

**Department of Homeland Security  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
U.S. Fire Administration  
Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy  
Aug. 5, 2024  
J-107**

**Attendees:**

The following members of the Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy were in attendance for the meeting.

John S. Butler (Chair)  
Fire Chief  
Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department  
12099 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22033

W. Nelson Bauer, Ph.D.  
Deputy Fire Chief  
Orange Beach Fire and Rescue Department  
P.O. Box 458  
Orange Beach, AL 36561

Steven Dubay (Vice Chair)  
Deputy Fire Chief, retired  
Colorado Springs Fire Department  
463 Evergreen Court  
Woodland Park, CO 80863

Megan Schuth, Ph.D.  
Battalion Chief/Fire Marshal  
Denton Fire Department  
332 E. Hickory Street  
Denton, TX 76201

Dr. Michael Macey  
Director of Public Safety  
St. John's College  
1160 Camino de Cruz Blanca  
Santa Fe, NM 87505

Scott Somers, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Arizona State University  
10157 East Palladium Drive  
Mesa, AZ 85212

Tiffanye S. Wesley  
Deputy Fire Chief  
Arlington County Fire Department  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard Suite 400  
Arlington, VA 22201

Edward Davis  
Executive Director  
National Association of Hispanic Firefighters  
3114 Flameleaf Street  
Garland, TX 75044

Federal Emergency Management Agency/U.S. Fire Administration/National Fire Academy (FEMA/USFA/NFA) staff in attendance:

Mr. David Brummett, Attorney Advisor, FEMA Office of Chief Counsel  
Mr. Eriks Gabliks, Superintendent, NFA  
Ms. Deb Gartrell-Kemp, Program Support Specialist  
Ms. Michelle Spielman, Secretary  
Chief Richard Patrick, Director, National Fire and Emergency Medical Services Division, USFA  
Mr. James (Vince) Hodge, Director, Management, Operations and Support Services (MOSS)  
Ms. Tiffany Warren, Branch Chief, Training, Administration, Planning and Analysis Branch (TAPA), NFA (via teleconference)  
Ms. Tammy Pimentel-Matthews, Branch Chief, Response and Special Operations Branch, NFA  
Mr. Richard Sexton, Branch Chief, Prevention, NFA

Others in attendance/public attendees:

None

**Convene Board of Visitors Meeting/Welcome  
Chief John S. Butler, Chairperson, Board of Visitors  
Mr. Eriks Gabliks, Superintendent, National Fire Academy**

Mr. Eriks Gabliks welcomed everyone to this meeting of the USFA/NFA Board of Visitors. The meeting was being conducted under regulations outlined in the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). Everyone is a Special Government Employee (SGE). Mr. Gabliks served as the Designated Federal Officer for the meeting to make sure everyone followed the federal requirements.

Mr. Gabliks stated that Ms. Deb Gartrell-Kemp is the contact person. She is the one who collects everyone's information and sets the meetings up. Ms. Michelle Spielman was Ms. Gartrell-Kemp's backup, and Ms. Jennifer Vanover would be taking notes for the meeting.

Mr. Gabliks stated that the Board of Visitors agenda is published in the Federal Register. The times listed are approximate, and they might need to adjust the schedule as needed. There should be enough time scheduled for all speakers, comments and questions, as well as for interaction. Mr. Gabliks stated that under the FACA requirements, anyone wanting to send something in to be reviewed had the ability to do so. There were no comments sent in from the public.

Dextera/Leading Solutions support staff, Ms. Vanover, would be taking notes and would compile minutes after the meeting. The minutes include matters discussed and conclusions reached by the board. The minutes would be prepared and sent to the meeting chair within 90 calendar days. All comments and notes would be available for public review forever; they would be archived. Mr. Gabliks advised everyone to be sure to state their name before speaking so the minutes could be recorded accurately. If anyone has notes, they should email them to Ms. Gartrell-Kemp so she can forward them to Ms. Vanover. Mr. Gabliks stated that for the meeting order they would follow Robert's Rules for motions.

Mr. Gabliks convened this meeting of the USFA/NFA Board of Visitors.

Mr. Gabliks stated that the agenda would be adjusted, and the decision was agreed to by the chair and vice chair. Mr. James Hodge would give the MOSS updates and then the Board of Visitors would go on the campus tour in the morning because of the temperature rise later in the day. After the tour, Mr. David Brummett would give the annual ethics briefing. The agenda would then continue as published with times adjusted.

Mr. Gabliks turned the meeting over to Chief John Butler to start the introductions. Once everyone had the chance to introduce themselves, Chief Butler then turned the meeting over to Mr. Hodge for the MOSS update.

## **Deferred Maintenance and Capital Improvements on the National Emergency Training Center Campus**

### **Mr. James Hodge, Director, Management, Operations and Support Services**

Mr. Hodge welcomed the Board of Visitors members and expressed gratitude for their time and attention. He provided a comprehensive overview of the completed, ongoing and upcoming maintenance and improvement projects across the campus.

Mr. Hodge stated that there is a paving project underway with additional handicapped spots being added to enhance accessibility. There are a few sections that still need paved.

Mr. Hodge highlighted the urgency of repairing the Building E Portico due to severe structural degradation and mentioned that it is the next large project. The columns are coming apart, and if that would fall, it could become a major disaster. There will be scaffolding going up around most of Building E. The columns will be removed and then put back. That project will be over \$2 million and will start in August and continue into December.

Mr. Steven Dubay asked if that project would affect access to the building and whether staff would need to relocate. Mr. Hodge replied that it will impact the entrance and exit. There have been emails sent out to staff about where the entrances and exits will be while the project moves forward. The U.S. Fire Prevention Summit will also be impacted and there will be more information on that later. The construction zone will be blocked off and safety measures will be in place. Construction will be suspended during the summit.

Mr. Hodge shared images depicting the visible separation of the columns. Chief Butler asked how they found out that the columns were separating. Mr. Hodge highlighted a meticulously categorized long-deferred maintenance list (which included the Building E Portico), prioritized based on criticality, and reiterated the continuous monitoring of campus conditions.

In addressing technical enhancements, Mr. Hodge stated that there have been campuswide Wi-Fi improvements. AT&T will provide the campus with heat maps that show the signal strength of the Wi-Fi. They are still struggling with some signal issues because of block walls. They are still investigating how to improve that.

Mr. Hodge stated that Building K had to be repainted because of the lead paint and general deterioration of the eaves. That work has been completed, but there is constant repair with the older buildings on campus.

Mr. Hodge stated that they are installing a bioretention pond, which is a state requirement. The bioretention pond is to help control rainwater runoff. This project should be done by the end of October.

Mr. Hodge mentioned that they have been replacing paper signs with professional emergency shelter-in-place signs to provide a more professional appearance.

Mr. Hodge stated that they will be updating and replacing the closed-circuit TVs with video surveillance systems across campus.

Mr. Hodge stated that firefighters and medical staff from the Vigilant Hose Company toured the campus a few weeks ago to see the upgrades that have been completed with the fire protection systems. This provides the new individuals the opportunity to see the campus and know where things are in case of emergency response that may be required on campus.

Mr. Hodge stated that hazmat is stored at the burn range. That area is a very controlled environment and has to be monitored closely; however, staff who manage the hazmat have been doing an excellent job.

Mr. Hodge advised that there are still issues with getting the new ice cream machine, which is a favorite with students, to work and keeping it working.

As another energy saving initiative, Mr. Hodge stated that they were replacing the dorm lights with LED lights. They will be saving money by using the LED lights.

Dr. Scott Somers asked if they have done the calculations of the operational cost of what that would save. Mr. Hodge replied that they have some unofficial information about that, but they are in the process of getting that kind of information from the solar panels that were installed. Dr. Somers asked if they were going to do the outside lights also. Mr. Hodge replied yes.

Mr. Hodge stated that in some buildings they have been removing the old insulation from the attics and reinstalling spray foam insulation, which provides better insulation properties and adds to energy savings.

Mr. Hodge stated that they are in the process of renovating buildings G and R currently. There is usually an annual meeting to make note if people will need to relocate to different buildings, etc.

Mr. Hodge stated that if the power were to go out and the solar would not support the campus, there are 17 generators on campus as backup. Usually only 1 or 2 are needed to power the whole campus. Mr. Hodge asked if there were any questions.

Dr. Somers asked if there has been any discussion about the restrooms outside the dorms going to gender neutral. Mr. Hodge stated that there has been some talk on that in the common areas.

Mr. Dubay asked how much use the pool gets because they have to do a lot of maintenance to that. Is it worth the cost to keep it up and running? Mr. Hodge replied that he does not have the numbers and does not know how many people use it. The pump on the pool has been out for about 2 months. Mr. Gabliks stated that the pool is part of the fitness center. There are people who would rather get their exercise from swimming laps. There have been questions about why the fitness center is not open 24 hours.

The tour of the campus, as led by Mr. Hodge, was followed by planned ethics training conducted by Mr. Brummett upon the return of the Board of Visitors members.

### **Ethics Training**

#### **Mr. David Brummett, Federal Emergency Management Agency Office of Chief Counsel**

Chief Butler turned the meeting over to Mr. Brummett.

Mr. Brummett is the embedded attorney and the ethics counselor who advises the NFA and the Board of Visitors. Mr. Brummett was advised that there were 2 people in this group who have not been in this ethics briefing before. There have been no ethics issues from any board member this past year.

Mr. Brummett proceeded with delivering the annual ethics briefing as required for SGEs. The briefing consisted of a PowerPoint presentation tailored for the board by the Office of Chief Counsel.

Mr. Brummett offered to take questions from the members, either in the room or directly by email or phone. Mr. Brummett thanked everyone for listening and concluded the briefing.

Chief Butler turned the meeting over to Chief Richard Patrick for updates on the National Fire and Emergency Medical Services Division (NFEMSD).

### **National Fire and Emergency Medical Services Division**

#### **Chief Richard Patrick, Director, National Fire and Emergency Medical Services Division, U.S. Fire Administration**

Chief Patrick thanked everyone for the opportunity to give the updates on NFEMSD.

Chief Patrick stated that during the reorganization the data and research divisions were separated. They also created an emergency medical services (EMS) branch. Everything that is being done is data guided. They get most data from National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and National Emergency Medical Services Information System (NEMESIS).

Chief Patrick stated that there are 32 firefighter line-of-duty deaths currently and that has been holding for about 3 weeks. Currently there are 1,261 documented public deaths from civilian home fire fatalities. In the past few years, civilian deaths have trickled upward even though the number of residential fires has gone down. More people die from home fires every year than all natural disasters combined.

Chief Patrick stated that for the USFA Fire Prevention and Control Summit, one of the original standing groups is Building Codes. Mr. Brian Metzger, who is the acting branch chief of the Prevention Branch, is the co-chair of that group. That group recently submitted their report for this year's summit. There is a new building codes position that is being fully funded by FEMA. USFA is in the process of recruitment for that position.

Chief Patrick stated that the International Code Council has 12 voting slots for the USFA. Mr. Metzger is one of the subject matter experts (SMEs) on that topic. Mr. Bruce Bouch, a retired deputy fire marshal from the state of Maryland, is also a part of that group. Chief Patrick stated that they just offered the branch chief position for Prevention and Special Operations. The individual is going through a security check currently. They are trying to understand what the federal government's role is to support and get others to support and participate in building codes.

Chief Patrick stated that one of the main campaigns going on in the prevention side is "Fire is Everyone's Fight®." It was created at the USFA about 15 years ago. There are 3,000 collective entities participating in that campaign. Sesame Street is one of the programs under this campaign and it is the most popular fire prevention tool offered by USFA. There is a wildfire prevention coloring book coupled with a marketing campaign currently underway.

Chief Patrick stated that the Home Fire Fatalities and Social Vulnerability Index is live on the FEMA and USFA websites. The available data drills to the county level across the U.S. and provides various risks. The data is approximately 2 years old. They are working on tying all the data information systems together so there will be 1 system.

Chief Patrick stated that the Fire Marshal Interchange has a few thousand fire marshals across the country that participate in that platform and share knowledge and information. They also have the Hotel-Motel Fire Safety Program which is a statutory requirement. All 50 states use it per the requirements for fire and life safety. Chief Patrick asked if there were any questions and there were none at this time.

Chief Patrick stated that 67% of all fire department responses are for emergency medical incidents as reported to NFIRS. When it comes to NEMESIS data, 40% of the 52 million incidents are responded to by fire-based EMS. The EMS Branch is to assist fire departments with EMS experiences and initiatives, learn from them and pass it on to others. The branch is a work in progress, and they have hired on 4 clinicians with good academic backgrounds.

Chief Patrick stated that there was an EMS work group added to the Fire Prevention and Control Summit last year, and the work group recently submitted their final report. The Fire Prevention and Control Summit will be held on Oct. 8 this year. There will be a panel on EMS, and a few of the discussion points will be the unhoused, opioids and falls.

Chief Patrick stated that there is still a push for EMS nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to have their own emergency support function (ESF). There is a FEMA document forthcoming stating that there will not be an ESF for EMS and why. FEMA has been offering webinars for NGOs if they want to learn more.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs was the contractor for the EMS needs assessment, and there were about 30 SMEs on that panel. Chief Patrick has a comprehensive profile on a board in his office that highlights the findings and maps out all the responsibilities related to every federal, state, local and NGO potential role. They are using this information for their work group for the summit and for the division's strategic plan.

Chief Patrick stated that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is taking NFPA 450, *Guide for Emergency Medical Services and Systems* and NFPA 451, *Guide for Community Health Care Programs* and consolidating them into NFPA 455, *Guide for Emergency Medical Services and Systems and Community Health Care Programs*. It should be released for public comment toward the end of this calendar year.

Chief Patrick stated that the Federal Interagency Committee on Emergency Medical Services (FICEMS) will be sponsoring a Post Crash Care Summit on Aug. 6 in Washington, D.C. It is a hybrid, and there are around 400 virtual registered participants. That will be an all-day event. The next FICEMS meeting will be Dec. 11. Chief Patrick stated that the National Emergency Medical Services Advisory Council is also meeting this week in D.C., and some staff is participating in that.

Chief Patrick stated that the division is now providing briefs to the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program classes on division programs and services. He stated that it takes about an hour to talk about all the programs.

Chief Butler asked if the students get any kind of literature about the programs to take with them and share. Chief Patrick replied that as of now they do not, other than giving them the website.

**National Fire Data and Research Center Division**  
**Chief Richard Patrick, Director, National Fire and Emergency Medical Services Division, U.S. Fire Administration**

Chief Patrick is filling in for Dr. Denise Smith. She could not make this meeting because she had a previously scheduled event. Chief Patrick stated that Dr. Smith has only been on board for about 2 to 3 months. She is still learning, but the transition is going well.

Chief Patrick stated that Mr. Craig Rollins has just come aboard as the branch chief of the National Fire Data Center. They have also hired a new data scientist, and he is working remotely in Florida.

Dr. Somers asked if this was the first remote employee. Chief Patrick replied that he is the second.

Chief Patrick stated that when they received funding for NERIS, they also got funding for more positions.

Chief Patrick stated that they continue to work with national fire service organizations to understand the major challenges facing fire and EMS. They are working with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate (DHS S&T) to identify funding needs and ways to use data, research and technology to meet future needs for the fire and EMS communities. They are working together to build out the research efforts.

Chief Patrick stated that there was a webinar last Thursday about NERIS, and the system is on track. They are getting good feedback and making technological adjustments to fix any quirks. In 2025, they should start rolling departments into the program.

Dr. Michael Macey asked if they were getting better responses from the departments. Chief Patrick replied that it is at 75% responses and it changes every day.

Mr. Dubay asked if NERIS will be nimble to accept emerging issues. Ms. Tammy Pimentel-Matthews replied that there are different things that will be captured in NERIS. There are a lot of things going into NERIS on the back end to get it ready for all the data. Mr. Gabliks stated that there will be tutorials on the Underwriters Laboratories Fire Safety Research Institute webpage on how to use NERIS. The NFA is looking to build classes that will teach the students how to use the data. One class is a data literacy class for students to learn how to use data, share data and implement it.

Chief Butler turned the meeting over to Ms. Tiffany Warren to give updates on the TAPA Branch. Ms. Warren joined the meeting via teleconference.

## **National Fire Academy Updates on Developments, Deliveries, Staffing and Admissions**

### **Ms. Tiffany Warren, Branch Chief, Training, Administration, Planning and Analysis Branch**

Ms. Warren stated that she will present some data that the Board of Visitors requested about some online course deliveries. Ms. Warren showed a slide with a total number of online self-study course deliveries from fiscal year (FY) 2014 to present by state. It does not include the blended courses. They can do another study on how many courses use the learning management system. The top 5 states for the most online self-study deliveries are California, Texas, Florida, Washington and Colorado. California, Texas and some other states are requiring their staff to take certain NFA online courses. Ms. Warren asked if there were any questions.

Mr. Dubay asked if the numbers shown on the slide are raw numbers. Ms. Warren replied yes.

Dr. Macy asked if there is a matrix to show advancement to job performance from taking the courses. Ms. Warren replied that the only correlation to job performance that they do is the Government Performance and Results Act results. That is for the courses done on campus and does not include the online self-study courses. That may be something to look at in the future.

Ms. Warren showed a slide with totals from the top 5 states by year from 2014 to 2024 for online self-study deliveries. This is showing the usage over the years. There was a spike in 2020 to 2021



because of COVID-19. There was a steep drop when the campus reopened. That was caused by a variety of reasons, with one being that people wanted to get back to normal with in-person course deliveries.

Ms. Warren stated that the next 2 slides showed the online self-study courses that were in high demand in 2022 and 2023. In 2022, the top 5 courses were:

- National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) S-190, “Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior” (Q0901-S190).
- NWCG L-180, “Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service” (Q0902-L180).
- NWCG S-130, “Firefighter Training (Wildland)” (Q0900-S130).
- “Incident Command System (ICS)-100: An Introduction to the Incident Command System” (Q0462).
- “Introduction to Emergency Response to Terrorism” (Q0890).

Ms. Warren stated that it would make sense that the top 2 courses are wildland urban interface (WUI) when looking at the top online self-study courses by state.

Mr. Dubay asked if they sunset any of the online self-study courses, like the ones at the bottom that are not seeing much attention. Mr. Gabliks replied yes.

Ms. Warren went to the 2023 slide and the top 4 were the same as 2022. In 2023, the top 5 courses were:

- NWCG S-190, “Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior” (Q0901-S190).
- NWCG L-180, “Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service” (Q0902-L180).
- NWCG S-130, “Firefighter Training (Wildland)” (Q0900-S130).
- “ICS-100: An Introduction to the Incident Command System” (Q0462).
- “ICS-200: Basic Incident Command System for Initial Response” (Q0463).

Ms. Warren asked if there were any questions. She stated that they have data on all kinds of information and to let her know if anyone thinks of any data requests; she will find the data.

Mr. Dubay commented that he was shocked at the steep drop in the online self-study course deliveries from 2021 to 2022. Mr. Richard Sexton stated that certain online courses ended up becoming in-person instead of online.

Chief Butler turned the meeting over to Mr. Gabliks for updates on the NFA.

### **National Fire Academy, Superintendent’s Updates**

#### **Mr. Eriks Gabliks, Superintendent, National Fire Academy**

Mr. Gabliks stated that the highlight for the USFA was that the reauthorization was approved. It took some time and involved a lot of different organizations, and he thanked everyone that played a role in that.

Mr. Gabliks stated that 2 weeks ago they kicked off the USFA 50th anniversary celebration. There was a meeting with all of the staff, and they had a ceremony with a cake cutting. There will be more events for the 50th anniversary; the next one will be at the Fire Prevention and Control Summit. The summit was announced for October and is a week earlier than last year. There are going to be 350 people on campus, and there will be unlimited livestreaming off campus. The summit this year is going to address the primary issues from the last 2 summits which are:

- Cancer.
- Mental health.
- Recruitment and retention.
- Codes and standards.
- Environmental response by fire and EMS providers.
- The awareness of funding needs for state, local, tribal and territorial fire departments.

Mr. Gabliks stated that those 6 groups were already in place. There were 4 additional work groups that were created: EMS, emerging issues (which includes lithium-ion batteries), cardiac and data. There are also other presentations on the summit schedule. Mr. Gabliks stated that the agenda is on the webpage and everyone is invited to attend.

Mr. Gabliks advised that the 20th anniversary of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Firefighters Life Safety Summit will be taking place in St. Louis. They will be discussing the 16 initiatives. The collective effort on campus is to reduce the number of names they put on the wall each year and reduce the number of injuries and deaths each year.

Mr. Gabliks stated that they have gotten a lot of questions about the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) first responders standard, and the USFA's position has been clear. That is an OSHA initiative, and the USFA has done its part to get the word out to the American fire service. It is a standard that has not been updated for many years.

Mr. Gabliks stated that the USFA has been very active with the PFAS issues. The Federal Aviation Administration is working with the Department of Defense (DOD) now and has a new firefighting foam that does not have PFAS in it. The new foam does act differently and there is different training required. There are still thousands of gallons of aqueous film forming foam with PFAS in it across the country. The federal partners are having discussions on how to go about disposing and handling it. As to firefighting turnout gear (personal protective equipment (PPE)), USFA and others are working with DOD to identify PFAS-free alternatives. DOD is involved not only because it has firefighters who wear PPE but also because they have PFAS in several items, such as tents and other equipment, as a water repellent. There is a lot of investigation going on for that. They also want to make sure that whatever the replacement is that it does not create other issues.

Mr. Gabliks stated that the NFA has been around since 1980. Since that time the NFA has trained more than 3,322,000 students both on and off campus. They are constantly looking at new ways to do business.

Mr. Gabliks stated that Chief Tonya Hoover retired about 2 weeks ago. The process is moving forward to find a replacement for her position. Mr. Gabliks is helping as the acting U.S. deputy fire administrator for the time being, but he is still the superintendent.

Chief Tiffanye Wesley asked when the application period closes for that position and whether any applicants are being looked at. Mr. Gabliks replied that applications have been received and that the process is moving forward. There are multiple reviews done along the way and nothing can be announced until the process has been completed.

Mr. Dubay asked if there were any updates to the USFA strategic plan. Mr. Gabliks stated that Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell established the 2024-2027 strategic plan. There are 4 goals for the strategic plan:

- Establish USFA as the leader of the nation's fire and EMS.
- Prepare the nation's fire and EMS services to prevent, prepare for, respond to and mitigate all hazards.
- Inspire fire service and EMS research and technology innovation.
- Establish a prepared, resilient and engaged USFA workforce.

Mr. Gabliks explained a little bit about each goal. The first goal is being done with the U.S. fire administrator going to the different conferences and the different summits that are going on around the world. Goal 2 is the NFA as the training arm, and they are targeting about 80,000 students this year, and there is always more that can be done. With the NFA moving to the quarterly enrollment, it has been a plus. They did just add over 75 off-campus classes to the schedule. NERIS is part of the goal 3 strategic plan. There are a lot of groups and organizations working together to engage and address the needs of fire and EMS. On goal 4, there have been a lot of retirements, and those positions take time to fill. Some positions have been vacant for about 2 years.

Mr. Dubay wanted to thank all of the staff involved in sending out the weekly reports and the instructor's newsletters.

Mr. Gabliks stated that there are still people out there who do not know there is a USFA or an NFA, and they do not know that cancer is a concern for the fire service, etc., even though information is distributed in every way possible.

Dr. Macey wanted Mr. Gabliks to explain more about the first goal. Mr. Gabliks stated that what he is seeing with the U.S. fire administrator is that she is opening more doors within their federal partners than ever before. The American fire service has a seat at the table at more national organizational discussions now than before. It is also about having the connection to state, local, tribal and territorial departments to help fire and EMS with apparatus, equipment and all their needs.

Mr. Gabliks turned the meeting over to Ms. Pimentel-Matthews for the update on the Leadership and Partnership Branch.

## **National Fire Academy Updates on Leadership and Partnership Branch Ms. Tammy Pimentel-Matthews, Acting Branch Chief, Leadership and Partnership Branch**

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that Mr. Lester Rich was the acting branch chief for the Leadership and Partnership Branch. She came on in August 2023 as branch chief for the Response and Special Operations Branch. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews is now the acting branch chief of the Leadership and Partnership Branch. They hired an education specialist in January, Mr. Michael Bercaw, who she will talk more about later. They have a vacancy for a training specialist for Leadership, which will be over the Managing Officer Program. They are doing interviews for that position today. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews explained that they have put in additional staffing requests for FY 25/26.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews explained some of the things that the Leadership and Partnership Branch focuses on. The EFO Program just went through a revamp. The Managing Officer Program is currently under a refresh so the classes are no longer being offered. They have had SMEs come in and discuss what needed to be done to refresh the program. The Managing Officer Program revamp is the priority this year. They are also doing a train-the-trainer in October of the 2-day class “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Fire Service.” There will be 24 people that come in to do the train-the-trainer with the developer, Ms. Colleen Waltz.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that there are currently 202 students in the EFO Program. This week is the second week of the third cohort. The EFO Program’s application period was opened in January, and within 15 days they had 500 applicants, which was the cut off. It will open again in November. Since the EFO Program started in 1985, there have been 4,796 students who have graduated. They are expecting another 25 to graduate this year.

Mr. Dubay stated that he had recently talked to a student who complimented the updated EFO Program.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that there are 110 papers that were sent to contract staff for 508 compliancy before being sent to the National Emergency Training Center library. The EFO symposium will be on April 25-26, 2025. The pre-event staff ride will be on April 24. There is continued work with Columbia Southern University (CSU) to get 45 students ready for the graduating class in late 2024 or early 2025.

Mr. Dubay asked if CSU would continue their partnership once the 45 students are finished. Mr. Gabliks replied that it is a contract, they are still evaluating and are not done yet. They have helped tremendously getting through the backlog, and they are looking at the pluses and minuses to see what to do for the future regarding the CSU contract.

Dr. Macey asked why there were more students than passing papers. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews replied that they were the papers left that need to be 508 compliant. Mr. Gabliks stated that some students did drop out because they could not meet the CSU timelines.

Dr. W. Nelson Bauer asked what the duplication of contract instructors is who work with NFA and also CSU. Mr. Gabliks replied that there are a few and they have been separated so that they are not teaching the EFO classes, but they are doing paper evaluations.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that all the courses for the EFO Program have received their 3 credits of graduate-level equivalency.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that all current students have completed year 1 in the Managing Officer Program, and there are 18 students that will complete the program in August 2024. The new development contract on the Managing Officer Program has been awarded to E-PAGA. They hope to have the revised program up and running by the beginning of 2026.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that the refresh meeting for the Managing Officer Program was held last month. The attendees included the NFA staff, E-PAGA's project manager and SMEs. It will be made a 2-year program focusing on building professional skills in change management, risk reduction, and leadership for the first- or mid-level officer/supervisor. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews discussed the program's schedule and the courses that are involved, which were displayed on the slide.

Mr. Gabliks stated that they want to make sure they are not replicating the EFO Program, but they want to give the first-level supervisors the tools that they need to have the difficult discussions.

Dr. Macey asked if they know the years of service of the students who take the EFO or the Managing Officer programs. Mr. Gabliks replied that the students are a little bit of every level. The Managing Officer Program is mostly lieutenants, captains and a few battalion chiefs. In the EFO Program, there are some captains, a union president, battalion chiefs and chief officers, etc.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that one of Mr. Bercaw's projects is the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE) program. He is redoing the entire program. Mr. Bercaw has reached out to all the schools that are listed to see if they still wanted to be a part of FESHE. They will be bringing back the FESHE conference and that will be held June 19-20, 2025. There is a new FESHE website that will be released soon. There are over 90 schools that are currently FESHE recognized, and that keeps growing. The curriculum for FESHE is being redone.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that in FY 23 there were 32 participating states for the State Fire Training Systems Grants. In FY 24, currently 32 have applied but they anticipated a total of 34 or more to apply. The cutoff was Aug. 8. Mr. Gabliks stated that this provides a grant of \$20,000 to each state fire training system to deliver NFA classes in their state. This does reach about 20,000 students a year.

Chief Butler asked what happens to it if the states do not take it. Mr. Gabliks replied it goes into a bucket and they reinvest it. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that between Oct. 1 and Nov. 14, 77 off-campus classes have been requested to be held in those 6 weeks using reallocated State Fire Grant money that has been returned this year.

Mr. Dubay asked if the instructor cadre could handle all of those. Mr. Gabliks replied that they hope so. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that just because they requested them does not mean that they will get the students. The states have to meet a minimum number of 15 students to offer the class.

**National Fire Academy Updates on Response and Special Operations Branch  
Ms. Tammy Pimentel-Matthews, Branch Chief, Response and Special Operations Branch**

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews went over some staffing information. Ms. Susan Denning is retiring after 40 years of federal service. Mr. Travis Petit is an instructional systems specialist who started in March 2024. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that they are doing interviews this week for the incident management and control training specialist. There is a position vacant for a program support specialist that has been put on hold. There is a list of additional staffing requests for FY 25/26.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that there is a full review going on of the Fire Investigation curriculum. The SMEs have been issued their contracts, and the meeting kicks off this week. There is new collaboration with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and Western Carolina University for a 5-day fatal fire class. Some of the examples they will be showing the class are WUI related. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that the EMS curriculum is undergoing an in-house review with the instructional systems specialists. They want to make sure the information in the curriculum is current. There are a few life safety and behavioral health classes being reviewed. The Hazardous Materials training specialist, Mr. Dave Donohue, decided to take the “Advanced Science of Hazardous Materials/Weapons of Mass Destruction Response” (N0655) course and break it down into 3 2-day courses.

Chief Butler asked if lithium-ion batteries are being added to the hazardous materials curriculum. Mr. Gabliks stated that they are adding lithium-ion batteries material where it needs to be in all the curricula.

Dr. Macey asked if the update to the EMS curriculum will include NFPA 455. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews replied that once that information comes out and there is access to it, the curriculum will be updated accordingly. When standards are updated, they will have an SME look over the curriculum and update that information and the references.

Mr. Dubay asked if there is a continuing partnership with CALFIRE. Ms. Pimentel-Matthews replied yes. They want to do another class in February.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews showed a slide with all the courses that will be going for American Council on Education reviews in November.

Ms. Pimentel-Matthews stated that there were 12 2-day classes offered on the Women’s Weekend. 11 of those classes were NFA. There was 1 National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) class that was their Leadership and Resiliency courses that they did as 2- and 4-hour increments. Women in Fire presented a panel that was very interactive and explained their organization. There were 234 participants and that was more than last year. The next Women’s Weekend is already scheduled for May 2025. The participants were from a variety of places in the U.S. Next year they will be partnering with NWCG, First Responder Center for Excellence and NFFF to run different classes.

Mr. Gabliks turned the meeting over to Mr. Sexton for his updates on the Prevention Branch.

**National Fire Academy Updates on Prevention Branch  
Mr. Richard Sexton, Branch Chief, Prevention Branch**

Mr. Sexton stated that he would be covering Prevention, WUI, Incident Command, Incident Management Teams (IMTs) and specialist projects.

Mr. Sexton stated that they standardized all the radios used in all the curricula on campus. They also worked with MOSS because of the operational radios on campus. All the radios on campus are now new.

Mr. Sexton stated that they have added a metro urban scenario system as part of the simulations. They worked with partners at Environmental Systems Research Institute and FEMA and created their own model community that is geographic information systems capable. They put in response times, and it has all the tools that would be needed for an actual incident. The problems they are having include selecting layers and, if the wrong weather layer is selected, whether it will reflect the actual weather at that time.

Mr. Sexton stated that they have changed the way they are approaching the IMTs. They partnered with the FEMA regions to help them establish capabilities and get teams in place. They also followed up with training instructors. Hawaii will be training in 2 weeks to fully staff IMTs around all the islands and have 30 qualified instructors at Type 3 positions and above. Mr. Sexton stated that there are 88 fully qualified instructors nationwide that can teach Type 3 and above. From 2022 until now, there has been a 300% increase in students. There are 90 classes going currently and there are about 1,485 students. They are looking to expand that project further.

Mr. Sexton stated that the top consumers for the IMT training are California, Texas, Florida, Washington State, Virginia and North Carolina.

Mr. Sexton stated that they have some mediated courses that they are looking at within the training program that need to be revised. They are refocusing on those courses. The response to the interface is one that they are looking into involving electronic storage. They are looking to build a component to put into the simulations.

Mr. Sexton stated that they started a major project to focus on the WUI component. They are looking at fire-adapted communities and they are revising those courses so they all have current information. They are developing a community wildfire protection plan. They are working on those through this year and getting them current and up to date so they can be reoffered.

Mr. Gabliks restated that contracts for curriculum development and projects like that have to wait for a budget to be in place. A lot of the curriculum updates have been talked about before but had to wait for a budget to actually do the updates.

Mr. Sexton stated that they have started a project with artificial intelligence (AI). Pushing to update the simulation lab was hard because of the equipment being used and the special approvals needed. There was an instructional designer that went through the process and the programs that had to be done to be able to look at AI; they got that in last week. They have talked to the DHS S&T for AI to be used in simulations to see if it would work or not. They did get that approved. They are

looking at current case studies and the amount of research to get it right from a structural standpoint, from a technical standpoint and from a delivery model. That will take a lot of staff time and they are limited on staff. They are looking to use AI to pull that data in and see if it would create something of value and to see if it would minimize staff time. They should have some solid data in about 8 months or so.

Mr. Gabliks stated that he did present Chief Hoover with a thank you and congratulations on behalf of the Board of Visitors. She was very appreciative of the thoughts and well wishes.

### **Board of Visitors Subcommittee Activity Reports**

Mr. Gabliks stated that the NFIRS committee does not need to continue because it is going to sunset. Mr. Gabliks stated that Chief Butler can reallocate the subcommittees and make one a FESHE subcommittee and the other could be a health, wellness and resilience subcommittee. Mr. Gabliks stated that they did get the green light to propose changing the subcommittees and that does not have to be decided on today but can be discussed going forward.

### **Final Comments/Adjournment**

Mr. Dubay stated that each year the Board of Visitors has to select a chair and vice chair for the coming year. Mr. Dubay suggested that either Chief Butler or himself should change over to someone new so there is some transition and succession. Chief Butler stated that either way was fine with him. There was some discussion and then Chief Butler nominated Chief Wesley for vice chair. Chief Wesley accepted the nomination. Chief Butler made the first motion and Dr. Megan Schuth made the second motion. All were in favor of Chief Wesley being the vice chair and no one opposed. Chief Butler asked if anyone was interested in the chair. There was some discussion, and all were in favor of Chief Butler staying as the chair and no one opposed. Chief Wesley will become vice chair on Oct. 1.

Mr. Dubay thanked everyone for the opportunity to be the vice chair. He also thanked Dr. Macey for his 4 years of service on the Board of Visitors because his term will end in September. Dr. Macey stated that it has been an honor, and it has been an incredible team. Chief Butler thanked Mr. Dubay for his time as vice chair and stated that he wished that he worked for him as an assistant, deputy or team member because he did an amazing job.

The meeting was adjourned, and the Board of Visitors went to talk with students in the classes that were being held on campus at the time.