

2017 - 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN



MINNESOTA STATE FIRE MARSHAL



**ETHICAL
LEADERS
IN ACTION**

State Fire Marshal Division Strategic Plan

Respectfully submitted to
Minnesota State Fire Marshal Bruce West
and Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal James Smith

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**Ethical Leaders in Action
Martin Scheerer
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Executive summary

The Minnesota State Fire Marshal Division (SFMD) engaged employees, managers and executives, partner organizations and members of the public in a strategic planning process to guide continuous improvement in the next three to five years. The SFMD retained consulting firm Ethical Leaders in Action (ELA) to provide a third-party perspective for this process. This report is the result of that study, presented by ELA and approved by State Fire Marshal Bruce West.

The planning process revealed many strengths, along with some areas for improvement. Of particular note was the degree to which outside stakeholders wanted the SFMD to play a more prominent role as a resource and as a coordinator in the state's fire service. We also identified staffing as an emerging risk factor: Given the tenure of its workforce, the SFMD will face challenges maintaining the level of expertise exhibited by its current teams over time. The SFMD will, at the same time, seek to diversify its staff demographically to better reflect the communities it serves. The SFMD will assure that its fire investigation processes remain state of the art in the future to support successful prosecution of arson and related crimes. Finally, the agency will strengthen its support of the fire service and thoughtfully engage with partners in advocacy with respect to fire and life safety policy issues.

Method

The SFMD strategic planning process was launched in the first quarter of 2016. The objectives of the project were to:

- Develop this strategic plan to guide the agency, which includes priorities, goals and initiatives based on an objective understanding of both the organization's current capabilities and the relevant needs of stakeholders.
- Determine how the SFMD and its units should focus effort and resources over the next three to five years to maintain and enhance its capacity to pursue its mission, and increase efficiencies, in partnership with other agencies.
- Engage SFMD leaders and external stakeholders in substantive conversations about the desired future of the SFMD.

This strategic planning process was commissioned and led by the state fire marshal and chief deputy state fire marshal, and was meaningfully informed by input from multiple stakeholders:

- SFMD employees and managers, through individual interviews and group working sessions.
- Agencies and organizations throughout the state that use the SFMD services, through an online survey distributed to fire service agencies and organizations interacting with the SFMD, and through individual interviews.
- Elected leaders of fire service organizations, through individual interviews.

Stakeholders were asked to provide their perspectives on the current status of the SFMD, and on how they felt that the SFMD could improve its service to the state, consistent with the SFMD mission. The online survey garnered 79 respondents, who provided answers to specific questions along with a good deal of commentary.

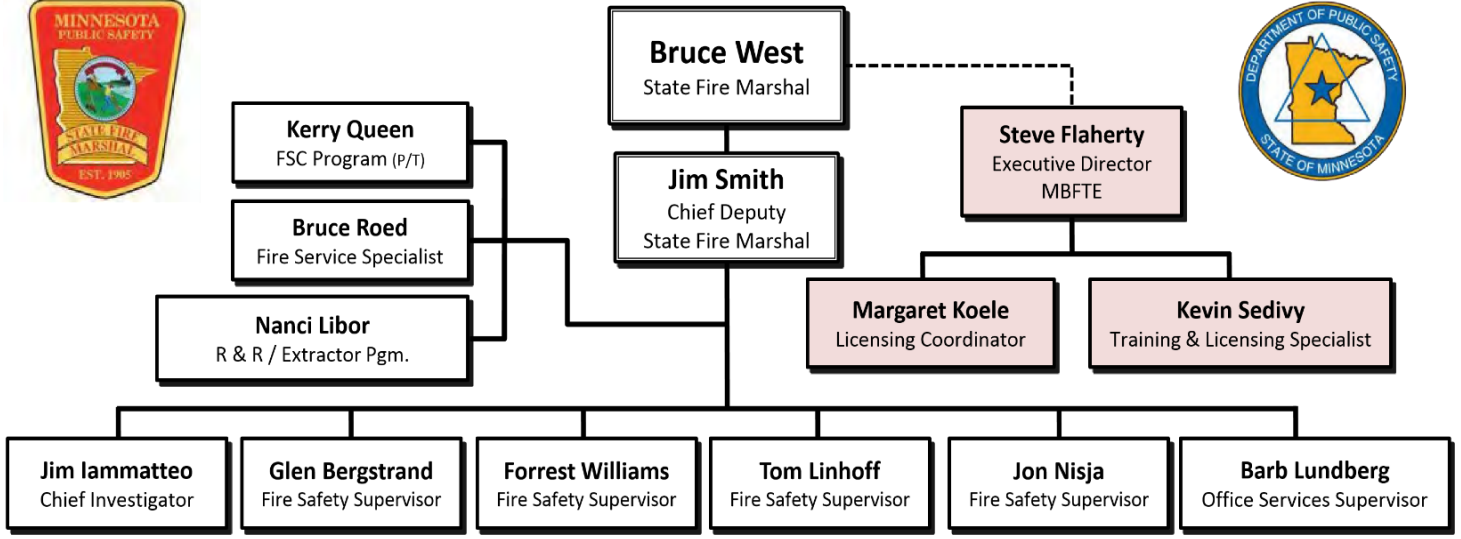
The SFMD engaged a consulting firm, Ethical Leaders in Action (www.ethinact.com) to bring an efficient method and objective perspective to this effort. As a means of evaluating current status and potential interventions, ELA employed its values-based framework, ELA's *Core Values for Public Safety Agencies*:

- *Excellent public service* (making valuable contributions to the state, achieving mission objectives, consistently demonstrating expertise and professionalism, continuous improvement)
- *Sound stewardship of public resources* (being prudent and thoughtful in expenditures, linking expenditures to service delivery, conserving and maintaining assets and resources)
- *Fairness* (upholding the law in accordance with principles of equity and justice, respecting rights and persons, appropriate transparency)

These values form the framework for evaluating current efforts and for pursuing strategic improvements.

Organization at a glance

MINNESOTA STATE FIRE MARSHAL DIVISION



Fire Investigation Team

Mark Germain
Steve Kellen
Kevin Mahle
Toby McLain
Bruce McLaughlin
Ron Rahman
Rich Sellman
John Steinbach
Casey Stotts
Andrea Wenzlaff
Steve Wolf

Residential Care and Lodging Team

Dan Beeson
Floyd Cupkie
Robert Rexeisen
George Shellum
Richard Sorensen
Chris Watson
Ryan Whiting

School Team

Joe Faust
Kurt Kastella
Brad Lundquist
John Swanson

Health Care Team

William Abderhalden
James Anderson
Bob Baumann
Larry Gannon
Roy Kingsley
Kimberly Swenson
Brian Tonnancour
Kerry Queen (P/T)

Information Mgmt. Team

Nora Gierok
Joel Paylor
Scott Radke

Fire Protection Team

Dan Kaiser
Ryan Kunst
Ralph Peterson

State Fire Code Team

Tom Jenson
Code Specialist
Kevin McGinty
Code Training and Development

Public Education Team

Kathi Osmonson
YFPI Specialist
Amanda Swenson
Fire/Life Safety Educator

Support Services

Danay Freeman
Angela Kappenman
Annette Lindquist
Randi Samuelson
Marian Whitney

The mission of the SFMD is “to protect lives and property by fostering a fire-safe environment through investigation, enforcement, regulation, data collection and public education.” It delivers services primarily through internal units or teams. The great majority of SFMD personnel have direct interface with the public, and are directly involved in service delivery.

The SFMD is a complex, multi-faceted organization, a part of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. The state fire marshal is appointed by the governor and reports to the state commissioner of public safety.

The function of each team is described below.

Fire Investigation Team

The SFMD works with local fire officials to investigate the causes and origins of fires, particularly those resulting in the loss of human life. Fire investigators work from remote locations around the state, positioned to provide response times typically less than three hours, often faster, around the clock.

Residential Care and Lodging Inspection Team

The SFMD conducts fire and life safety inspections of:

- Hotels
- Adult and child day care centers
- Child care homes and foster care homes
- Day training and rehabilitation centers
- Treatment facilities
- Special requests or complaints from other agencies

Inspectors work with property owners and occupants to achieve compliance and to promote fire and life safety. Some facilities must be inspected upon initial licensure; all facilities are inspected on a recurring basis (e.g., every three years or in response to complaints or cited violations). The SFMD also provides training on relevant code requirements to local officials. Some of these inspections are conducted by local officials by agreement with the SFMD.

School Inspections Team

The SFMD inspects each public or charter primary, secondary, middle, and alternative school once every three years. This includes more than 1,600 facilities statewide.

Health Care Inspection Team

The SFMD conducts annual inspections of licensed health care facilities, which includes both fire safety and life safety requirements. These inspections are conducted under the auspices of both the state fire marshal and the federal Center for Medicaid Services (CMS). Health Care Team inspectors receive additional training and inspections are audited by federal officials.

Fire Protection Team

The SFMD reviews plans and issues permits for fire protection systems (e.g., sprinklers and fire suppression systems), certifies installing personnel and licenses fire protection contractors, and inspects

existing fire protection systems. This team also provides training and technical assistance for fire protection systems.

Fire Code Team

The SFMD provides fire code training and responds to calls from other agencies and the public to understand and interpret the fire code. This team is also responsible for guiding the development of the state fire code.

Fire Data and Education Team

The SFMD gathers, analyzes, and reports on statewide fire data collected from Minnesota's 780 fire departments. This team also provides public education on fire and life safety and supports public fire and life safety education statewide, including the state's Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention (YFPI) program.

Minnesota Board of Firefighter Training and Education (MBFTE)

The MBFTE is an appointed board that was established to manage the licensure of Minnesota firefighters and to enhance firefighter training statewide primarily by distributing funds to support approved training programs. The executive director of the MBFTE reports to the board and to the state fire marshal.

Other roles

The SFMD has been tasked with explosives permits and licensing, with monitoring compliance with the Minnesota Fire Standard Compliant Cigarette Program Statute, and with leading the Governor's Council on Fire Prevention and Control. The SFMD also plays an informal leadership and ceremonial role in the state fire service and in the broader public safety community. The SFMD Honor Guard represents the agency and the profession around the state. The fire marshal is present at various community events, from public education and outreach programs to the funerals of fire service leaders.

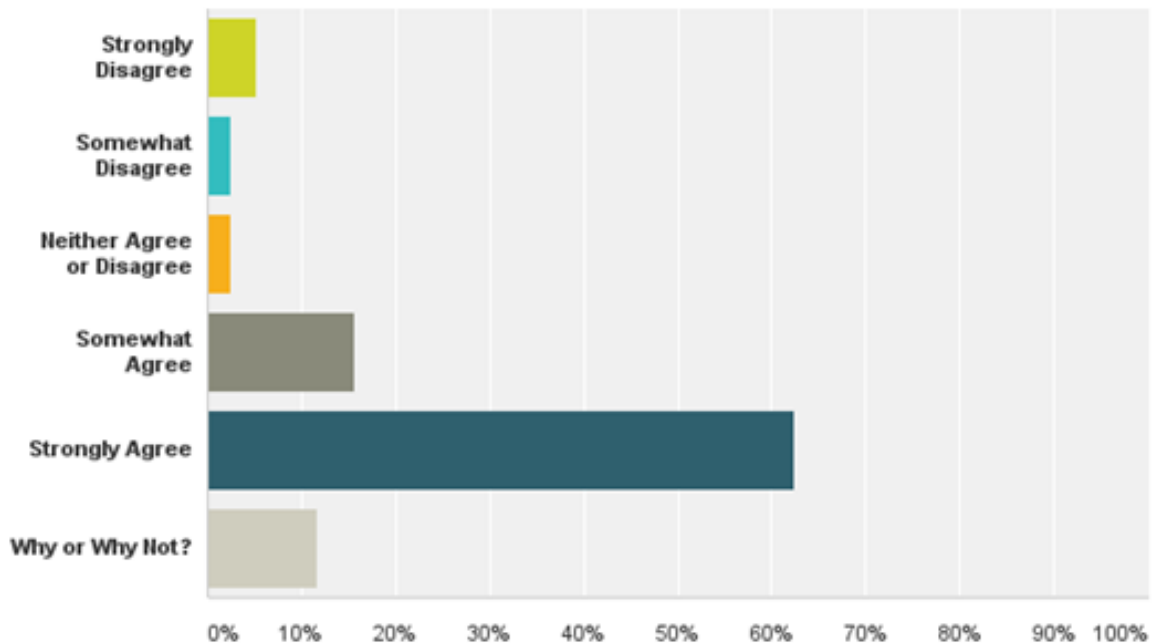
Further descriptions, key accomplishments, and performance metrics for each team, and for the SFMD as a whole, are set forth each year in the Minnesota State Fire Marshal Annual Report, available at on the organization's website at sfm.dps.mn.gov Click on "about" in the orange navigation tab at the top of the page.

Strategic assessment: Current status

As the above organizational summary indicates, the SFMD is a very complex in nature, encompassing multiple areas of expertise and engaging with a wide range of customers and stakeholders. Our research and planning efforts demonstrated that the agency is highly regarded by the vast majority of stakeholders, and is nearly universally considered to be a key asset within the Minnesota fire service. That level of approval is shared by those receiving direct services (e.g., inspections, training, or technical support) from SFMD:

Q5 Overall, I am very satisfied with my interactions with SFMD

Answered: 77 Skipped: 1



SWOT analysis: Strategic factors relative to the SFMD and its pursuit of mission

The SWOT analysis — a structured summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats — is a standard tool for strategic assessment. It is a means of synthesizing and categorizing assertions about an organization relative to a mission or vision. In other words, an organization’s SWOT analysis is made relative to its capacity to achieve its mission or some other set of strategic objectives. In this instance, we apply the SWOT analysis to the SFMD’s mission, and its capacity to achieve that mission while maximizing ELA’s Three Values for Public Safety Agencies: Excellent public service, sound stewardship of public resources and fairness.

The language of SWOT was modified somewhat to prompt creative thinking by department members. These are the modified category descriptions:

Internal strengths — consistent with a SWOT, strengths internal to the SFMD.

Internal limitations — traditionally called “weaknesses,” internal to the SFMD.

External drivers — traditionally called “opportunities,” these are factors primarily outside the SFMD that tend to promote achievement of mission, or “tailwinds.”

External inhibitors — traditionally called “threats,” these are factors primarily outside the SFMD that tend to inhibit achievement or mission, or “headwinds.”

An analysis of this sort can be only as good as the input provided for it. In this instance, the primary input came from employees in all units, and it reflected a high level of self-awareness and insight among many SFMD employees. Moreover, because analysts were able to ask the questions of multiple groups, very strong themes emerged across units. Input from external stakeholders through the survey and interviews confirmed the perspective represented in this analysis. There is good reason for a high level of confidence in the following factor analysis.

Internal strengths

- **Staff quality and knowledge.** This refers to SFMD’s highly tenured staff with a broad and deep experience level. As one outside stakeholder, a senior association leader, put it, “They are the go-to people in the state. They care so deeply about getting it right, and they have the experience to back it up. When they don’t know, they say so and find out.”
- **Empowering and effective leadership.** Many groups stated that the fire marshal and deputy fire marshal provide excellent leadership and support. There was a similar level of support for unit heads. “There isn’t anything the senior folks wouldn’t do to help us succeed. They give us the room we need to do our jobs, but they have our backs.”
- **Adequate funding due in large part to Fire Safety Account.**
- **Data-driven decision-making, and success in achieving high levels of data reporting statewide.** The SFMD has been recognized at national events for the breadth of incident reporting from fire departments.
- **Appropriate equipment, materials, and resources.** As with any agency, there are systems that need upgrading or updating (noted below as limitations), but overwhelmingly staff members feel what they have what they need to get their work done.
- **Broad capabilities and responsibilities with respect to fire prevention, safety, code compliance, education, etc.** The agency has many opportunities to excel.
- **Very strong, earned reputation for excellent service among outside stakeholders, including the legislature.** This includes a reputation that inspectors are also educators who support problem-solving and creative efforts to achieve safety and code compliance.

Internal limitations

- **Some process inefficiencies and redundancies.** “Sometimes when we work across teams, it takes too long to communicate, and things get complicated. That’s even more true when we have to go outside the agency.”
- **Workforce may be too specialized.** Staff mentioned there is not sufficient cross-training or cross-awareness. “I wish we knew more about what the other teams are doing, or could pitch in when we have some time and they need more help.”
- **Outdated information technologies.** System software and mobile phones were cited in particular. Technology investments will be focused on achieving service quality and efficiency, and on allowing our partners to do the same.
- **Possible “myopia.”** There is an opportunity to do more looking outside borders to benchmark aspects of the division’s operation, and to identify new programs and new ideas. One contributing factor is also the success of the agency in many respects, and the recognition that SFMD has received for being a leader.
- **Recruiting new staff members will become a priority; it has not been pursued strategically.** The staff has a great many people with extensive experience, having retired from other agencies. That is a strength. Staff demographics reflect the fire service, but not the broader community. Low pay relative to other agencies may make recruitment a greater challenge.
- **There may be holes in enabling legislation, especially with respect to investigations.** At times, the roles and authority of SFMD investigators have not been clear to all those working an incident.
- **Room to improve cooperation with other state agencies and functions.** “We have problems getting things through, when the services are outside of our office. This consumes a lot of time, and it sometimes hurts our customer service.”
- **Quality of fire incident data can be improved, in partnership with reporting agencies.** While the SFMD is justly proud of the breadth of reporting, some outside stakeholders argued that the data quality could be improved, which would increase its value for public policy research.

External drivers

- **Good relationships with local fire chiefs and fire marshals (Authorities Having Jurisdiction, or AHJs) with respect to inspections, code interpretation, problem-solving.** As one fire chief put it, “When I had staff turnover in my inspections team, they leaned on the state a lot, and we always got really excellent service.”
- **Support from fire service groups (MSFCA, MPFF, MSFDA, IAAI, etc.).** Interviews revealed the degree to which the SFMD has been a long-standing contributor to these groups, providing information, insight and at times leadership. The strongest role is as a source of professional and industry information within the organizations.
- **Legislative respect.** This goes beyond funding, to include soliciting input and taking heed of statements from SFMD.
- **Fire Safety Account (FSA) funding provides a fairly reliable funding base.** Agency leaders can do reasonable resource planning for the near- and mid-term future.

- **Basic needs for service, and public opinion that safety is important.** Survey data revealed that more than 80 percent of outside respondents felt that the SFMD made a significant contribution to their organization and to the broader community, versus less than 10 percent who disagreed.
- **Technologies that make sharing information more efficient, like social media.** These inexpensive tools have the power to accelerate efforts to build public awareness and drive public education about fire and life safety.
- **Technologies that improve fire safety, and those which improve gathering of evidence in investigations.** New technologies represent opportunities to improve service delivery, lower cost, or both.

External inhibitors

- **Criminal defense tactics that put at risk prosecutions** based on current state-of-the-art investigations. This will be an area for strategic investment to assure that investigative techniques continue to reflect best practices and lead the state of the art.
- **Legislative mandates and/or public expectations to deliver services in ways that are inherently costly**, e.g. timely inspections of newly licensed child care locations spread throughout the state. Inspections are required upon licensure, before these occupancies can open for business.
- **Potential to expand health care inspections to assisted living facilities would place radical pressure on limited agency resources.** Such a mandate would have to be implemented with time and funding to assure continuity of quality service delivery.
- **Political climate.** Budgets can change, and unfunded mandates can arise, including the above-noted potential to require inspection of assisted living facilities.
- **CMS/MDH changes/issues pose a risk of failure to comply**, and place at risk the quality of relationships with some stakeholders. “We work hard to stay on top of this, but it’s a definitely a risk factor,” stated one experienced health care inspector.
- **Appointed fire marshal** (vulnerability to a less effective appointee in the future). As one staff member put it, “We’ve had great bosses for as I can remember, but I worry after every election year.”
- **Criminal cases such as arson and wrongful death depend on engagement from state and county attorneys, and other prosecuting agencies.** An investigator summed it up: “these are complicated cases, and the other players have to have a willingness to dig into them to win them.” Investigators spend many hours on such cases, but enforcement and prosecution ultimately hinges on the activities and work of other agencies.
- **Potential for code changes and changes in regulatory standards.** This is a particular vulnerability because the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) has statutory code authority.
- **Investigation scene safety may be a greater challenge** than in the past, consistent with greater risks faced by all public safety personnel. One investigator observed, “Officers or deputies are busy, and don’t always want to wait around for us to finish our work.”
- **Cultural practices that are unsafe with respect to fire prevention are hard to modify through public education.** For example, some religious uses of candles are inherently

unsafe, but practitioners are not persuaded to change the practice by safety-oriented messages.

- **Insurance companies and other lobbying agencies drive policy decisions that are at odds with public fire and life safety.** Examples have included decisions regarding sprinklers, portable fire extinguishers, and other laws and policies that left the public less safe, or imposed costs that were not efficient contributors to safety, than might otherwise have been the case.

Impact of service

The impact of the SFMD's services is far reaching. Nearly every city and township in Minnesota has been influenced by the agency in several ways including fire code, training, inspections, law enforcement, the legal system and possibly fire investigations. Many private sector businesses are also impacted by the SFMD. Obvious examples include residential and commercial construction companies, sprinkler installers, fireworks and cigarette retailers, healthcare facilities, hoteliers, and education-related businesses and retailers. Well beyond that immediate scope, the people of Minnesota benefit from safer occupancies and from improved fire and life safety education for children, the elderly, and the public at large. Finally, the state legislature and governor use information from the SFMD to guide them with legislation and policies.

Strategic recommendations and opportunities

The purpose of a strategic plan is to guide continuous improvements. The SFMD will pursue the following strategic initiatives over the next three to five years.

1. Internal staff development. Includes enhanced staff training and knowledge sharing, and external benchmarking. Also includes some reorganization to rationalize reporting structures and spans of control. Finally, SFMD will put in place strategic recruiting measures to assure excellent staffing in the future.

2. Investigations and interface with criminal enforcement. SFMD will study and, if necessary, improve investigative methods to assure effective prosecution. The agency will continue to develop relationships with law enforcement agencies. It will also study whether new legislation, or enforcing current legislation, could help assure that SFMD coordinates all fatal fire investigations in the state. SFMD will continue to assure scene safety for investigators in light of potentially new threats.

3. Solidifying role supporting Minnesota fire service. Multiple stakeholders asserted that centralization of some functions could improve access to services and/or save money (for local agencies and overall). First, SFMD will study whether consolidating MBFTE with the Certification Board would yield overall cost savings, given the parallel charters and very similar administrative demands of firefighter licensure and firefighter certification. SFMD will also consider expanding its training function to become a premier provider of firefighter professional training, or to be a clearinghouse for that training provided through others.

4. Considered policy leadership. Association stakeholders expressed their strong desire for a greater advocacy role from the SFMD. Agency leaders acknowledge that one way to pursue the mission of the SFMD — *“to protect lives and property by fostering a fire-safe environment...”* — is through legislative influence and a higher public profile on issues of fire and public safety.

Each of these recommendations is discussed in more detail, below.

1. Internal staff development

There is good reason to assess the actual depth and currency of technical knowledge among staff members. While the reputation of the agency is absolutely excellent with respect to staff knowledge and expertise, the agency’s ability to sustain that level of performance cannot be taken for granted. Even now, many internal staff members expressed concern or reservations about their own depth of expertise in the areas in which they work. More expressed a desire to learn more about areas beyond their immediate job roles, and cross-training to support greater staffing flexibility. An initiative to assess and strategically advance staff expertise levels will assure continued excellence in service delivery, and provide staff members with a clearer sense of their own capabilities, whether or not actually expanding those capabilities is indicated.

This strategic planning process also revealed an opportunity to expand the degree to which the SFMD looks to other agencies, for example other states’ fire marshals’ offices, for new program ideas, incremental improvements in service quality and/or efficiency, and performance benchmarks. This effort should be coordinated at the executive level of the agency, and may include the establishment of mutual relationships with other agencies for the purpose of continuous improvement.

Overall, the SFMD will invest time and energy — as well as some funds — to sustain and advance the expertise of staff members where appropriate, and to become more adept as a learning and knowledge sharing organization. This begins with understanding the relevant opportunities for improvement, and becomes an integrated part of the way the SFMD does business.

Key actions:

- a. Identify and prioritize staff training areas across the SFMD units. Use impact on service, mid- and long-term, as prioritization criterion.
- b. Expand staff development plans, integrated with professional development planning and performance appraisal processes.
- c. Combine outside training and professional development with internal knowledge sharing so staff members attending conferences and classes outside of SFMD are able (and expected) to share what they learned. Foster informal conversations and mentorship to share knowledge within and across teams.
- d. Develop a plan for external agency learning and benchmarking. Identify a key member of the management team to lead this effort. Report annually on progress and offer recommendations arising from this ongoing inquiry.

2. Investigations and interface with criminal enforcement

The investigation of fires is a critical step in detecting the commission of arson and related crimes, and in apprehending and convicting perpetrators. The SFMD's investigations team includes expert investigators stationed throughout the state to conduct or assist in those investigations.

Defendants' attorneys continue to challenge investigative techniques and processes used in arson investigations nationwide; there is a risk that these challenges and the resulting case law will hamper the ability of prosecutors to secure appropriate convictions in Minnesota. Operationally, the SFMD must live up to its reputation by assuring that best practices are documented into policy and consistently followed. Relationships between SFMD and law enforcement agencies, including BCA, must be rock solid.

The SFMD must be in a position to be of service to local investigators whenever that is appropriate. It may be that the mandate of the agency to coordinate investigation of fire fatalities in particular is not effective, or is not effectively implemented. It may therefore be the case that new legislation, or better implementation of current legislation, could best assure that SFMD coordinates all fatal fire investigations, and that state resources contribute to achieving the best possible outcomes of these investigations whenever they might do so.

On a related note, this strategic planning process revealed a concern among some investigators that they do not always feel safe against potential acts of violence when on investigative scenes. The current practice is to have local or county law enforcement provide scene safety. Along with the efficacy of investigative techniques, risk mitigation and security practices also merits assessment. SFMD is committed to the safety of its personnel while they do the critical work of the agency.

Key actions:

- a. Assess current investigative practices against professional best practices nationwide. Document this effort toward continuous improvement.
- b. Based on that assessment, define opportunities to improve investigative practices and establish specific plans to implement any improvements.
- c. Engage other agencies in assessment, planning, education, and execution. This is certainly a multifaceted effort best undertaken in partnership with other agencies such as the BCA and prosecutors at multiple levels.
- d. Establish a role to continue to monitor changes in this field, and advise team and agency leaders of possible issues as early as possible.
- e. Assure scene safety for investigators. Assess actual risk and the effectiveness of current risk mitigation factors, and determine whether additional measures should be taken.

3. Solidify role supporting Minnesota fire service

The strategic planning process identified a strong theme that the SFMD is an excellent partner to fire departments and to the major associations that support the interests of the fire service. SFMD personnel support local fire prevention and code enforcement efforts by being “always there when we need them, and always professional and prompt,” as one local fire marshal put it. Another training chief noted the role that the fire marshal plays in funding training opportunities. “We’re a small community fire department, and we depend on those state funds for almost all of our outside training costs.” Association leaders noted that participation by the fire marshal or other SFMD leaders provides their members with authoritative information and adds value to their association for their members.

Interviews revealed a widely held point of view that that the SFMD could create greater efficiencies for fire departments and firefighters with respect to professional education of firefighters and other fire service professionals. The SFMD may also be able to improve overall cost efficiency with respect to certification of firefighters.

The primary role that SFMD plays in directly providing professional training is predominantly limited to its annual conference, which features multiple training opportunities in the areas of fire prevention, code enforcement, investigation and public education. As noted above, the MBFTE is closely aligned with, and largely managed as a part of, the SFMD. Currently, the MBFTE is responsible for disbursing funds for fire service training to departments on a *per capita* basis, to fund training that meets established criteria. The MBFTE is also responsible for recording firefighter licensure. Career firefighters require, and all qualified professional firefighters are eligible for, licensure in the state of Minnesota.

Professional education and training services are provided by many public and private schools, agencies, organizations and firms throughout the state. The MBFTE does not closely monitor the quality of these programs, except to establish broad content parameters and certify the qualifications of instructors. Departments and individuals must seek out these providers for firefighter and officer training. Closer coordination by the SFMD, and/or the direct provision of excellent training, may provide real benefits for fire departments, as well as individual firefighters or officers. Examples to consider include the BCA’s programs for supervisors and senior managers in law enforcement, direct fire service training provided by agencies, as well as indices or clearinghouses maintained by some states. This strategic initiative is to identify opportunities to add net value, and to develop plans for achieving those gains.

Finally, multiple stakeholders expressed their view that there is redundancy between MBFTE and the outside, non-profit Minnesota Fire Service Certification Board (MSFCB). The MBFTE does not currently provide testing services like the MSFCB's, but it does administer firefighter licensure in a manner that seems similar to the role of the MSFCB with respect to certifications. On that basis, the SFMD will consider consolidating MBFTE with the MSFCB at some point in the future, given their parallel charters and very comparable administrative demands. The agency will also consider expanding to become a premier provider of firefighter professional training, or to be a clearinghouse for that training provided through others.

Key actions:

This initiative requires more investigation of specific opportunities. Following are possibilities identified in this course of the strategic planning process.

- a. Consider expanding the SFMD's role in educating the fire service. Examples of options include:
 - Code enforcement training to promote consistent, best practices among municipal inspectors.
 - Expanded fire suppression and rescue training; becoming a premier provider of training services.
 - Coordinate with Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) and other agencies that train firefighters.
 - Consider creating a state fire academy or a firefighter I and II fire academy
 - Be a clearinghouse for utilization of the various trailers, props and other assets operated by state and regional organizations.
 - Deliver more investigations and set standards for investigations.
- b. Currently the MBFTE manages firefighter licensure, and the nonprofit Certification Board manages firefighter certifications. Consider combining or otherwise aligning operations to reduce total expenditure of public resources without reducing the level of service to stakeholders or the level of firefighter preparedness that is assured by sound testing.
- c. Specific initiatives with defined outcomes can be linked to FSA funding requests.

4. Consider policy leadership

Multiple outside stakeholders shared the view that the SFMD can and should take stronger positions on policy issues related to fire and life safety. In general, the role of the SFMD with respect to policy has been as a provider of data and information, and at times as an expert voice in understanding and contextualizing that data and information. It is rare that the SFMD has taken an advocacy position with respect to policy. It is reasonable that that stakeholders with policy objectives that align with the mission of the SFMD would expect the agency to advocate for those objectives, as well.

The SFMD does not take positions in a vacuum. As a division of the state's Department of Public Safety, which in turn is part of the executive branch of state government, any advocacy positions must align with the SFMD's broader role as a public agency. At the same time, advocacy of some positions may be a matter of leadership. Specifically, on issues related to fire safety, leadership may include policy advocacy instead of strict neutrality in the provision and interpretation of data.

The SFMD will work with the Department of Public Safety to develop sound processes that would enable the agency to establish advocacy positions on issues of fire safety, and will continue to provide objective data and interpretation of that data on all issues within the scope of its work. This focused advocacy role will be pursued with respect to a small number of highly relevant issues, in accordance with the mission of the SFMD. Policy advocacy will always be based on the best available data and information. SFMD will also benchmark with other agencies to develop processes that enable the agency to pursue its mission and in all respects to maintain the public trust.

Key actions:

- a. Study other similar agencies to determine what processes are used to evaluate issues for appropriateness of advocacy, and how to formulate advocacy positions on selected issues.
- b. Work with DPS to determine advocacy criteria and parameters.
- c. When issues arise that are critically relevant to the SFMD mission and meet advocacy criteria, SFMD will make and communicate policy recommendations in accordance with the established process.
- d. SFMD will continue to respond to requests for information from all parties in support of public policy decision-making.

Conclusion

Implementing this strategic plan will require creativity and commitment from SFMD employees, and from partners in other agencies and organizations. It is precisely those capacities that have earned the SFMD a reputation for excellent service and for being a great partner and asset to the community. SFMD leaders appreciate all those who shared their time and insights with the strategic planning team as the agency paused in its work to think strategically. The state fire marshal wishes to thank those same people, in advance, for the hard work that is to come.



Minnesota Department of Public Safety
State Fire Marshal Division

sfm.dps.mn.gov