



GOVERNOR'S FIRE SERVICE POLICY COUNCIL

Biennial Report

2023-2024



476,685 Biennial reports. *The Governor's Fire Service Policy Council shall provide a biennial report to the governor on the overall performance of the Department of the State Fire Marshal. The report shall identify significant successes and improvement opportunities.*

FOREWORD

by Chair Karl Koenig



Over the last year, I have had the privilege to chair the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council. During this term, we shattered acres burned records with more than two million acres lost to fire. While that is a staggering number, we need only to look at the number of structures lost, 132 in 2024, instead of the nearly 5,000 in 2020 to illustrate what happens with a coordinated effort and clear policy from leaders. Having those fire industry leaders on your council is proof that leaders with clear goals make a difference for all Oregonians.

As a result of Senate Bill 762, Oregon's fire service set a course direction that emphasizes all facets of our fire challenges here in Oregon. The work of the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council has emphasized collaboration and meaningful discussions on shared values which have made this council and its representative members a complementary and productive team. The council's work over calendar years 2023 and 2024 encompassed a range of policy efforts to provide comprehensive resources in support of Oregon fire service and programs to protect Oregonians. We are all committed to excellence and providing the best possible policy options to serve the state and its visitors.

On behalf of Vice Chair Ben Stange, Oregon fire chiefs, and the council, thank you for the opportunity to develop and recommend progressive policy and insight into the Oregon fire service.

Regards,
Karl Koenig
Chair
Governor's Fire Service Policy Council

OVERVIEW OF THE COUNCIL



Since 2001, the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council has existed to provide advice and guidance on issues of common interest, policies, and affairs that affect the fire protection and life safety of Oregonians. The council objectives are to:

- Cultivate a forum to identify, assess, and prioritize concerns specific to the Oregon fire service.
- Develop a unified and collective response to address timely concerns facing the Oregon fire service.
- Upon consensus, ensure adequate communication and expert advice is provided to the governor and the state fire marshal to inform policy decisions.

Membership of the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council (2024)

Leadership

Mariana Ruiz-Temple, State Fire Marshal, Executive Director

Karl Koenig, Oregon State Fire Fighters Council, Chair

Ben Stange, Oregon Fire Chiefs Association, Vice Chair

Members

John Dunn, Oregon Fire District Directors Association

Jason Bolen, Oregon Fire Marshals Association

John Powell, Property & Casualty Insurance Provider

Claire McGrew, Oregon State Fire Marshal

Jason Servatius, Oregon Volunteer Firefighters Association

Todd Riley, League of Oregon Cities

Rebecca Shanklin, General Public

Ex-Officio Members

Casey Coddington, Oregon State Police

Phil Castle, Department of Public Safety Standards and Training

Doug Grafe, Governor's Office

SIGNIFICANT SUCCESSES

Defensible Space Program

In April 2022, a subcommittee of the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council was formed to design a uniform wildfire structural checklist using data-based evidence to provide to the Oregon fire service, partnering agencies, and the public to reduce wildfire risk to homes and structures. The subcommittee brought together the OSFM, fire service professionals, and building code experts to develop a tool for evaluating risk and identifying home hardening modifications to increase fire resistance for buildings.

During the January 2023 meeting, the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council voted to approve the proposed OSFM defensible space assessment tool.

A preview of the new program and accompanying suite of tools was presented to the fire service in early June 2023, followed by a public release in late June 2023. The program offers Oregon-specific wildfire preparedness best practices, resources to download, and a property assessment request portal for the public. A [website](#) was created to provide a central location for all Oregonians with the information and connections they need to create defensible space and better protect their homes from wildfire.

Oregon Department of the State Fire Marshal

July 1, 2023, marked a special day for the Oregon Department of the State Fire Marshal. While the agency existed as an office within other state agencies since 1917, this was its first day as an independent state agency. The Governor's Fire Service Policy Council was kept apprised of the transition work throughout the process.

Throughout 2023 and into 2024, the department navigated the transition smoothly and established a solid foundation. An agency budget was developed and presented to the legislature. Staffing more than doubled between 2022 and 2024, with most of those positions supporting new functions such as fiscal, human resources, information technology, and business operations. Grand openings for new office locations were held in Salem and Bend.

The organizational growth continues with ongoing work to build a supportive, safe, and efficient work environment. Employee engagement is achieved through a Workplace Guidelines Group, a Wellness Committee, a Safety Committee, a DEI Committee, a Positive Action Committee, and more. In-person biannual all-staff meetings are held to support connection and to ensure all employees are aligned with the OSFM's mission.

Convening of the Fire Service

In June 2024, Governor's Fire Service Policy Council Executive Director and State Fire Marshal Mariana Ruiz-Temple called for a gathering to collectively discuss the most critical issues facing the fire service. The group assembled as a subcommittee of the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council to meet the intent of ORS 476.680(6). It was the first time that leaders from each fire association and tribes came together to create a common voice of issues facing the Oregon fire service and to collectively generate solutions.

The topics discussed during the meeting included increased calls, emergency medical services, workforce issues, wildfire, regulations, and funding. The insights and collaboration that emerged from the meeting resulted in a report, approved by the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council in September 2024. The 20-page report contains critical issues and explores the systemic changes required to modernize and stabilize the fire service's capacity to assist and protect Oregon's communities.

Behavioral Health Collaborative

The Governor's Fire Service Policy Council chartered a Behavioral Health Subcommittee in January 2023 to recommend actionable strategies to reduce the risk of and mitigate behavioral health related issues in the fire service.

The subcommittee brought together fire service professionals, clinicians, peer support experts, training, insurance, and chaplaincy representatives. In 2023, the group conducted a survey of the fire service, researched best practices, engaged in discussions, and developed recommendations to address issues facing the health, safety, and wellness of fire service professionals. The recommendations included:

1. The Oregon State Fire Marshal should establish an Oregon fire service Health and Safety Collaborative and provide support, such as staff to engage and involve fire service stakeholders in improving all aspects of firefighter health, safety, and well-being. This collaborative should consist of the OSFM, DPSST, OFDDA, OVFA, OSFFC, OFCA, SDAO, CIS, and SMEs and create a statewide, regionalized community to include and serve all Oregon fire agencies.
2. The State of Oregon provide dedicated funding and resources to support firefighter health, wellness, and safety efforts.
3. The OSFM and/or DPSST develop and distribute related training curriculum and support services to the collaborative and Oregon fire agencies.
4. The collaborative report quarterly to the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council and, as appropriate, provide additional recommendations to improve firefighter health, wellness, and safety.

The Governor's Fire Service Policy Council endorsed the subcommittee's work and supported the associated recommendations on February 1, 2024.

In June 2024, the OSFM launched the Oregon Fire Service Health & Safety Collaborative, staffed with one full-time coordinator. This collaborative is a significant commitment to the health and safety of the men and women serving in the fire service across the state, ensuring they receive needed support in their critical roles. Resources are focused on four categories: cancer risk reduction, physical health & fitness, behavioral health, and incident safety.

Urban Search and Rescue Report

House Bill 2484 from the 2023 legislative session directed the OSFM to study the state's needs related to urban search and rescue (USAR). Through OSFM leadership and in partnership with the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council, a subcommittee was created to assess the organizational structure necessary for USAR and to prepare funding recommendations.

USAR is a multi-hazard discipline that involves the location, extrication, and initial medical stabilization of victims trapped in an urban area, including structures or trenches collapsed because of natural disaster, war, terrorism, or accidents. Oregon faces many risks and natural disaster threats from a Cascadia Subduction Zone event and tsunami to catastrophic wildfires, flooding, and ice storms. Statewide and regional incidents from Oregon's natural disaster risk profile will require USAR task forces and capability.

Throughout 2023 and 2024, the USAR subcommittee reviewed historical information, assessed current hazard needs of Oregon, evaluated FEMA team typing, and determined budgetary needs. Recommendations contained in the HB 2428 report were approved by the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council at a September 2024 meeting and were subsequently presented to the legislature.

Review of Rural Fire Protection District Statutes

Following the passage of House Bill 2522 (2023), a task force was created as a subcommittee of the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council. The task force was charged with reviewing ORS 478 and preparing a report for the legislature to provide an in-depth analysis of the current state of rural fire protection in Oregon, identify areas for improvement, and outline recommendations for legislative changes.

Today, rural fire protection districts (RFPDs) make up most fire protection services across our state. Their contributions extend well beyond fighting fires; they are integral to fire protection, emergency response and emergency medical services that protect the well-being of our communities. As our state continues to grow and face new challenges, it is essential that we ensure our legal framework reflects the current and future needs of these districts. The task force report is a comprehensive evaluation of Oregon's current statutes governing RFPDs, which have evolved far beyond their original mandate and now play a vital role in protecting the lives and property of Oregonians.

In September 2024, the report containing short-, mid-, and long-term recommendations was completed and approved by the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council and was then presented to the legislature.

OSFM Grants

Response Ready Oregon

- Engine Program: \$25 million awarded apparatus to local fire agencies, including seven type 3 engines (midsize), 20 type 6 engines (smaller), and 30 tactical tenders, strategically placed across the state to add firefighting capacity and critical response resources to protect communities.
- 2022 Wildfire Season Staffing Grant: \$6 million awarded to 181 fire agencies.
- 2023 Wildfire Season Staffing Grant: \$6 million awarded to 185 fire service agencies.
 - Combined, these grants increased capacity by 3,476 firefighters in 220 communities.

Community Wildfire Risk Reduction

- Defensible Space Incentive Grant: \$271,000 to protect community infrastructure.
- Community Wildfire Preparedness Planning: \$2.7 million to support CWPP implementation.
- Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant: \$18 million awarded to 106 projects statewide.

Cross-Cutting Investments

- Tribal Nations Investments: \$4.5 million awarded to tribal nations in Oregon.
- Oregon Fire Service Capacity Program: \$13.5 million awarded to 33 fire agencies.
- Firefighter Apprenticeship Pilot: \$3 million to two pilot programs for apprenticeships.



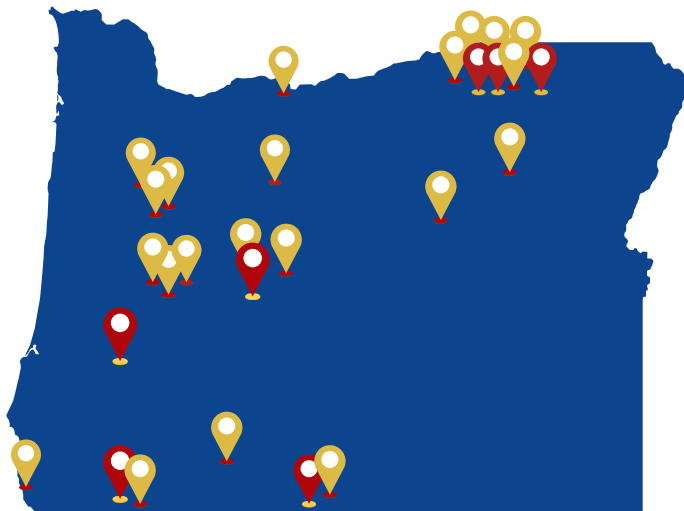
Wildfire Seasons

In the 2023 wildfire season, the OSFM mobilized resources to six conflagrations in Umatilla, Klamath, Lane, Douglas, and Josephine counties. Pre-positioning and immediate response efforts spread across the state in a concerted effort to keep fires small and out of communities. OSFM costs for the 2023 wildfire season topped 12.5 million.

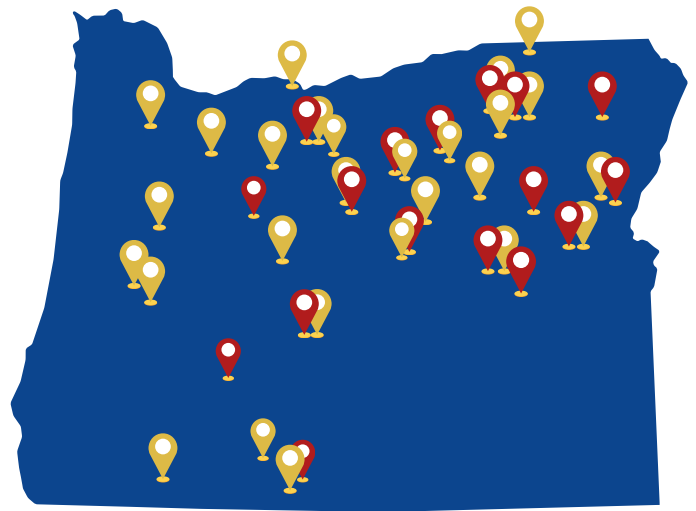
In 2024, Oregon had its worst wildfire season on record. More than 1.9 million acres burned across the state. The season began early with the first conflagration in June.

During the historic wildfire season, the Oregon State Fire Marshal mobilized to 17 conflagrations statewide, deploying 88 task forces from Oregon's fire service, bringing in firefighters and equipment from four neighboring states to battle the fires. Many of the 2024 fires were driven by challenging weather conditions, like high winds and extreme heat, which caused rapid fire growth and threatened thousands of Oregonians.

The Oregon State Fire Marshal incident management teams were instrumental in coordinating efforts alongside local, state, and federal agencies, providing critical structural protection for homes and critical infrastructure.



2023



2024



CONFLAGRATION



IMMEDIATE RESPONSE
& PRE-POSITION



IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The future work of the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council and the Department of the State Fire Marshal will be guided by the needs identified in the 2024 Convening of the Fire Service report.

In 2025, there are anticipated changes to the membership composition of the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council, as Senate Bill 860 moves through the legislature. The bill amends ORS 476.680 to increase the council to 12 members, adding representatives from the Special Districts Association of Oregon, a federally recognized Oregon Indian tribe, and the Oregon Fire Service Office Administrators. The ex-officio roles are adjusted to remove the Oregon State Police superintendent and add a designee from the Oregon Health Authority who is involved with administering the emergency medical services and trauma system (described in ORS 431A.050).