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI)

IFSI staff have been busy with fall training activities. Courses held in Champaign and across the state have provided first responders with a wide range of high-quality training opportunities.

The fall session of Basic Operations and Advanced Technician Firefighting Academy concluded at the end of October. After seven weeks of intense training candidates returned to their communities prepared to begin their careers as firefighters.

The Basic Operations and Advanced Technician Firefighting Blended (BOF) class will conclude in December. Throughout this 20-week program firefighters from across Illinois worked on developing their skills and knowledge while learning to operate safely and effectively on the fireground.

There is always something happening at IFSI. Keep reading for more updates.

IFSI Responder Intervention Team (RIT) Program Changes

The Responder Intervention Team (RIT) Program will undergo the following changes in 2027.

Due to changes in federal funding beyond IFSI control, grant funding will no longer be available to cover technician and chief level courses. As a result, all 2027 RIT Under Fire and RIT Chief Under Fire courses will require tuition. The cost for each course will be $2,650 for Illinois students and departments.

Responder Intervention Team (RIT) Basic courses will continue to be funded through the Cornerstone Program. This training is supported through the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal and is available at no cost to Illinois departments.

Course Name Changes

The current Responder Intervention Team (RIT) Rescue Technician course is returning to the course name RIT Under Fire. Responder Intervention Team (RIT) Chief will become RIT Chief Under Fire.

The current RIT Technician and RIT Chief course listings will become inactive on the IFSI training menu in early November 2026.

Updated Course Schedule

The IFSI team has carefully reviewed the curriculum to ensure delivery of an effective and efficient training schedule. To better accommodate travel requirements and staffing schedules, the traditional technician and chief formats will be reduced to four days. While the schedule has been streamlined, students will continue to receive the same high-quality, hands-on instruction that has defined the program.

Registration for all 2027 RIT Under Fire and RIT Chief Under Fire classes opens on November 9, 2026. ***Available 2027 Class Dates***

- February 8-11, 2027
- May 3-6, 2027
- May 17-20, 2027
- November 8-11, 2027
- November 29-December 2, 2027
- December 13-16, 2027

Visit fsi.illinois.edu for more info.

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WINTER FIRE SCHOOL

Registration for the 2027 Winter Fire School opens on November 2. This unique training event gives first responders the opportunity to strengthen their skills in cold weather conditions. Courses are available for all experience levels.

Students can tailor their training experience to meet individual needs by choosing from hands-on exercises, live fire training, and classroom instruction.

Course offerings include:

4-Hour Courses

- Advanced and Commercial Forcible Entry
- Ice Rescue Awareness
- iPumps
- Rope Operations Recertification Skills for Trained Rescuers
- Searching for Fire vs Searching for Victims
- Residential Firefighting Tactics (NEW)
- VEIS Room and Beyond (Vent, Entry, Isolate, Search)

8-Hour Course

- VEIS Room and Beyond (Vent, Entry, Isolate, Search)

12-Hour Courses

- Engine Company Winter Operations
- Basic RIT
- Investigation for Vehicle Fires
- Leadership Development and Decision Making- Winter Leaders Course

16-Hour Course

- Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC) – Second Edition

Winter Fire School attendees are eligible to receive up to 2 nights of funded hotel accommodations. Rooms are limited and assigned only after class enrollment. Conditions do apply.

Visit the IFSI website for complete details and full Winter Fire School course descriptions.

Jim Keiken
Director

IL Fire Inspectors Association

For budgeting purposes, fire department membership dues will increase to $150 beginning January 2027. While no one wants to raise dues, the good news is that the half-day mini seminars will be **free to IFIA members**. For departments that would send just two people to a seminar, the increase in dues and no charge for the mini seminars is a savings to you. The full day events usually have costs associated with them and there will be a nominal charge for those events.

In November, we will be holding our annual Did You Know class. This free, virtual morning class will provide an overview on many different topics. We recognize that not everyone likes every topic, so by providing many subjects, if you find one that you really want to delve deeper into, contact information will be provide so you can follow up.

We have presented three classes on the Introduction to Fire Inspections. Remaining are ones scheduled are November 14th at Tolono, and March 13th at Washington. These are FREE. While this eight-hour class will not give you any certification, it will provide you a high-level overview of the inspection process. This is designed for someone with no inspection background, or someone who just wants a refresher. This should give attendees the confidence to do basic inspections such as a church, insurance office, a small restaurant, barber shop, etc. Registration for this is in our website training tab.

Throughout the year we offer several OSFM Fire Inspector certifications and Public Fire and Life Safety classes. As these become confirmed, they will be posted on our website. Registration can be done from there. At this point, there is an Inspector 1 class scheduled in Romeoville in January. Class information and registrations can be found on the training tab of our website.

Each year we meet in December to plan the upcoming year. Should you have any ideas of what we should do, not do, etc., please contact a member of the Board or our office.

Our Annual Fire and Life Safety conference will be March 10 – 12 at Par a Dice, in East Peoria. There will also be a pre-conference on Tuesday afternoon. At the time of this writing, not all of the topics have been locked down, but by publication, hopefully most will be in place. You can check our website where the most updated information can be found. It will also be in our weekly email blasts.

Upcoming events:

Nov. 20 – VIRTUAL, Did You Know? FREE
December – Holiday social event
January – Inspector 1, Romeoville

Robert Morris
Executive Director, IFIA

Illinois OSHA

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Erik Kambarian, Chief
Div. of Occupational Safety and Health (IL OSHA) - IL Dept of Labor

Camp I am Me

Fire Safety Advocates Honored at Annual Fire Prevention Week Luncheon

Camp I Am Me by Illinois Fire Safety Alliance honored four fire safety and prevention advocates at the 85th annual Fire Prevention Week Luncheon which was held on October 8th. The event, which took place in Woodridge, included award presentations to Dan Medina of the Addison Fire Protection District, Countryside Fire Protection District, Sarah Fellows from Channahon Fire Protection District, and Nate Rice from Peoria FD/ Normal FD.

Addison Fire Protection District's Daniel Medina received the Special Recognition Award for his ongoing commitment to fire safety and prevention and his willingness to step forward when the fire service needs a voice. From representing the fire service at legislative and media events to helping bring stakeholders together on emerging safety issues, Dan consistently advocates for safer communities and a stronger fire service.

Countryside Fire Protection District was presented with a Life Safety Award for its comprehensive, year-round approach to fire and life safety education, reaching residents from young children to older adults and individuals with disabilities. Through programs, partnerships, home safety initiatives, and community engagement, Countryside has made prevention an ongoing priority throughout its community.

Sarah Fellows also received a Life Safety Award, for her significant impact on fire safety education, prevention, and community engagement since joining the Channahon Fire Protection District. Drawing on her background in early childhood education, Sarah has expanded programs for children and seniors, increased community participation, and helped position the fire department as a welcoming and proactive community partner.

Nate Rice, formerly with Peoria Fire Department, now with Normal Fire Department, was recognized for his leadership in fire prevention and Community Risk Reduction and for influencing the broader fire service to view prevention as an essential priority by being presented with the Wayne Luecht Memorial Award. Through innovative programs, extensive community outreach, smoke alarm installations, and professional leadership, Nate has helped make prevention an ongoing focus while serving as a model for other fire departments across the state and country.

A special thank you goes out to our moderator and panelists who spoke on the importance of having a strong fire safety public education presence within the community – Matt Perez (OSFM), Stephen Clayton (Highland FD), Ron Echtenacher (Countryside FPD), Shawn Sollberger (Peoria FD), and Marisa Tomich (New Lenox FPD). The generous sponsors

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of the luncheon included Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board, National Fire Sprinkler Association - Illinois Chapter, 1-800 BoardUp, Battalion Board-Up, Promos 911, Reliable Fire Equipment, Romexterra Restoration, and Servpro Team Zubricki.

2027 Summer Camp Volunteer Requests Now Being Accepted

Even though the 36th annual Summer Camp program will not be taking place until June of 2027, preparations are already underway for the signature event. Camp I Am Me's Summer Camp is Illinois' camp for young burn survivors which provides a special and unforgettable one-week experience for approximately 60 children each year. Through the generosity of donors, supporters, sponsors, and volunteers, Camp I Am Me offers this unique experience at no-cost to the campers, including lodging, meals, all of the special activities, events, and transportation to and from the camp.

Whether you have been attending camp as a volunteer for 10 years or are looking to become involved for the first time, completing the Summer Camp Request to Volunteer Form is the first necessary step to becoming involved in next year's camp. This allows Camp I Am Me to properly identify volunteers to staff the cabins and activities, ensuring the kids have the best week of their year!

If you are interested in volunteering at the 2027 Summer Camp, which requires being at camp for eight days and nights (Saturday-Saturday), visit www.IFSA.org/get-involved. The deadline to submit your request is Friday, February 5, 2027.

Philip Zaleski
Executive Director

Firefighters' Pension Investment Fund

Preliminary Fiscal Year 2026 Investment Performance (July 1 – June 30, 2026)

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, FPIF delivered a preliminary pre-audit return of 17.1%, surpassing the Fund's policy benchmark return of 16.0% and substantially exceeding the long-term actuarial assumption of 7.125%.

The Fund's success extends beyond a single year. Over the most recent three-year period, FPIF achieved an annualized return of 14.4%, compared with 13.7% for the benchmark. This sustained performance underscores the value of the Fund's diversified investment approach and long-term focus.

Equity Markets Drive Strong Results

Global equity markets were the largest contributor to fiscal year performance, with gains across both domestic and international allocations.

U.S. Equity returned 22.7%, while the Russell 3000 Index return of 22.8%, as continued strength in technology and growth-oriented companies supported market returns.

Non-U.S. Equity gained 30.6%, exceeding the MSCI ACWI ex USA IMI Index return of 26.6%.

Emerging Markets Equity was a standout performer, returning 57.3% and significantly outperforming the MSCI Emerging Markets IMI Index return of 40.3%. Strong security selection and favorable market conditions contributed to the exceptional result.

Fixed Income Continues to Add Value

The Fund's fixed income portfolio provided stability while also generating returns in excess of benchmark expectations. Total Fixed Income returned 4.9%, outperforming the Bloomberg U.S. Universal Index return of 4.2%. Credit and Emerging Markets Debt returned 13.9%, ahead of the benchmark return of 11.8%, driven largely by strong results within the Emerging Markets Debt allocation. While fixed income serves an important risk-management role within the portfolio, the asset class also contributed meaningfully to overall Fund performance during the year.

Growth in Private Market Investments

FPIF has strategically expanded its alternatives portfolio, growing from $814.1 million in June 2025 to $1.368 billion as of June 2026—an increase of more than $500 million through a combination of OCIO partnerships and FPIF's internally managed investments. During this period, real estate holdings increased to $732.9. million, while infrastructure reached $192.6 million, private credit grew to $332.0 million, and private equity totaled $111.1 million.

2026 Trustee Election Update

The FPIF Election Panel has finalized the slate of candidates for the 2026 Trustee Election. ***2026 Trustee Election Final Slate of Candidates***

Beneficiary Trustee (4-year Term) Gregory Knoll (Retired Firefighter, Homewood) - Elected by Acclamation

Executive Trustee (4-year Term) Douglas Krieger (City Manager, Naperville) - Elected by Acclamation

Executive Trustee (2-year Term) Mary Burress (Mayor, City of Pekin) Karl Langhammer (Treasurer, Carol Stream Fire Protection District)

Participant Trustee (4-year Term) Jason Skilondz (Firefighter, Wheaton) - Elected by Acclamation

Participant Trustee (2-year Term) Michael Mounts (Firefighter, Lake Forest) - Elected by Acclamation

The FPIF Board of Trustees congratulates Douglas Krieger, Gregory Knoll, Michael Mounts, and Jason Skilondz on their election and extends its sincere appreciation to all candidates for their interest in serving as a trustee. An election will be held this fall for the Executive Trustee - 2-Year Term position. Eligible voters will choose between Mayor Mary Burress of the City of Pekin and Treasurer Karl Langhammer of the Carol Stream Fire Protection District.

Key Election Dates

- **October 23**- On or before Oct, 23, 2026, ballots and election materials will be mailed to eligible voters.
- **December 1**- Election Day. Eligible voters must ensure completed ballots are received by the election vendor no later than 4:30 p.m. on Dec. 1, 2026.

Upcoming Meetings

- FPIF Audit & Compliance Committee - Dec. 1, 2026, 9:00 AM
- FPIF Investments & Operations Committee - Dec. 1, 2026, 10:00 AM
- FPIF Election Panel -Dec. 8, 2026, 10:30 AM
- FPIF Board of Trustees - Dec. 10, 2026, 9:00 AM