Maine Fire Marshal News, June 2011

Maine Office of State Fire Marshal

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WELCOME!

Welcome to this issue of the Maine Fire Marshal News. Please take some time to read the newsletter and send us your own article for a future publication or comments in general. As always, we do appreciate the feedback on the newsletter many of you have sent over the years and look forward to hearing from you more in the future.

A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL

At last summer is here! Fire as you all know has seasonal characteristics which I usually discuss and make recommendations regarding increased safety. Instead of that I’d like to discuss how the Fire Marshal’s Office operations change from season to season or from colder to warmer months.

First, the volume of fire investigations will, generally speaking, remain steady with a statistically insignificant increase during the warmer months. However, it does appear that local fire departments will call on our investigators more in the summer when the fires are not as easily determined to be accidental in nature. As such, they’ll look to us for an answer. The graph below shows you the distribution of investigations by month for 2010.

![Graph showing distribution of investigations by month for 2010](image)

Certainly, fire fatalities occur more in the colder months and they require significant attention. So, from an operations perspective, the investigative workload, in terms of numbers of investigations, appears to be steady throughout the year. However the actual labor involved in the investigation may vary depending upon type. For instance a fire fatality will take more time as will an arson. It should be noted that our investigators will be called out to fireworks displays in addition to amusement park events which are primarily a warmer weather event.

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types of inspections in the warm months. Though we will see some down times in plans review from December to February and July and August, the most noticeable change in operations will be increased deployments of inspectors, and some investigators, to inspect amusement rides or devices at traveling and fixed parks.

Maine’s Agricultural Fairs begin their fair season in July and it continues through to October. Because these events are scattered all around Maine in various towns it requires a lot of travel on the part of our inspections team in addition to some investigators. If the inspection of various devices yields no problems a sticker is administered and the inspector moves on. If there is a problem however, it must be identified and the inspector must wait or return another day before the ride can be stickered and operate. Needless to say the cost in terms of inspector time, gas, wear-and-tear on a vehicle and in some instances lodging can add up to a point far exceeding the cumulative money collected for issuing stickers.

The research, planning and critical support staff really see no slow down but rather a shift in the type of data they enter for permitting purposes. For instance the fireworks display or amusement park ride permits obviously will pick up in the warmer months. This activity tends to crowd out permits for facilities such as day cares so we generally see fewer day care facilities permitted in the summer.

Research work can be requested and initiated anytime during the year. Generally speaking though, most of the research and planning work will take place around the legislative session and/or rulemaking period. The cost and benefits as well as what each rule does must be identified, described, and the various stakeholders notified. When a law is proposed the subject matter of the law is usually examined using our Maine Fire Incident Reporting System in addition to other state and national data sources. Because rulemaking will generally come after the legislative session, this tends to evenly distribute the research and planning workload throughout the year.

Other variables that impact workload change is the proclivity of staff to take vacation time during the warm months. This constrains the workload to fewer individuals and hence, to them it appears as if the actual workload has increased though it actually has remained steady but handled by fewer people.

So, as I look back on this most recent year and think about workload seasonality over the years it’s pretty clear that we’re busy all year. All that changes is the type of work being done and that is due, obviously, to our geographic location and the things Mainer’s do as the seasons change.

Now, I’d like to wish you and yours, on behalf of the entire Fire Marshal’s staff, a happy and safe summer.

Sincerely,

John C. Dean
Fire Marshal

VISION 20/20 RELEASES FIRE PREVENTION ADVOCACY TOOL KIT
By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

The Fire Prevention Advocacy Tool Kit is the child of Vision 20/20’s strategy #1: Increase Advocacy for Fire Prevention. The lead organization was, of course, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, Life Safety Section
headed up by Alan Perdue.

Under the 2008 IFE grant from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program Vision 20/20 conducted a task group meeting in 2010 to brainstorm ideas for an Advocacy Tool Kit which could be used locally and nationally to promote fire prevention programs. Peg Carson worked with Peg Paul and Associates and others to develop the materials that serve to highlight the importance of fire prevention programs and the results they achieve. That is the essence of the tool kit.

The tool kit provides considerable information on proven fire prevention strategies and how to advocate for them, implement them, and then evaluate them to learn from them. There is also detailed information on presenting information to and reaching specific audiences such as policy makers and the public in general. The tool kit is laden with information on data sources that can be used to make the case for fire prevention in your community.

In summary, the tool kit provides guidance to help fire departments advocate for increased fire prevention investment. I’d urge you all to take a look at the tool kit particularly if you’re seeking additional funding from your local community, foundations and other granting organizations, or from other sources. Follow this link to the tool kit!

http://www.strategicfire.org/advocacytoolkit/

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In addition, a portion of the funds will be used to design and produce brochures on the dangers of smoking while on oxygen therapy in addition to incidents of children involved in the ignition of fires. The brochures will be distributed to various health care facilities and made available to older adults and parents. It is hoped the brochures will bring more meaningful fire prevention and safety information to these particular audiences as well as those who serve them.

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Fire Marshal Dean, who spoke at the dedication, said that this was a great example of good planning, design, and community support. Unlike the old station there is ample room for all of Saco’s fire apparatus. Next time you’re in Saco go take a look.

**IMAGINE BUYING 18,000 COUNTERFEIT SMOKE DETECTORS?**

By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

That’s just what happened to the Atlanta Fire & Rescue Department in it’s well intended effort to install smoke detectors in areas of the city most in need.

The detectors were sold by a company called Silver Sales. What distinguishes the alarms is a UL label in the form of a hologram that is also missing the UL number below the label. The detectors had been distributed to areas in need beginning in 2006. Now Atlanta Fire and Rescue is in the process of recalling them. It’s difficult enough to get the devices into homes that need them let alone get the bad ones back out! Good luck Atlanta.

*Maine Fire Marshal News*
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As always, the NFPA provides loads of factsheets and other educational materials for teachers, the fire service and families in all languages. Go to the following site for your information today!
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I will always remember John as the investigator with “Midnight.” Midnight was a beloved dog John worked well with for a number of years. We wish John well in his retirement and hope he’ll come and see us sometime.

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MEFIRS – Maine Fire Incident Reporting System

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* The Fire Marshal’s Office will have all data for 2010 in by June-July of 2011.
** Represents single incidents only.
*** Based on SFMO Investigations

End of the Year

This is the time of year when we finalize the data for the previous year though some stragglers who will add some data later on this year.

When we compare 2009 to 2010 there are a lot of positive signs in terms of basic percentage changes. For instance, total calls dropped 4%. Fire calls dropped 10% which is significant. EMS calls as well went down 2%. Another encouraging sign was the total dollar loss from fire which showed a decrease of 31%. All other calls however increased 10% from 2009 to 2010.

On the injury and death side 2010 showed mixed results. Civilian fire injuries decreased 8% and civilian fire deaths as well by 36%. In fact, civilian fire deaths for 2010 were the lowest they have ever been since we began keeping track. The ten year average for fire deaths is about 16 in contrast to 2010’s 9. On the other hand fire service related fire injuries increased 3% but there were no fire service fatalities.

Overall 190 fire departments reported through the MEFIRS system in 2009 in contrast to 180 in 2010 which is back down to average since 2004. It’s obvious we’d like more and more departments to report so that when we go to the legislature or attempt to make rules we have the justification in numbers at hand.

I often wonder about the civilian injury numbers because Maine’s CDC will report about 60 or more fire/flame related injuries each year and that’s only hospital discharges! If you add in outpatient treatment the numbers would increase. Injuries add significant cost to fire so the fire service should do it’s best to report that when it occurs. It should be noted that Maine’s CDC will pick up events where there was no fire department response so the numbers will never be equal.

Perhaps the most startling statistic above is the increase of civilian fire fatalities from 2010 to 2011. Using commonly employed figure of five million dollars per life, Maine fires have cost us $85,000,000 in fire deaths alone this year.

For information on MEFIRS contact us at 626-3872. Thank you.

“Fight Fire with Facts”
As I reported in our last issue, Maine has gotten off to a bad start in 2011 as far as fire fatalities go. As of this issue we have 17 reported fire fatalities. Certainly, among the most unusual of those is the Biddeford plane crash and fire.

Pictured below is the small plane that crashed into the home starting a fire that killed the pilot but fortunately spared the occupants of the home.

The pilot of the plane apparently had engine trouble and the plane faltered coming to a crash landing on top of the home.

A three story building of mixed commercial and residential occupancy located on Maine Street was severely damaged by fire causing interior structural collapse. The origin of the fire was in the stairwell area between the first and second floors and the cause was not determined due to the extent of damage to the structure. The possible accidental malfunction of electrical wiring could not be ruled out. The fire department did a great job containing this one (see picture below).

Too often we see brush fires in spring that have disastrous outcomes. In fact, one of the public service announcements the Fire Marshal aired last spring focused specifically on this topic. Tragically, the burned hillside shown below with Forest Ranger Matt Bennett is the result of a brush fire that got out of control and took the life an 85 year-old Buxton man.
In another unusual and tragic fire, the Winterport Calvary Apostolic Church (pictured above right) was set on fire and destroyed. This fire was set by an individual who also doused himself with accelerant and committed suicide. The Winterport Fire Department was assisted by other firefighters from Prospect, Stockton Springs, Frankfort, Bangor and Newburgh.

It only got stranger as we moved through the spring of 2011 season as this fire illustrates. In this Augusta fire the driver of a truck runs into a house starting a fire then flees the scene but not before he essentially destroyed the home.

What you see below is the damage done to another church, this one being the Unitarian Universalist Church in Brunswick. The fire was believed to have started due to bad wiring. The church contained a pulpit Bible inscribed by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow which fortunately survived the fire. No one was hurt and the church was by no means a total loss thanks to the quick work of the Brunswick Fire Department.

This Month in Fire History

LaSalle Hotel fire kills 61, Chicago (IL), 1946
K-Mart warehouse fire loss worth $190 million (2003 dollars), Falls Twp (PA), 1982
Carteret Shopping Center fire loss worth $37 million (2003 dollars), Carteret (IL), 1974
Hotel Vendome fire kills 9 firefighters, Boston (MA), 1972
Upstairs Lounge fire kills 32, New Orleans (LA), 1973
Aerlex Corporation fireworks plant fire kills 21, Hallett (OK), 1985
Maury County Jail fire kills 42, Columbia (TN), 1977
Forest fire, loss worth $334 million (2003 dollars), Santa Barbara County (CA), 1990
LP-gas tank car derailment fire kills 23, Meldrim (GA), 1959
Flammable Fabrics Act takes effect, 1954
First NFPA Committee on Safety to Life is appointed, 1913

Augusta, Maine

Opera House Block Fire
July 4, 1896

The Fine New Opera House Block Burned which contained a theatre, city offices and Stores on ground floor. The fire was believed to be the result of fireworks. AUGUSTA, Me., July 4. - The Opera House block was destroyed by fire tonight, the fire being discovered shortly before midnight.

It was rebuilt at a cost of $40,000 by Hon. J. Manchester Haynes in the summer of 1891.

On its site stood Granite Hall block, destroyed by fire in 1890.

It is not now known whether the block will be rebuilt or not. Its loss will be much felt in Augusta as it contained the fine Opera House. It contained also city government and city treasurer’s rooms and offices.

On the street floor were the store of E. W. Church, grocer; Augusta Deposit and Trust Company, café, and Charles K. Partridge, druggist. It is located opposite the post office and the total loss will probably reach $60,000 of which there is partial insurance on the building.

The fire is supposed to have caught in the rear in a sub-passageway.

The cause is supposed to have been fire crackers.

Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, Bangor, ME 4 Jul 1896

The time and place of this event will be posted on our website when confirmed.

THE 23RD ANNUAL FIRE & LIFE SAFETY EDUCATION CONFERENCE

"Teaching Today for a Safer Tomorrow"

October 14 & 15, 2011
Ramada Inn in Saco, Maine

The conference will include keynote speaker Jim Crawford of Vision 20/20 among other great speakers and presenters. For more information on the conference go to: http://www.ptbf.org/

If you have an announcement or upcoming event you'd like to post in this newsletter please feel free to forward it to us using the contact information below. The next issue will be in September 2011.

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End of the Year

This is the time of year when we finalize the data for the previous year though some stragglers who will add some data later on this year.

When we compare 2009 to 2010 there are a lot of positive signs in terms of basic percentage changes. For instance, total calls dropped 4%. Fire calls dropped 10% which is significant. EMS calls as well went down 2%. Another encouraging sign was the total dollar loss from fire which showed a decrease of 31%. All other calls however increased 10% from 2009 to 2010.

On the injury and death side 2010 showed mixed results. Civilian fire injuries decreased 8% and civilian fire deaths as well by 36%. In fact, civilian fire deaths for 2010 were the lowest they have ever been since we began keeping track. The ten year average for fire deaths is about 16 in contrast to 2010’s 9. On the other hand fire service related fire injuries increased 3% but there were no fire service fatalities.

Overall 190 fire departments reported through the MEFIRS system in 2009 in contrast to 180 in 2010 which is back down to average since 2004. It’s obvious we’d like more and more departments to report so that when we go to the legislature or attempt to make rules we have the justification in numbers at hand.

I often wonder about the civilian injury numbers because Maine’s CDC will report about 60 or more fire/flame related injuries each year and that’s only hospital discharges! If you add in outpatient treatment the numbers would increase. Injuries add significant cost to fire so the fire service should do it’s best to report that when it occurs. It should be noted that Maine’s CDC will pick up events where there was no fire department response so the numbers will never be equal.

Perhaps the most startling statistic above is the increase of civilian fire fatalities from 2010 to 2011. Using commonly employed figure of five million dollars per life, Maine fires have cost us $85,000,000 in fire deaths alone this year.

For information on MEFIRS contact us at 626-3872. Thank you.

“Fight Fire with Facts”
MAINE FIREWATCH
By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

As I reported in our last issue, Maine has gotten off to a bad start in 2011 as far as fire fatalities go. As of this issue we have 17 reported fire fatalities. Certainly, among the most unusual of those is the Biddeford plane crash and fire.

Pictured below is the small plane that crashed into the home starting a fire that killed the pilot but fortunately spared the occupants of the home.

The pilot of the plane apparently had engine trouble and the plane faltered coming to a crash landing on top of the home.

A three story building of mixed commercial and residential occupancy located on Maine Street was severely damaged by fire causing interior structural collapse. The origin of the fire was in the stairwell area between the first and second floors and the cause was not determined due to the extent of damage to the structure. The possible accidental malfunction of electrical wiring could not be ruled out. The fire department did a great job containing this one (see picture below).

Biddeford Plane Crash

Too often we see brush fires in spring that have disastrous outcomes. In fact, one of the public service announcements the Fire Marshal aired last spring focused specifically on this topic. Tragically, the burned hillside shown below with Forest Ranger Matt Bennett is the result of a brush fire that got out of control and took the life an 85 year-old Buxton man.

Photo by Tim Greenway

Winterport Church Fire, Photo by Kevin Kratka
In another unusual and tragic fire, the Winterport Calvary Apostolic Church (pictured above right) was set on fire and destroyed. This fire was set by an individual who also doused himself with accelerant and committed suicide. The Winterport Fire Department was assisted by other firefighters from Prospect, Stockton Springs, Frankfort, Bangor and Newburgh.

It only got stranger as we moved through the spring of 2011 season as this fire illustrates. In this Augusta fire the driver of a truck runs into a house starting a fire then flees the scene but not before he essentially destroyed the home.

What you see below is the damage done to another church, this one being the Unitarian Universalist Church in Brunswick. The fire was believed to have started due to bad wiring. The church contained a pulpit Bible inscribed by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow which fortunately survived the fire. No one was hurt and the church was by no means a total loss thanks to the quick work of the Brunswick Fire Department.

This Month in Fire History

LaSalle Hotel fire kills 61, Chicago (IL), 1946
K-Mart warehouse fire loss worth $190 million (2003 dollars), Falls Twp (PA), 1982
Carteret Shopping Center fire loss worth $37 million (2003 dollars), Carteret (IL), 1974
Hotel Vendome fire kills 9 firefighters, Boston (MA), 1972
Upstairs Lounge fire kills 32, New Orleans (LA), 1973
Aerlex Corporation fireworks plant fire kills 21, Hallett (OK), 1985
Maury County Jail fire kills 42, Columbia (TN), 1977
Forest fire, loss worth $334 million (2003 dollars), Santa Barbara County (CA), 1990
LP-gas tank car derailment fire kills 23, Meldrim (GA), 1959
Flammable Fabrics Act takes effect, 1954
First NFPA Committee on Safety to Life is appointed, 1913

Augusta, Maine
Opera House Block Fire
July 4, 1896

The Fine New Opera House Block Burned which contained a theatre, city offices and Stores on ground floor. The fire was believed to be the result of fireworks. AUGUSTA, Me., July 4. - The Opera House block was destroyed by fire tonight, the fire being discovered shortly before midnight.

It was rebuilt at a cost of $40,000 by Hon. J. Manchester Haynes in the summer of 1891.

On its site stood Granite Hall block, destroyed by fire in 1890.

It is not now known whether the block will be rebuilt or not. Its loss will be much felt in Augusta as it contained the fine Opera House. It contained also city government and city treasurer’s rooms and offices.

On the street floor were the store of E. W. Church, grocer; Augusta Deposit and Trust Company, café, and Charles K. Partridge, druggist. It is located opposite the post office and the total loss will probably reach $60,000 of which there is partial insurance on the building.

The fire is supposed to have caught in the rear in a sub-passageway.

The cause is supposed to have been fire crackers.

Bangor Daily Whig and Courier, Bangor, ME 4 Jul 1896
The Office of the Maine Fire Marshal will sponsor a seminar on National Fire Protection Association Life Safety Code #101, 2009 edition. The time and place of this event will be posted on our website when confirmed.

THE 23RD ANNUAL FIRE & LIFE SAFETY EDUCATION CONFERENCE

"Teaching Today for a Safer Tomorrow"

October 14 & 15, 2011
Ramada Inn in Saco, Maine

The conference will include keynote speaker Jim Crawford of Vision 20/20 among other great speakers and presenters. For more information on the conference go to: http://www.ptbf.org/

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To submit articles for publication contact the Fire Marshal’s Office at (207) 626-3870 and ask to speak with the editors. You may also e-mail an article or comment to Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov

Articles submitted for publication in this newsletter from outside sources do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the State Fire Marshal’s Office.

All articles are subject to an editorial staff review prior to inclusion. For a copy of submission requirements contact the editorial staff.

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If you have an announcement or upcoming event you'd like to post in this newsletter please feel free to forward it to us using the contact information below. The next issue will be in September 2011.

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