

JANUARY 2026



SC STATE FIRE FOCAL POINT

SC STATE FIRE MARSHAL JONATHAN JONES



Welcome to the *Focal Point*! This newsletter offers a high-level overview of our work, highlighting key updates, priorities, and statewide support efforts across fire safety, training, prevention, and emergency response.

The mission of SC State Fire is to be “the focal point for service and support to save lives and property.” Our mission creates a symbiotic relationship with local fire departments and emergency response agencies who are on the front lines of saving lives and property. Our team views you as an extension of our mission and, as we provide service and support for your team, we hope you view the SC State Fire Team as an extension of your mission.

SC State Fire’s mission is not static. It grows. It evolves. It responds to new challenges. The one thing that doesn’t change is the heart behind the mission. The SC State Fire Team is a group of dedicated professionals, who are here to serve and support you. Each and every member of our team plays a crucial role in the mission of SC State Fire. Throughout this newsletter, you will see highlights of our team’s efforts and impact. It is truly work that matters.

As we reflect on the accomplishments of our team, with you as partners in our mission, we also realize that we can’t rest in what’s already been done. We have to look forward, plan, and focus, in anticipation of the future. 2026 will bring opportunities to ensure our efforts have impact and make a difference for years to come. Strategic planning will give our team opportunities to map out the future of what SC State Fire’s service and support looks like. Strategic alignment of priorities across all SC State Fire programs will give our team focus on how their work matters and has impact on our service and support to you.

In 2026, you will see an increased focus from the SC State Fire Team on reducing home fires in our state and equipping our citizens with education and resources that give them the best chance of surviving a fire in their home, should one occur. In fact, it will be one of our TOP priorities. The majority of South Carolina’s fire fatalities and fatal fires occur in residential settings. If the desired result of our mission - of everything we do - is to save lives and property, reducing home fires HAS to be a priority. If the desired result of your mission is to save lives and property, I want it to be a priority for you and your department. Fire Safe SC is about more than Community Designations, it’s about reducing risks and saving lives. We need your help to prevent home fires and give occupants the highest chance of survival.

We need you and your team to be partners in SC State Fire’s mission. We need your help to impact South Carolina communities and save lives and property. Combined, we serve as a force multiplier in service and support to each other. Together, we make a great team.

V-SAFE GRANT PROGRAM

The “Notice of Intent” to apply for a grant is now open through January 15, 2026. To be eligible to apply for 2026 V-SAFE grant funding, a South Carolina fire department must be at least 50 percent volunteer and meet the other statutory requirements.

After the number of eligible fire departments that intend to apply have been determined, the amount available for each grant award will be announced.

The law states V-SAFE grant money received by a fire department must be used for the following:

- ◆ fire suppression equipment;
- ◆ self-contained breathing apparatus;
- ◆ portable air refilling systems;
- ◆ hazardous materials spill leak detection, repair, and recovery equipment;
- ◆ protective clothing and equipment;
- ◆ new and used fire apparatus;
- ◆ incident command vehicles;
- ◆ special operations vehicles;
- ◆ training;
- ◆ rescue equipment;
- ◆ medical equipment;
- ◆ decontamination equipment;
- ◆ real properties or improvements thereto including upgrades and rehabilitations; and
- ◆ communications equipment.

The grant application period will open late February for 45 days. V-SAFE checks are usually mailed in late April.

For more information on the V-Safe Grant Program [click here](#).

VOLUNTEER INCENTIVE PROGRAM

Chiefs and Portal Administrators for Responding Fire Departments, Rescue Squads, and Haz-Mat Teams:

Volunteer Incentive Program (VIP) Qualification Reporting is now available via the Fire Portal through January 31, 2026.

For directions and more information, [click here](#).



SC FIRE ACADEMY

Jason Pope, Superintendent



I am pleased to announce that our Curriculum section has begun working on updates in line with the latest NFPA 1020 standards. These updates will enhance both our Fire Instructor and Fire Officer programs, and we will begin to offer e-books to support our students as many of them are now bringing their own device (tablet/laptop) to enhance their learning experience. Additionally, I am proud to announce two new courses in development: Live Fire Instructor and Live Fire Instructor-in-Charge. These new programs reflect our ongoing commitment to providing comprehensive, up-to-date training for the state's fire service.

In other news, our Accreditation section has successfully completed testing updates for the Rope Rescue Awareness and Operations levels, ensuring our programs remain current and effective. The next ProBoard Site visit will happen sometime in 2026.

During our last Fire School Advisory Committee meeting in November, we had a lengthy discussion centered around the development of digital course resources. Several of our staff members are piloting a new digital course package using the functionality of our learning management system (Blackboard) for future integration with the SC Fire Academy database. They will continue to pilot these new methods of administration as well as streamlining our ability to accommodate online testing for accredited level courses. Staff agrees that we want our students to have the ability to download and print their training certificates from within the fire portal, so we are working with our IT staff to create that functionality. We hope to have this completed sometime in late 2026. The next Fire School Advisory Committee will convene on February 11, 2026. I encourage all interested members to participate and contribute to the ongoing growth and excellence of our programs.

I would also like to recognize the dedicated Facilities section for their tireless work in maintaining and upgrading the Academy's fire training props. Their efforts ensure that the campus training environment remains safe, functional, and ready to meet the needs of your firefighters. This Winter, our facilities team will be overseeing a complete upgrade of the entire fire and smoke generation components of the ARFF props. This work is part of our ongoing capital improvement plan that will help ensure our facility is ready to support the needs of our growing fire service.



SC FIRE ACADEMY SEEKING PAYROLL INSTRUCTORS

Requirements:

- ♦ Current SC Fire Academy instructor with proven commitment to teaching.
- ♦ Active instructor who has completed instructor recertification training.
- ♦ Willing to teach outside home county and travel across the state as needed.
- ♦ Willing to teach according to the Academy's needs, not just the minimum required teaching hours.
- ♦ Capable of completing paperwork accurately and meeting deadlines for annual training.
- ♦ Open to all disciplines, with a high need for Officer and Instructor levels.
- ♦ Willing to teach new disciplines and complete Instructor Orientation Workshops as assigned.

If you are ready to expand your role and serve as one of our payroll instructors, contact Erick Adams at 803-331-0097 or erick.adams@llr.sc.gov

SC FIRE ACADEMY INSTRUCTOR DEVELOPMENT

The SC Fire Academy welcomes Eric Bolen as the new Instructor Development Coordinator. In this role, Eric will focus on strengthening communication with instructors and gathering feedback to enhance the Academy's training experience. His initial priorities include developing greater consistency in both initial instructor training and the recertification process, ensuring that instructors across the state are equipped with the tools and support they need to deliver high-quality, mission-focused education.

For new instructors that have recently completed the 4171-Fire Instructor I class, there are two New Instructor Orientation Programs scheduled to be held virtually:

- ♦ January 24 [Click here to register.](#)
- ♦ February 12 [Click here to register.](#)

Eric looks forward to connecting with instructors to listen and collaborate on the continued growth of the Academy's instructional programs. To reach Eric Bolen: 803-394-9696 or eric.bolen@llr.sc.gov

HIGH SCHOOL/CTC FIREFIGHTER PROGRAMS

Over the past five years, the SC Fire Academy's High School/CTC Firefighting program has achieved outstanding results, driven by the dedication of its students, instructors, and agency partners.

Notable Impacts:

- ♦ Since 2020, over 1,140 students have earned Firefighter I certification, completing coursework in Hazmat Awareness, Operations, and Firefighter I training.
- ♦ Additionally, almost 700 students have completed Firefighter II certification, completing requirements that include Firefighter I, Auto Extrication, and advanced fire service skills.

This program has transformed the lives of countless students, many of whom now serve their communities as firefighters.

For more information on the SC Fire Academy's CTC/High School Firefighting Program, contact Alex Kimball at: 839-224-0404 or alexander.kimball@llr.sc.gov



OFFICE OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Nathan Ellis, Assistant State Fire Marshal



Greetings from the Office of State Fire Marshal, where we serve and support the risk reduction efforts of local fire departments by providing impactful data, education, engineering, inspection and investigation programs that prevent tragedy and protect and strengthen South Carolina communities.

The work of the Community Risk Reduction section is ever evolving to keep pace with the growing demands for services from the SC Fire Service and our partners. The OSFM CRR team is consistently recognized as the national model for state-level Community Risk Reduction efforts. Updates regarding their programs are shared elsewhere in this newsletter.

The Engineering section is the unsung, behind-the-scenes heroes of State Fire. The number of fires they have prevented and lives they have saved are unable to be counted. But when you think that virtually every sprinklered system in the state is reviewed and approved by the expert eyes of the OSFM Engineering section, then every fire controlled by those sprinklers is mitigated, in part, by the work of our team. The average time for performing a plan review is currently 14 days, just below the 15-day goal for each reviewer and well below the 30 days allowed by state law.

The work of the Deputy State Fire Marshals in the Code Enforcement and Investigation section is tireless and persistent. A new contract with the SC Department of Education's Office of School Facilities solidifies the role of the fire service in public school and charter school construction and renovation projects. The partnership establishes OSFM as the enforcer of the SC Fire Code Chapters 5 and 9 for school construction. As a part of our responsibilities, we will involve the local fire service in the plan review and inspection process for school construction. In the first two quarters of the fiscal year, our Deputies have performed 4908 inspections and initiated 6 complaint investigations against licensees.

As we go about our daily duties, the team at OSFM strives to create a culture of community that sets the State Fire standard for teamwork. We are committed to continuously pursuing knowledge that results in wisdom and understanding, intentional collaboration that results in unified effort, and a sense of pride in our team that results in an organizational culture that others want to be a part of and emulate.



CLEAR TEAM

The CLEAR Team (Community Loss Education and Response) was created by the South Carolina Office of the State Fire Marshal in 2012 to address the urgent need for deeper insight into fatal fires across the state.

With a commitment to understanding not just what happened, but why, the CLEAR Team focuses on three core areas: response, relationships, and research. Instead of leading investigations, the team

collects crucial data at fire scenes, works closely with local response agencies, and examines both environmental and human factors behind each loss. By turning these insights into action, the CLEAR Team strengthens local fire department records, guides code enforcement, informs public safety outreach, and, above all, strives to prevent future fire tragedies in South Carolina. Their work is driven by a dedication to both saving lives and supporting the communities they serve.



For more information on SC State Fire's CLEAR Team [click here](#).

FIRE SAFE SC

Fire Safe South Carolina unites our five leading fire service organizations to engage partners to support the fire service in local community risk reduction (CRR) efforts. It was launched in Summer of 2017 at Fire-Rescue, followed by county meetings over the next two years sharing purpose, a data-driven move beyond fire prevention, and need for statewide involvement.



Annually, the program launches in February with a set of goals for fire service to build depth of awareness and capacity to support the risk reduction process; therefore, fire departments are encouraged to seek the designation repeatedly. [Orientation Briefings](#) are your starting point each year to learn current goals, new resources, and how to achieve designation.

In the year-ahead, newly hired SC State Fire CRR Strategists will seek to support you in addressing any challenges to engaging both in the program and other data-driven resources to facilitate statewide risk reduction efforts.

For those receiving the designation multiple times, discussions for the program are underway to level-up sustainable efforts.



EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Chad Beam, Assistant Chief



The 2025 year was an exceptionally active one, marked by both in-state and out-of-state deployments, continued program growth, and significant training achievements. Our teams completed another strong year of training and operational readiness across SC-TF1, SC-HART, and the five regional Urban Search and Rescue teams—SC-TF2, SC-TF3, SC-TF4, SC-TF5, and SC-TF6—which remained busy with training initiatives and deployments at both the local and statewide levels.

SC-TF1 deployed multiple times this year, supporting incidents within South Carolina as well as responding out-of-state to assist Texas. The team completed more than 14,000 hours of training (14,107) in 2025, reflecting a continued commitment to professional development and mission readiness. SC-TF1 currently consists of 170 team members, and we recently concluded our annual application process, receiving more than 100 applications. Interviews will begin in January, followed by the onboarding of successful candidates. We are excited about the continued growth of the team, the program, and the opportunities it provides for members to bring advanced skills and experience back to their home agencies. This program's success is made possible through the ongoing support of our sponsoring agencies, whose commitment allows their personnel to serve as team members when our state is in need.

SC-HART also experienced a demanding year, conducting multiple rescues across the Upstate and providing mutual aid support to North Carolina on two separate missions near Boone—both resulting in successful rescues. Team members continue to train extensively on both aircraft platforms used in operations, the UH-60 Black Hawk and the LUH-72B Lakota. The partnership between the South Carolina National Guard and State Fire remains critical to ensuring seamless aviation rescue capabilities for South Carolina. SC-HART currently maintains a roster of 22 highly trained rescuers.

Firefighter Mobilization experienced another historic year, continuing its close partnership with the South Carolina fire service to support communities during large-scale incidents. In March and April, the program coordinated the largest mobilization in its history during the Table Rock Fire in Pickens and Greenville counties. This incident brought together more than 400 fire apparatus and over 1,000 firefighters from across the state to combat one of the largest wildland fires experienced on the East Coast.

We are proud of the dedication, professionalism, and teamwork demonstrated by all of our Emergency Response programs in 2025 and remain grateful for the continued support of our partners, agencies, and personnel who make this mission possible.



SC State Fire Emergency Response received its new Communications van for SC-Task Force 1 in late 2025.



EMERGENCY RESPONSE LOGISTICS UPDATE



SC State Fire's Emergency Response Logistics Section includes (L to R): Joe Adams-Logistics Specialist, Joe Borrelli-Logistics Chief, Joe Dannelly-Logistics Manager, Richie Lapera-Logistics Manager, Scott Jackson-Logistics Manager, and Ricky Tripp-Logistics Manager (not pictured).

The Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) equipment cache was initially acquired following the adoption of South Carolina Code of Laws Title 23, Chapter 49, in 2000. Over the years, some equipment reached the end of its service life and required replacement. Additionally, FEMA periodically updates the requirements for the Type 1 cache, necessitating ongoing adjustments to inventory.

Unlike federally funded teams, we receive funding directly from the State of South Carolina. In 2023, the state awarded a one-time allocation of \$28 million to support the SC US&R System, of which \$12 million was designated for SC-Task Force 1 to modernize the aging cache.

Procurement began in October 2023, starting with radio equipment and Hazmat monitors. Selecting and acquiring the necessary equipment has been a complex and time-consuming process for the team. Over two years into the effort, equipment purchases remain ongoing.

A Type 1 US&R cache is organized into nine sections: Communications, Hazmat, Logistics, Medical, Planning, Rescue, Technical Search, Vehicles, and Water.

- We have replaced and acquired new vehicles, including two Mack tractors, a Volvo box truck, and four Dodge 3500 utility body trucks, some of which are still pending delivery.
- Our entire Base of Operations, known as "Tent City," has been upgraded with new tents, generators, water management, and HVAC systems.
- The boat team has received four new boat trailers, four new Zodiac inflatable boats, and is awaiting delivery of four flat-bottom aluminum boats.
- The Rescue section has replaced all rope equipment, added Paratech structural shoring components, new extrication equipment, and more.
- Our Medical cache has been completely updated.
- Technical Search has received new search cameras and thermal imaging cameras, and is anticipating the return of the K-9 search unit in the near future.



A few new cache features: a fully equipped trailer, a prime mover, a rescue boat, and more—ready to respond to any emergency.

These are just a few examples of the enhancements made possible by the generous support of the State of South Carolina. Operating at this high level would not be possible without South Carolina's continued support.

For more information on the SC Emergency Response Task Force System, [click here](#).





- ♦ Anderson City Fire Department
- ♦ Bluffton Township Fire Department
- ♦ Burton Fire Department
- ♦ Central Berkeley Fire & EMS
- ♦ Charleston County Rescue
- ♦ Charleston Fire Department
- ♦ Columbia Fire Department
- ♦ Greer Fire Department
- ♦ Clemson University Fire & EMS
- ♦ Colleton County Fire Rescue
- ♦ Charleston County Communications
- ♦ Darlington City Fire Department
- ♦ Dorchester County Fire Rescue
- ♦ Duncan Fire Department
- ♦ Easley Fire Department
- ♦ Florence Fire Department
- ♦ Fountain Inn Fire Department
- ♦ Greenville City Fire Department
- ♦ Greenville County Emergency Management
- ♦ Greenville County EMS
- ♦ Hilton Head Island Fire Rescue
- ♦ Holly Springs Fire Rescue
- ♦ Horry County Fire Rescue
- ♦ Irmo Fire District
- ♦ Jasper County Fire Rescue
- ♦ Kershaw County Fire Service
- ♦ Lancaster County Fire Rescue
- ♦ Lexington County Fire Department
- ♦ Lugoff Fire Department
- ♦ Marion City Fire Rescue
- ♦ Midway Fire Rescue
- ♦ Mt. Pleasant Fire Department
- ♦ Mullins Fire Rescue
- ♦ Murrells Inlet Garden City Fire Rescue
- ♦ Myrtle Beach Fire Department
- ♦ North Charleston Fire Department
- ♦ North Myrtle Beach Fire Department
- ♦ North Spartanburg Fire Department
- ♦ Parker District Fire Department
- ♦ Prisma Health Ambulance Service
- ♦ Pickens County EMS
- ♦ Pickens County Emergency Services
- ♦ Ridgeland Fire Department
- ♦ Riverview Fire Department
- ♦ Sardis Timmonsville Fire Department
- ♦ Seneca City Fire Department
- ♦ Simpsonville Fire Department
- ♦ St. Andrews Fire Department
- ♦ SC State Fire
- ♦ Summerville Fire Recue
- ♦ Taylors Fire Department
- ♦ Travelers Rest Fire Department
- ♦ Tyger River Fire Department



PALMETTO IST EARNS FEMA SRT DESIGNATION STATUS



SC State Fire is proud to announce that the Palmetto Incident Support Team (IST) has been selected by FEMA to serve as a Supplemental Response Team (SRT), a designation held by only three other teams in the nation. This milestone reflects the team's proven expertise in incident management and its ability to support large-scale disaster operations across the country.



FEMA's SRT program identifies highly trained incident management teams capable of providing planning, command, coordination, and logistical support during disasters that exceed local and state capacity. Teams are selected based on their operational performance, advanced training, and ability to integrate into federal response structures.

Formed in 2019, the Palmetto IST brings together incident management professionals from across South Carolina. Their experience ensures rapid mobilization and strong interoperability with state, regional, and federal partners.

SC State Fire Marshal Jonathan Jones described the designation as a reflection of South Carolina's commitment to excellence in emergency response. "This national selection recognizes the mission-ready culture of our team," he said. "We stand ready to serve whenever and wherever help is needed."

This achievement strengthens South Carolina's role in national disaster response and reinforces SC State Fire's mission to save lives and property through prevention, training, and coordinated emergency response. Whether serving communities here at home or supporting disaster response efforts across the nation, the Palmetto IST continues to represent the highest standards of preparedness and public service.

For more information on FEMA's SRT Designation, [click here](#).

For more information on the Palmetto IST, [click here](#).



Palmetto IST members activated briefly during Tropical Disturbance Imelda.



We administer the Emergency Response Task Force System under the SC Firefighter Mobilization Act. Through that system, we have several capabilities:

- SC Task Force 1 (US&R), extensive search, rescue, and technical operations.
- Five regional Urban Search & Rescue teams for lighter-scale operations.
- SC Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team for hard-to-reach rescues in mountainous terrain or swiftwater.
- The Palmetto Incident Support Team, incident management specialists who can integrate with you.
- The SC Firefighter Mobilization system, which enables requests for personnel, apparatus, equipment, and specialized teams when a local event exceeds capabilities.

What this means for County Emergency Managers: We are a partner who can help right-size the response, coordinate, streamline, and integrate resources before conditions escalate.

CALL US EARLY: TELL US THE PROBLEM

- When you anticipate a problem, call us. Tell us: What's the challenge? What's your goal? What's working/not working? Early engagement lets us match the right capability to your need.
- Allow us to propose a solution. We will tell you how we can help, what the resource looks like, what's required, and how to integrate it with your operations. This helps avoid delays or resource misallocation.

We're here to support you. Your mission is to protect lives and property in your area. Let us help you do it better, faster, more efficiently.

WHY THIS APPROACH MATTERS

- Efficiency: You get the *right* resources for *your* problem.
- Speed: Early engagement cuts time to solution, speeds up mobilization and decision-making.
- Cost reduction: Timely engagement allows for proportional response and more cost-effective outcomes.
- Increased resilience: By coordinating early, we strengthen your local capacity and make sure you're not operating in isolation.

STATE WARNING POINT

803-737-8500

Call for fire-related fatalities, SC Firefighter Mobilization, SC-Task Force 1, or SC-Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team needs.

Always ask for a call back from SC State Fire.

