



VFIS[®] news

Bringing important information to emergency service organizations

VOLUME 11 • NUMBER 2

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INSERT EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES UPDATE

Social Media: Postings may compel ESOs to take disciplinary action

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We welcome comments, suggestions and questions from our readers.

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A Division of Glatfelter Insurance Group

Published by the
Glatfelter Insurance Group
York, Pennsylvania

Safe Backing Practices


for Fire & EMS By T. Randy Hess, Director, VFIS Risk Control Services

Accidents resulting from backing emergency vehicles are unfortunately all too common. These incidents often result in minor property or vehicle damages but sometimes they are severe or even fatal. Backing an emergency vehicle can be a very hazardous undertaking because of the many blind spots that interfere with the driver's ability to see the possible risks. These hazards often include other vehicles, fixed objects such as trees and poles and sometimes pedestrians, children or other emergency workers.

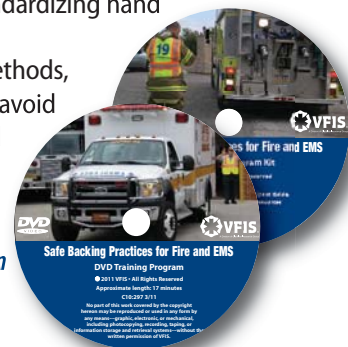
To help reduce the risk of accidents and injuries related to vehicle backing incidents, VFIS has developed two new tools for emergency service organizations to use. The first is a new Risk Communiqué that outlines suggested best practices and the administrative and training guidelines that drivers, officers and spotters need in order to reduce the risks of vehicle backing incidents. This is available on www.vfis.com under the resources tab.

"Safe Backing Practices for Fire and EMS" is the latest installment in the Safety and Risk

Management video training series. This 18 minute instructional video outlines the hazards encountered when backing any style emergency vehicle including an ambulance and ladder truck. The program also provides visual portrayals of several common situations that may occur while backing an emergency vehicle. In an effort to help improve backing safety, the program focuses on three important positions within emergency service organizations: chief and administrative officers, emergency vehicle drivers and the spotter.

While many organizations require a spotter to be in position prior to backing a vehicle, it has been the experience of VFIS that few have specific guidelines or provide training to those acting as spotters. This program covers a variety of procedures including staying visible, standardizing hand signals and other communication methods, safe positioning to avoid personal injury and how to recognize hazards. 

The "Safe Backing Practices for Fire and EMS" kit includes a DVD and a CD containing an Instructor's Guide, Participant Guide and additional resources. Like all VFIS materials, you may obtain this program through your regional director, local agent or online at www.vfis.com or by calling 800-233-1957 extension 7961.





Protecting against

EMPLOYEE THEFT

By Ed Williams, Vice President, ESO Program Manager

*Emergency
service
organizations*

(ESOs) take a variety of steps to protect their members and their property. They guard against injury with protective gear and secure equipment to prevent damage. Yet two less-visible assets also need their attention: their funds and their reputation in the community.

Unfortunately, losses as a result of employee dishonesty are increasing. ESO funds are often at risk of misuse and embezzlement. This type of loss not only disrupts the ESO but families and communities as well. The damage to an ESO's reputation in the community can hinder fundraising efforts and good will, and can be extremely difficult to repair. The loss of funds can jeopardize high-quality response, equipment and services to the community. Preventive measures, early detection and appropriate insurance are extremely important.

Initially a member may intend to borrow a small amount of money that he or she expects to repay. When such an act goes undetected, repeated theft may not be far behind. Without oversight, this type of loss can go undetected for months or even years.

Fortunately, there are steps ESOs can take to protect department funds — and the people who handle them:

- Sign only fully completed checks. Never sign blank checks or allow use of signature stamps.
- Keep up-to-date signature cards on file with the bank.
- Assign bank reconciliation duties to someone who does not have check-writing authority.
- Conduct a third-party audit annually.
- Avoid allowing people with close personal ties (spouses, siblings, business partners) to have control over department finances.
- Require supporting documentation for financial transactions, such as purchase orders, receipts and invoices to compare with check and cash transactions.
- Separate financial functions when possible.
- Consider background checks on all new officers and members.
- Put all financial policies in writing.
- Review the insurance policy with a broker to assure that proper fidelity coverage is in place.

Financial audits are designed to confirm that financial documentation meets generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). This is a necessary step, but audits are not the most common detector of fraud; the ESO is! With proper oversight, including a system of checks and balances, the risk of employee dishonesty is greatly reduced and early detection is increased. The ESO involvement also limits temptation. ESOs can try to avoid the scandal of embezzlement by taking action to prevent and detect misappropriation of funds. ❄️



Is your reputation at risk?

Introducing Reputational Risk training program

Available now through *VFIS Distance Learning*

By Chief Bill Jenaway, Ph.D., CFPS, CFOD, Executive Vice President, VFIS Education, Training and Consulting

VFIS, in conjunction with the Cumberland Valley Volunteer Fireman's Association (CVVFA), has developed an awareness training course on emergency service Reputational Risk that can be taken online at the VFIS Distance Learning Center, vfis.sju.edu.

The program is a formalization of the conference seminars conducted by Dr. Bill Jenaway of VFIS and Steve Austin of CVVFA. Jenaway and Austin have been instrumental in the research, development and release of information related to reputational risk, resulting in a white paper

released by CVVFA, which is included in the course. This new emergency service management development program provides a background on several issues and prevention measures surrounding reputational risk. Additionally there are results of a symposium on Reputational Risk where more details on the concept, background, challenges and solutions are discussed. This program also allows the opportunity to review the sample policy on social media and preparation to implement a similar policy. The assessment can help recognize the reputational risk issues facing emergency service organizations today. 🌟

This program is offered at no cost, courtesy of VFIS and CVVFA. To access the class or learn more about the Distance Learning program, visit the VFIS Distance Learning site at www.vfis.com/DistanceLearning.htm or vfis.sju.edu.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

FASNY joins forces with VFIS for distance learning



The Fireman's Association of the State of New York (FASNY) has joined forces with VFIS and St. Joseph's University to establish a distance learning affiliation for FASNY members. As a new site is developed for the forthcoming FASNY program, the organization collaborated with VFIS to provide its FASNY members distance learning opportunities on the VFIS Distance Learning Web site.

There are currently three courses available on the VFIS site for FASNY members:

- Seat Belt Safety
- Sexual Harassment Prevention Techniques
- FASNY OSHA Annual Refresher Course

To access these courses, use your FASNY membership number, which serves as your password. To validate this, call the FASNY office for the membership number and discount codes to enter to participate in an offered class.

Set up your account and proceed with an informative distance learning program at <http://vfis.sju.edu>. 🌟



Solar energy fire safety considerations

By Chief Bill Jenaway, Ph.D., CFPS, CFOD
Executive Vice President
VFIS Education, Training
and Consulting



New forms of energy are often used for powering vehicles, heating systems and electrical generation when the price of oil escalates or alternative energy heating and cooling systems are created. When this occurs it can create challenges for emergency responders, resulting in safety considerations and required training. One such example involves solar energy.

Quickly becoming an energy source for residential and commercial properties, solar power systems (aka photovoltaic systems) operate on a very simplistic approach. Solar energy is absorbed by a collection system, which is converted to electrical power for use in the property and possibly transmitted to other locations. It is simple and cheap energy; but it does not come without safety considerations and fire protection concerns.

Emergency service organizations (ESOs) are encouraged to have a local or regional solar system installer discuss the specifics of the systems and safety considerations. ESO personnel should inquire about the precautions offered in this article and how they would apply to the systems that could be encountered such as in Figure 1, which shows a dwelling with a solar panel array installed on the roof.



The National Fire Protection Association report "Firefighter Safety and Emergency Response for Solar Power Systems" provides extensive information that could be used in training sessions. The document can be obtained as a download at www.nfpa.org/assets/files/PDF/Research/FFTacticsSolarPower.pdf. The safety considerations for use by emergency responders offer a significant synopsis that includes:

Fireground Tactics

- Components are typically hot
- Operate normally, but don't touch
- Size-up, identify and validate hazard
- Stress key message for tactical approach (especially large commercial systems)
- Leave the scene in a safe condition

Code Development

- Provide ability for electrical system isolation for emergency responders
- Create consistent placarding and labeling for emergency responders
- Address on-going maintenance oversight of installed systems (especially commercial)
- Require system contact information for emergencies

Education and Training

- This is energized electrical equipment like other equipment, but with an inability to power down
- Systems are widespread. These systems are often found in first due jurisdiction
- Don't underestimate electrical hazard; don't be complacent

Grant, Casey E.,
"Firefighter Safety
and Emergency
Response for Solar
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The Fire Protection
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May 2010, 93
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continued on page 5

THE LATEST IN CANADIAN FIREFIGHTING NEWS

By Laura King, Editor, Fire Fighting in Canada

Canadian Government

In March, the federal government in Canada announced in its budget a \$3,000 tax credit for volunteer firefighters who serve a minimum of 200 hours a year responding to calls or attending training and meetings.

The Conservative Government was defeated in Parliament in late March, which also eliminated the proposed tax credit. However, fire-service leaders are confident that another tax credit will be introduced in the upcoming budget. All federal parties have endorsed a tax credit, which would equal about \$400 in savings for volunteer firefighters who meet the criteria.

The Federal Liberal Party proposed a fund for families of fallen firefighters and payouts of \$300,000 for line-of-duty deaths. Additionally, in its provincial budget, Newfoundland and Labrador proposed a parallel tax credit for its volunteer firefighters. The provincial tax credit would save qualifying firefighters an additional \$230 annually.

There are about 84,000 volunteer firefighters in Canada and 3,400 career, composite and volunteer fire departments. Traditionally, fire departments have been funded by municipal governments but the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs has been lobbying federal government ministries for the tax credit and to create a federal fire advisor's office, which would represent the interests of the fire service on Parliament Hill.

Alberta, Canada

A small fire department in Wandering River, Alberta, closed last summer because its group of female first responders could not keep up with the demand for extrication and life-saving services along a dangerous stretch of Highway 63 that leads to Alberta's oil sands. These firefighters had been responding to an average of one fatality a month along the highway in addition to routine calls – all while working their day jobs.

The Alberta government and the Athabasca County announced that they would ante up \$1.3 million to hire four full-time first responders to work that stretch of Highway 63.

Wandering River's volunteer firefighters will be invited to apply for the new jobs and the government plans to ask oil sands companies to subsidize some of the ongoing cost.

CANADIAN NEWS



Laura King is the editor of Fire Fighting in Canada (FFIC) and Canadian Firefighter and EMS Quarterly (CFF) magazines (www.firefightingincanada.com.) Contact her at lking@annexweb.com.

Solar Energy, continued from page 4

The most critical message of emergency response personnel is to be sure to consider photovoltaic systems and all their components as electrically energized when exposed to sunlight.

One common aspect of solar training sessions is the issue of continuous electrical charge of the system. It's important to engrain in the mind of responders that these systems cannot be turned off, resulting in power being generated. This requires individuals to have a



Figure 2

unique understanding of the systems to safely operate around them and with them. In addition, appropriate warning signs should be posted to alert emergency responders that unique electrical hazards

exist at the location. Figure 2 provides an example of these warning signs.

Solar panel systems pose unique hazards to emergency response activities. It's helpful to know in advance what hazards are posed and how to deal with them to provide a safe outcome for all involved. ❄️

Using SAFER Grants toward a Length of Service Award Program

By Jeff Moore, Specialty Benefits Technical Sales Executive

Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) is a grant program that provides direct funding to help departments with staffing shortages. These grants can provide support for recruiting and retaining volunteers. The resources are distributed over a four-year period by the Department of Homeland Security/ Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The goal of the SAFER program is to help departments increase their number of frontline firefighters so communities have



sufficient protection from fire-related hazards. This goal of increasing the number of firefighters means that SAFER grant money may not be used to reward past service of firefighters.

A common question that volunteer and combination departments ask is whether SAFER grant money can be used to implement a Length of Service Awards Program (LOSAP).

While the answer is yes, there are important considerations that must be explored prior to establishing a plan:

1. It is important to recognize that a LOSAP is a long-term commitment, while the SAFER grant is limited to four years. There must be an alternative source of funding after, and preferably during, the grant years.

2. Generally, the funding "prefunds" a significant portion of the LOSAP. The actuarial calculations can be structured in such a way as to accept larger contributions during the terms of the grant, with lower contributions for the life of the plan.
3. As a general rule to establish a reasonable benefit, the grant request should contemplate no less than \$1,500 per active volunteer.
4. If the goal is to reward past service, an alternate source of funding is required.

The SAFER grant process can be a valuable tool in providing funds for continued success of volunteer departments. Each year, the grant application form is posted online at www.fema.gov/firegrants/. To obtain more information on how VFIS can assist in developing a plan to meet specific goals or learn more about SAFER grants, please contact your VFIS agent or Jeff Moore at (717) 870-0579 or jmoore@vfis.com to discuss the needs of your organization. 🌟

NEWS YOU CAN USE

25 Years of Commitment

Cloyce Anders and Dave Burrows have been representing VFIS for 25 years and were recently honored for their contribution at a sales and education event.

Anders is president of Fire & Rescue Insurance Services, Inc. D/B/A VFIS of North Carolina. Anders is an unrelenting advocate for independent agents with legislators and regulators and committed to his community. He is a member of the North Carolina Fire & Rescue as well as the North Carolina Safety Workers' Compensation Forum. Anders' contribution to VFIS' success is greatly appreciated and for that we thank him.



Burrows joined the Burrows & Burrows Agency in 1975 and started working with VFIS in 1984. He expanded the agency's market at a statewide level, not only marketing to Oklahoma's fire service but to EMS as well. Burrows enjoys working with VFIS as he believes it is one of the most prominent emergency service programs in the nation. VFIS thanks Burrows for his lengthy commitment to VFIS.



VCOS SUMMIT REPORT

MANAGEMENT

By Chief Bill Jenaway, Ph.D., CFPS, CFOD, Executive Vice President, VFIS Education, Training and Consulting and Dave Wyrwas, President, Specialty Benefits

VFIS recently served as a sponsor of the 2011 National Volunteer Fire Summit. Titled as the "Heartbeat of America: Preserving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service," it was facilitated by the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section (VCOS) of the International Association of Fire Chiefs. The mission of the summit was "constructing a national blueprint for expanding the future of volunteerism in the Emergency Service Community."

The event was an intensive, three-day summit that examined the challenges faced by the fire departments staffed with volunteer, on call or part-time firefighters. Ultimately it is hoped that the summit results in a planning effort that can carry the volunteer and combination fire service into the future to solidify its status as a vital component of America's emergency response system.


The summit focused on nine domains of content that are critical to volunteer/combination fire service agencies:

- Capabilities and competencies
- Community relationships
- Recruitment
- Retention of organizational members
- Organizational structure
- Business model and priorities
- Legislation and regulations
- Reputation management
- Delivering fire and life safety services

There were breakout groups where participants were assigned one of the listed topics. The groups were charged with identifying a limited number of challenges facing the volunteer fire service within specified topics. Discussions and negotiations were lengthy when trying to identify three to five key areas which are currently hurting recruitment. There were common threads among the various groups. Challenges facing recruitment also impact retention, reputation management and other topics. Each area of the country has different challenges, but overall the problems faced are national and it is hoped that a unified, strategic plan can assist with the continued success of volunteer emergency service organizations.

More than 100 participants from around the country were involved in the powerful summit activities, of which VFIS was an active participant. It featured a series of prominent speakers from the government, emergency service and the private sector.

According to the United States Fire Administration, volunteer firefighters are utilized in more than 90 percent of America's fire departments, saving more than \$37 billion annually, yet volunteerism declines and service demands increase.

The summit resulted in strategic concepts for implementation by VCOS. A group of dedicated VCOS members will meet again this summer and continue to assist in creating a blueprint for the future. Look for additional information from VCOS in the near future by visiting their Web site at www.vcos.org. 

Montgomery County Fire Rescue Association receives award

Montgomery County Fire Rescue Association in Maryland was the recipient of the VCOS-VFIS Retention and Recruitment Award at the 2010 VCOS Symposium in the Sun. The award is presented to a department that has experienced positive results to a comprehensive approach to retaining and recruiting members.



Executive Director Eric Bernard and President Marcine Goodloe of Montgomery County Fire Rescue Association receive the 2010 VCOS-VFIS Recruitment and Retention Award from Dr. Bill Jenaway, executive vice president of VFIS. Pictured as part of the presentation are Dr. Jenaway, Andy Wright MCFRA board member, Goodloe, Bernard and Joe Chernock, MCFRA.

Duboistown, Pennsylvania receives Safe Vehicle Operations Award

Duboistown Pennsylvania Fire Department was the recipient of the VCOS-VFIS Safe Vehicle Operations Award at the 2010 VCOS Symposium in the Sun. This award is presented to a department that has experienced zero vehicle accidents during the period Aug. 1, 2009 to July 31, 2010. Vehicle accidents are defined as state reportable accidents where no injuries have occurred in the accident.



Chief Richard Knecht of the Duboistown Pennsylvania Fire Department receives the 2010 VCOS-VFIS Emergency Vehicle Safe Operation Award from Dr. Bill Jenaway, executive vice president of VFIS. Also pictured as part of the presentation are VFIS President Troy Markel, Pennsylvania State Fire Commissioner Ed Mann, Knecht, Dr. Jenaway and Duboistown Deputy Chief Craig Kropp.

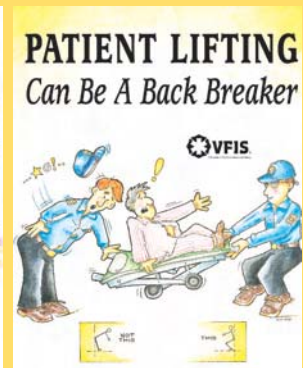
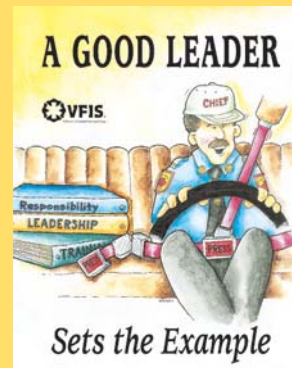
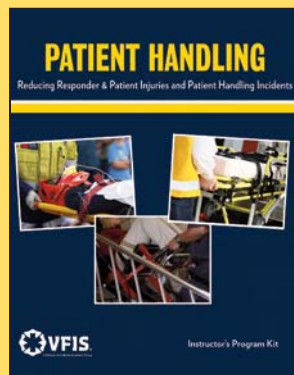
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Please route to your local emergency service organization

NEWS YOU CAN USE

All new Patient Handling program kit

Every day emergency service organizations are called to help somewhere in their community. Often these requests involve lifting and moving patients. Whether lifting a patient back into a bed or onto a stretcher, roll a patient on a stretcher from an ambulance to the Emergency Department, or extricate a patient from a deep ravine, emergency service personnel are exposed to situations that may not only injure the people being helped, but cause a career-ending injury to themselves. This program is not simply about moving a patient from the scene to the hospital or another healthcare facility, but rather it focuses on the various circumstances surrounding the complex task of patient handling. Order this new edition (item C10:025) online at <http://www.vfis.com/onlinestore.htm> or by calling 800-233-1957 extension 7961.



New safety posters available

Two new VFIS safety posters are now available for purchase. The Good Leader poster (item C10:267) and the Patient Lifting poster (item C10:264) are 16" x 20" and can be placed within your organization to remind everyone about safety.

To order, visit www.vfis.com/onlinestore.htm or call 800-233-1957 extension 7961.

VFIS offers new Risk Control Communiqué on Social Media

VFIS recently released a new Risk Control Communiqué to assist emergency service organizations on ways to best handle the growing trend of social media usage. The Risk Communiqué is titled "Social Media – Management Liability / Employment Practices Risk Management" and provides ESOs with analysis and risk management guidelines for managing difficult issues involving social media usage. It can be found at <http://vfis.com/resources.htm> by clicking on the Risk Control Communiqué tab then Management & Employment Practices Liability tab.