

NEWS | FOR EMERGENCY SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

TRAINING + RESOURCES FOR MODERN FIRST RESPONDERS

Let's face it. This isn't your grandparents' emergency service organization.

Rick Gurba, Director of VFIS Education, Training and Consulting

You're doing more frequent and varied responses than ever before. Fires ignite faster, burn hotter and contain even more toxins. Costs of equipment and apparatus are rising. Funds are dwindling. Volunteer personnel are more difficult to find. Public demands and expectations can be overwhelming. Possible long-

term reputational damage due to one member's actions is daunting. And, in many cases, your Chief is faced with the insurmountable task of managing it all.

Can any one individual do it all and do it well? Probably not. But you don't have to.

FROM THE FRONTLINES TO ONLINE—resources designed for you.

- 63 Online Courses
- 500K Trained since 2002
- 21 Training Programs
- 324 Online resources
- 100 Podcast episodes

Proudly brought to you by the VFIS team with 552 years of combined emergency services experience.



VFIS HAS YOUR BACK.

As a VFIS client, you get more than an insurance policy. We're also here to serve as a helpful partner and training arm to your organization by providing you with a variety of industry-specialized resources, educational programs and training classes that are designed to help you educate, train and retain your personnel, develop comprehensive risk management programs and, ultimately, stay better protected while you serve and protect others.

The current landscape calls for ESOs to actively focus on safety and risk management—and we're here to help you answer that call.

Here's an overview of our online and in-person learning opportunities, the majority of which are *completely free* for VFIS clients, to help you lead your team, address everyday risks, overcome unique challenges and expand your skillsets.

RESOURCE LIBRARIES

- **VFIS.com** has 300+ online tools, self-assessments and shareable resources covering best practices for general operations, vehicle operations, personnel management, property management, wellness, cybersecurity and more.
- **ResponderHelp.com**, developed and administered by VFIS, houses 5,000+ resources (including free SOGs) that have been developed by a variety of industry specialists, including the USFA, NVFC, NFFF and more, to help you tackle your top concerns.
- **The *Don't Risk It!* Podcast** series, available on all major podcast platforms and at vfris.com/podcast, shares 100+ meaningful and helpful conversations about emergency services industry trends, best practices and risk management.



VFIS UNIVERSITY

Our distance learning platform, available at vfisu.com, gives you 24/7, 365 access to quality online training courses (many of which are recognized as meeting industry standards) that you can assign to your team members and they'll receive certificates upon completion. Some course topics include annual refresher training, behavioral health, wellness, vehicle operations, administration and more.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Browse our educational USBs, videos and products at shop.vfis.com—all of which are designed to help you host trainings and increase awareness about important risks at your own station, including patient handling, vehicle operations and abuse prevention.

FIELD TRAINING CLASSES

We conduct a variety of in-person training classes on a regional basis throughout the year, many of which are offered at instructor ("train the trainer") and participant ("student") levels, including Emergency Vehicle Driver Training (EVDT) + EMS Vehicle Operations (EMSVO), Trailer Operations and Safety, UTV/ATV Safety, Traffic Incident Management and more. Visit vfis.com to check out a live calendar of upcoming trainings + see if we're coming to a city near you!

EXCLUSIVE ANNOUNCEMENT: NEW EVDT PROGRAM COMING SOON!

Did you know that VFIS developed the first-ever Emergency Vehicle Driver Training (EVDT) program in 1976? We're just as proud that it soon became the gold-standard for training in the industry—and has remained a leading program and top priority for our team.



We're honored that this program has aided in saving countless lives—and excited to exclusively share with you that we're releasing an updated version of it later this year in hopes of continuing to save many, many more!

Stay tuned for more details—and if you're an instructor of the course and would like to re-certify to teach our new program, please reach out to your dedicated VFIS Education Specialist so we can help you begin that process.



LOOKING FOR SOMETHING ELSE?

We may be able to offer you a custom learning opportunity or solution! For example, we can host a free webinar for your department that's devoted to helping you address your biggest concerns, like severe weather preparedness, cybersecurity, body-worn cameras in EMS, cancer prevention, succession planning and more. If you'd like to learn more or have questions about any of our offerings—please reach out to your Education Specialist, we'd be happy to assist you.

REMEMBER, TRAINING IS MORE THAN CHECKING A BOX.

"Yes, that's what's in the SOG. But here's how we really do it."

You may have heard this "red flag" comment or something similar like, "we do it our way" or "that won't work here", during your emergency services career. This is the type of mindset that can start in one area of your operations and lead to gaps in all of your practices, procedures and guidelines.

Here's an example: Fixed object strikes, regardless of mode of operation, continue to be the leading

insurance claim of VFIS clients. While there are many possible solutions for this problem—and many emergency service organizations have precautions in place—they continue to happen.

Was there a spotter? Did they use hand signals? Was the camera on the vehicle clean and providing a clear picture? It only takes skipping one simple step one time for serious (even deadly) damage to occur. And it's those types of mistakes that could point towards aloofness or apathy in your training.

IT TAKES LEADERSHIP TO CREATE ACTION.

There is a well-known quote from *School Culture Rewired* by Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker that says, *“The culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior the leader is willing to tolerate.”*

“The culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior the leader is willing to tolerate.

So, while leaders have the ability to set the benchmark for what's appropriate, what's not and what's expected in your day-to-day operations—leaders can also instantly lower that bar by being seemingly unconcerned with one member's lack of interest or enthusiasm for practices and procedures. And that could be the root-cause of many of your challenges and risky behavior.

As a leader, you have the power to develop a team that helps you solve your problems—rather than creating more of them.

You were selected for a reason. We believe in you and are here for you.





DON'T RISK IT!

a podcast by  **VFIS**



TUNE IN—ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

Tune in bi-weekly for new episodes featuring the latest fire and EMS trends, safety best practices and meaningful discussions from fellow first responders and industry specialists.

RECENT TRENDING + POPULAR CONVERSATIONS:

- **INCIDENT REHAB** with guidance from Tracie Young-Brungard, Director of Recruitment and Retention for the PA State Fire Commissioner's office
- **THE LEGAL GUARDIAN** with insights from David Givot, EMS Defense Attorney at The Legal Guardian, author of Sirens, Lights and Lawyers: The Law and Other Important Stuff EMS Providers Never Learned in School and former paramedic from LA County
- **ELECTRONIC VEHICLES AND LITHIUM ION BATTERIES** with observations from Chris Rodgers, VFIS Sr. Risk Solutions Representative, and Chief Michael O'Brian, Brighton Area Fire Authority

Plus, stay tuned for conversations on hazmat, incident investigation and documentations, patient handing, patient care reports and more!

SCAN TO
LISTEN NOW!



FROM 6 VOLUNTEERS TO FULLY-STAFFED IN 6 YEARS

Real-life tips to help your emergency service organization recruit + retain more volunteers.

Communities across North America count on volunteer fire departments to respond to fires, vehicle accidents, medical emergencies, natural disasters, public service calls and countless other scenarios. However, many departments are struggling now more than ever to meet staffing needs.

For example, the NVFC reports that while the number of volunteer firefighters in the U.S. reached an all-time-low in 2020, the call volume for fire departments has more than tripled within the last 35 years. Similarly, Canada continues to see a shrinking volunteer base year-after-year, while simultaneously facing the worst wildfire season on record in 2023.

HOW ONE RURAL VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT WAS ABLE TO IMPLEMENT SIMPLE, COMMON-SENSE CHANGES TO HELP THEM RECRUIT AND RETAIN MORE MEMBERS

VFIS had the opportunity to meet Chief Sarah Shoemaker of Nolalu Emergency Services Team (NEST) at the FIRECON Conference held in Thunder Bay, Ontario this past fall. NEST operates in five townships west of Thunder Bay and has two station locations, including one without running water. The all-volunteer organization serves an estimated 1,600 residents, which doubles in the summertime due to popular recreational activities, and has an annual call volume of about 80-100.

However, unlike many similar, rural departments, NEST is not facing recruitment and retention issues. In fact, they're fully-staffed. But, that wasn't always the case. Just six years ago, when Chief Shoemaker started her leadership tenure, they were down to six volunteers. Then, with some remarkable hard work and a few common-sense changes, they were able to turn things around, increase staffing levels and gain a favorable reputation in the community.

We thank Chief Shoemaker for her sharing her insights with us and for her service to her organization and community. Here are a few key takeaways from our conversation that may be able to assist other emergency services organizations with their volunteer recruitment and retention efforts.

When Chief Shoemaker began her leadership role more than six years ago, there were only six volunteer members.

THE PROBLEM AT A GLANCE:

When Chief Shoemaker began her leadership role more than six years ago, there were only six volunteer members whose roles were split between firefighters and medical-first response, and the department had minimal policies and procedures for recruitment, retention, training or otherwise.



Chief Sarah Shoemaker of Nolalu Emergency Services Team (NEST)

HOW CHIEF SHOEMAKER WORKED TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE:

- **ONE TEAM:** Chief Shoemaker started by combining the two existing teams (firefighters vs EMS) into one, and cross-trained the personnel group so everyone could respond to any type of call. And, because everyone was now on same team, they were able to focus on a common goal and avoid cliques that tend to form in many volunteer organizations.
- **A SHIFT IN PRIORITIES:** The Chief focused on training, developing standard operating procedures and guidelines and participating in local and regional events, like FIRECON. This helped them gain a favorable reputation in the community—and word of mouth is a major key to recruitment.

- **LEADERSHIP THAT CARES:** The Chief and fellow leaders made it a priority to make each member of team feel valued, welcomed as if they belonged. Further, they encouraged members to prioritize their wellness and host wellness check-ins, especially after a bad call.
- **LEAD BY EXAMPLE:** Recruits learned the importance of continued training, setting and meeting goals and behaving appropriately, from the seasoned-pros.
- **DON'T WASTE TIME:** Every volunteer has a limited amount of time so, they are straight-forward about what the commitments are and respectful of everyone's time. After work is completed, those who have time to engage in casual conversations and share war stories can do just that.
- **COMMUNICATION:** They implemented an app to help them communicate regularly about important logistics—like changes in availability due to employment or other commitments.

THE RESULTS:

You don't often hear fire and EMS organizations saying they are "fully staffed"—but, that's exactly what NEST considers themselves. They currently have 21 volunteer personnel (50% of which are women!) and about 75% of which are certified to FF1 and 40% at level 2. And, to add to their success, they've retained an estimated 75% or more of their personnel since Shoemaker became Chief.

WHAT'S CONSIDERED "FULLY-STAFFED"?

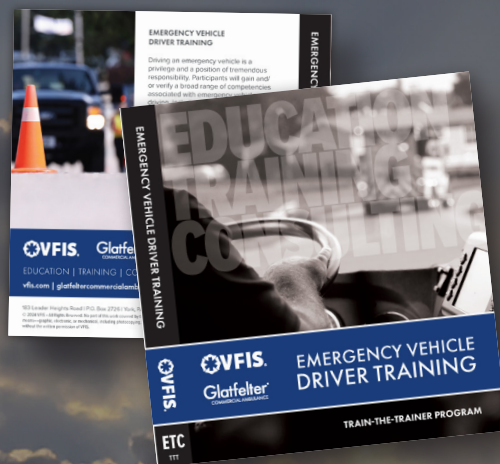
NEST considers themselves fully-staffed using the "butts in seats" approach. Meaning, their apparatus includes a primary pumper, pumper/tanker, tanker, rescue/rehab vehicle, rescue/comm and pick-up truck. So, the number of people they're able to safely ride in a seated position in all their apparatus equals twenty. (However, they currently have one extra member as they're planning for a retirement.)

Like all departments, NEST is not without its challenges. For example, the crew recently had to wait on-scene with a patient for three hours until an available ambulance could arrive from Thunder Bay. And, of course, a lack of funding is always top-of-mind—especially, when they'd love to have running water in both of their stations and a proper training location. However, having a team of 21 allows them to be able to focus on and accomplish the everyday challenges and unique hazards that come their way with much more ease than they could as a team of six.

At the end of the day, recruitment and retention doesn't have to be innovative or fancy—it just has to work. And that's exactly what the changes that Chief Shoemaker implemented did.

FIELD TRAINING CLASSES NEAR YOU!

Check out our online calendar to see our upcoming in-person learning opportunities, including our refreshed EVDT course coming soon!





A WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE ON ESO FINANCES

Insights to help emergency services leaders plan, develop + manage budgets

When Benjamin Franklin famously coined, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”, he was advising fire-threatened Philadelphians that it was important to focus resources on preventing fires rather than solely reacting to them.

Hundreds of years later, this famous quote still applies to many modern-day concerns in fire and emergency services, including planning, developing and managing a budget. Because no matter what your emergency service organization’s (ESO’s) goals, initiatives and plans may be—at some point that issue will likely intersect with one major consideration: money.

With this in mind, we sat down with Kim Lee Kenawell, MSFS, AWMA, CDFA, CRPC, who is not only the Founder and CEO of a wealth management firm, Avantra Family Wealth, but someone who has served in the emergency services field for over 30 years as a volunteer firefighter and EMT, divisional Chief of a critical incident stress management team and ESO board member with responsibilities related to budgeting, risk management and more.

Kim Lee Kenawell, MSFS, AWMA, CDFA, CRPC

Here are a few insights from our conversation with Kim Lee Kenawell to help emergency services leaders better manage their finances.

Q: What do you think are some of the fundamental financial issues in fire and emergency services?

A: When it comes to finances, I usually find that departments fall into one of two buckets: those with more than enough money and those that are just trying to get by.

However, far too many departments in both buckets don't have a basic budget. And, when it comes to the future of your organization, your budget is everything.

Q: What's one area that you wish was prioritized more in emergency services budgets?

A: Whether it's educating your members on the signs of suicide, training operators on rollover prevention or performing vital ongoing vehicle and facility maintenance—the cost of preventing hazards, threats and risks is almost always less than not doing so.

For instance, spending a few hundred dollars to have an expert talk to your crew about any of these examples would be much less than the hundreds of thousands you'd pay if an incident or accident occurs... and, most importantly, could even save a life.

Q: Let's say your ESO has enough (or more than enough) money to get by and all of your needs are met—however, your membership is low, you're all tired and there are only so many hours in the day.

Why should you devote precious time on a budget—especially when you've gotten by for years and years without one?

A: Emergency services leaders usually have many of the same main concerns, like supporting their members and their families when they need them the most and helping their community members decrease their risks and stay safe.



But, even though they usually have good intentions and their hearts are in the right place, that's not always where the budget goes—and that usually comes down to a lack of planning, budget oversight and wealth-management knowledge.

For example, if your department faces an unexpected, extreme hardship, like a LODD, do you have any emergency funds to pay for the funeral? What about their mortgage? A college fund for their children? Every leader would love to be able to help financially support a fallen firefighter's loved ones—but the emergency funds simply may not be there.

So, while it may seem overwhelming, especially if your budget has been sorely ignored for years and years,

creating and managing a budget will help ensure your dollars are spent on the things that matter most to you.

Q: If an emergency service organization finds itself in financial trouble—or simply unaware of their financial situation—where can they start?

A: First and foremost, I'd consider evaluating how your leaders with purchasing power earned their positions—specifically, take a look at your board members.

All too often, I've seen politics, friendships and personalities put people on the board of an emergency service organization. However, simply liking someone doesn't mean they should be entrusted to make educated, data-driven and strategic decisions that impact the long-term future of your ESO.

That's why it's important to encourage your team to really dig deeper when you're making those decisions and evaluate someone's true readiness to sit on a board by looking at things like their professional experience, ability to collaborate and critical thinking skills.

Q: What are some qualities you'd look for if you were responsible for selecting board members for an ESO?

A: Personally, I'd look for two things: professional experience and emotional intelligence.

For professional experience, you want people who understand the fundamentals of money management. For example, do they know (or can they learn) the average lifespan of an engine and can they perform cost projections for future vehicles and

vehicle maintenance? Do they have a grasp on the importance of emergency funds, including the possible financial impacts of unexpected events like LODDs? Are they committed to staying up-to-date with the latest financial pressures in emergency services, like consolidations, a depleting volunteer base, behavioral health access, inflation and new technology? Are they able to apply that knowledge to put an adequate amount of funds into savings and investments to help set your organization up for long-term success? Will they consult with a local insurance professional to help ensure you have benefits that are specifically designed to assist emergency service organizations and first responders?

From there, you want a group of people who are able collaborate, get things done, compromise to find win-win situations, communicate clearly and handle criticism when you make a tough call (because, no matter what you do, you can't please everyone).

Building that "dream team" often takes a group of diverse people with emotional intelligence, also called EQ, meaning they're able to perceive, manage and handle their own emotions, have self-awareness and social skills to engage with others in a positive and productive way, and see situations from multiple perspectives.

Q: How can ESOs help set their board members up for success?

A: If you're looking for a place to start, consider helping each board member gain a deeper understanding of what matters to your ESO.

For example, share the long-term goals of the organization, what your

core values are, what keeps the Chief up at night and what new fancy "toy" your members are daydreaming about. Because, as we discussed earlier, these things shouldn't only drive your day-to-day operations, but your purchasing decisions as well.

This way, board members will have the ability to strategically assess every budgetary decision to help ensure they align with the goals and values of the organization.



Q: What's one thing you wish every board member knew before accepting a position?

A: At the end of the day, being on a board isn't always the most comfortable position... I know, because I've been there.

Let's say that once you really look at the costs of your operations, consider unexpected expenses, add in inflation and determine the cost of vital education, training and prevention measures—you decide the organization should be putting 10% into savings.

While your estimates are probably accurate and your intentions are in the right place—someone is not going

to like that decision. You have to be okay with not always being the most liked person in the room, set your ego aside and do what's best for the organization.

We thank Kim for sharing her knowledge and expertise with us—and for her service to her community and fellow emergency responders. Whether you're a volunteer EMT, career firefighter, board member or you represent the emergency services community in another way—we believe all of these missions are noble and are grateful for all that you do. We hope tips like these will help your organization continue to serve your community for years to come.



TRADESHOW + EVENT SCHEDULE

Here's where the VFIS crew is headed next—and we hope to see you there!

- **June 10 – 13:** FASD Annual Conference | Orlando, FL
- **June 16 – 21:** MSFA Convention + Conference | Ocean City, MD
- **June 17 – 20:** New Mexico Counties Annual Conference | San Miguel County, NM
- **July 19 – 23:** FFCA Executive Development Conference | Tampa Bay, FL
- **August 8 – 10:** FASNY Convention | Niagara Falls, NY
- **August 14 – 16:** Fire-Rescue International | Dallas, TX
- **August 27 – 30:** Arkansas Emergency Management Conference | Hot Springs, AR
- **September 9 – 13:** EMS World Expo | Las Vegas, NV
- **September 13 – 14:** NJSFA Convention | Wildwood, NJ
- **September 18 – 20:** NVFC Fall Meeting | Kansas City, MO
- **September 23 – 25:** FireShowsWest Conference & Expo | Reno, NV
- **October 15 – 17:** CalChiefs Annual Conference | Costa Mesa, CA
- **October 18 – 19:** Tri-State Emergency Responders Conference | Dubuque, IA
- **November 5 – 7:** FireFusion | Charleston, SC
- **November 14 – 17:** IAFC VCOS Symposium in the Sun | Clearwater, FL

Special thanks to all of these organizations for hosting meaningful opportunities for the emergency services community to be together—and for all that you do.





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