



STATE OF ARKANSAS FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES BOARD

March 11, 2026 Minutes



Meeting held at the Arkansas Division of Emergency Management in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

Members Present:

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| ○ Scott Baltz, ARVFA | ○ Ben Hammond, AFMA | ○ Brad Moore, ASFFA |
| ○ Michael Cossey, APFF | ○ Brad Hardin, AAFC | ○ Brandon Taylor, ASFFA (<i>Virtual</i>) |
| ○ Travis Dover, APFF | ○ Bo Higginbotham, ASFFA | ○ Michael Willhite, ASFFA |
| ○ Brian Dunavan, AAFC | ○ Kathryn Mahan-Hooten, AFD | ● Grant Warner, AFTA |
| ● Dennis Free, State Fire Marshal | ○ Mark McCollum, AAFC | ○ Shane Wood, AAFC (<i>Virtual</i>) |

Members Absent:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| ● A.J. Gary, ADEM | ○ Keith Hillman, ARVFA | ○ Jason Wills, AFMA |
| ○ Marty Hamrick, APFF | ○ Vacant Position, APFF | |

Others Present:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| ○ Louis Eckelhoff, State Fire Service Coordinator | ● Denotes <i>ex officio</i> members |
| ○ Tawnie Hughes, Assistant Attorney General (<i>Virtual</i>) | |

Meeting called to order by Chairman Brad Hardin at 10:00 am.

Previous Minutes

Kathryn Mahan-Hooten noted a change necessary in the December 10, 2025 minutes. Motion to approve minutes as amended was made by Ben Hammond, seconded by Brad Moore and passed unanimously.

Arkansas Division of Emergency Management Report:

State Fire Marshal Dennis Free reported that 13 applications had been received to replace Barry Burke, who retired in February 2026. The first meeting to begin reviewing the 2024 Fire Code will be the second week of April. Starting January 1, 2027, all assembly occupancies rated for 300 or more people in the state will have to be retrofitted with sprinklers. Arkansas has had 17 fire deaths so far this year. The Fire Marshal's Office will look at adding a one-page form to their website to make it easier for departments to report deaths.

Louis Eckelhoff, State Fire Service Coordinator, reported he received 171 Act 833 applications with 91 certified.

Arkansas Department of Agriculture Report:

Kathryn Mahan-Hooten, Rural Fire Protection Administrator, presented her report on property and equipment acquired from federal surplus and distributed to fire departments in the state.

During the period of December 2025 – February 2026, the division did not receive any warehouse items. They received approx. \$291,834.17 worth of large equipment, which included two truck tractors and one pumper. Equipment distributed to fire departments included one truck tractor, two generator sets, one boat, one boat motor and one cargo trailer. The value of all property distributed was \$57,949.00.

During that same period, the Forestry Division conducted 24 wildland training courses with 491 students in attendance from 194 fire departments. Four interest-free revolving fund loans totaling \$46,299.82 were provided to four fire departments. Six state contract sales of four pump/engines and two water skid units were made totally \$69,500. Some items from the Wildland Suppression Kits have been received with the plan to deliver the kits in April or May. The 2026 Rural Fire Show will be held on Saturday, October 3 at the Conway Expo Center.

The total assistance provided by the Rural Fire Protection program to fire departments across the state during this time was \$173,748.82. Additionally, the program delivered six fire trucks to departments that were purchased through a third-party vendor, saving those departments a total of \$11,728 in shipping costs.

Arkansas Fire Training Academy Report:

Arkansas Fire Training Academy Director Grant Warner provided a report on items of interest at the academy. He reported a 30% increase in training from 2024 to 2025 with the biggest increase in Firefighter II training. 188 students completed Firefighter II in 2024 with 270 completing it in 2025. The total number of firefighters attending classes in the state increased from 15,377 in 2024 to 17,539 in 2025 (14% increase). The total number of training hours logged in the state increased from 38,550 in 2024 to 47,835 in 2025 (24% increase). The total number of classes increased from 1,906 in 2024 to 2,424 in 2025 (27% increase).

Director Warner requested a meeting with the training committee to approve new books for Driver/Operator, Officer & Instructor.

Brad Moore asked about the status of lottery scholarship to pay for meals at the fire academy. Director Warner reported the state's rule won't be ready until the fall.

Committee Reports:

FIRE PREVENTION COMMITTEE – There are currently 1,236 smoke detectors in inventory with \$22,406 remaining in fire prevention. Ben Hammond made a motion to spend the remaining money to purchase smoke detectors. The motion was seconded by Michael Willhite and passed unanimously. Due to the pending departure of Jason Wills, Ben Hammond will be Chairman of the Fire Prevention Committee. Other members are Brandon Taylor, Brian Dunavan and Mark McCollum.

FIREFIGHTER CERTIFICATION COMMITTEE – Committee Chairman Michael Cossey reported that he was waiting to hear what steps were necessary to create and promulgate board rules before scheduling a meeting.

TRAINING COMMITTEE – Michael Cossey will fill the vacancy on the Training Committee. The committee will meet March 18 to approve Driver/Operator Pumper Aerial, Officer and Instructor textbooks.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMMITTEE – The Strategic Plan Committee met in January. Chairman Hardin presented a draft 2026-2030 plan for review by the Board to be discussed at a future meeting.

Unfinished Business:

FIRE DEPARTMENT CLASSIFICATION & CERTIFICATION – Chairman Hardin presented a draft Board rule for the classification and certification of fire departments. Assistant Attorney General Tawnie Hughes said that rules promulgated by the Board must go through a process that includes review by the Governor's Office, a 30-day public comment period, and a review by the Legislative Council Rules Subcommittee. Asst. AG Hughes said she would convert the draft rule into a format that meets the format of the Arkansas Code of Rules (COR). The Board will hold a virtual meeting on May 13 to vote to initially approve the board rule once it is in COR format.

Adjournment:

Michael Cossey made a motion to adjourn, which passed by unanimous consent at 11:43 AM.