

The Maine Fire Protection Services Commission



Conceptual Plan for the Funding of Regional Fire Training Facilities Across the State of Maine

October 2016

Introduction:

The Maine Fire Protection Services Commission (Fire Commission) was established by the legislature in 1999 to “monitor and evaluate the State's fire protection services system on a continuing basis and to provide recommendations to the appropriate state agencies and to the Legislature regarding necessary changes in the fire protection services system”. One of the core duties of the Fire Commission is “to assist all governmental agencies with firefighter training and education responsibilities to enhance their delivery of services to fire prevention, protection and life safety professionals, including paid, call and volunteer fire service members”.

Since 1999 the Fire Commission has worked diligently with a wide range of stakeholders to improve firefighter training and education. The Fire Commission has conducted studies, produced reports, and submitted legislation to improve the availability, quality, and safety of firefighter training across Maine.

The Challenge:

Maine is a very large and diverse state with a wide range of fire service capabilities and training needs. However, there are common basic fire training needs that apply state-wide. They include safe, modern training facilities within a 60 minute travel time of 90% of Maine’s firefighters where they can obtain hands-on live fire training in a safe and structured environment.

Maine is one of very few states in the nation that has no central training facility and in fact none of the regional training sites in Maine are owned or operated by the State. They are all a mix of local community, regional groups, chief’s organizations, and firefighter association sites that have been built and maintained through a variety of local efforts and resources. Most of the facilities are old (the newest built in 1996 or 20 years ago) and none of them have NFPA compliant class A burn buildings which is the key component to any facility.

For a few years the Maine Fire Service Institute (MFSI) was able to provide a modest level of grant support for some of the facilities that it uses for skills testing. Those funds came from their operating and reserve funding but the resources don’t come close to meeting the need. A recent report from MFSI indicated there are only six current regional training sites that meet the absolute minimum standards that MFSI requires to conduct proficiency exams for Pro Board certification of firefighters and even those sites don’t meet current national consensus standards and guidelines.

Live fire training is an absolute necessity for firefighter certification and proficiency but is also one of the most dangerous evolutions we perform. Historically most of that training was conducted in acquired structures but due to Department of Environmental (DEP) regulations, concerns from neighbors, and safety concerns that option is nearly non-existent now. The key to any regional training facility is a pre-engineered NFPA compliant class A burn structure or prop designed specifically to meet the required training evolutions leading to firefighter certification.

Minimum Standards for Regional Training Facilities:

This proposal envisions two different tiers of regional training facilities to best serve the varying needs across the state while maximizing resources. A Tier 1 facility is designed for the more urban areas where there are higher numbers of firefighters to be trained and utilization of the live burn facilities are apt to be more intensive requiring heavier duty construction and components. As a minimum all live training facilities shall be engineered and designed to meet *NFPA 1402 Guide to Building Fire Service Training Centers* 2012 Edition, and *NFPA 1403 Standard for Live Fire Training Evolutions* 2012 Edition. The photos below are conceptual in scale but not necessarily indicative of an NFPA compliant final design.

Tier 1 Regional Training Facilities Should Include:

- Building or prop suitable for training attack and extinguishment of Class A fire. Must be able to provide training in hose line operations & advancement; ventilation; search & rescue; ground ladder operations; and high angle rescue. Prop should be 40' in height for aerial ladder operations.
- Water supply from a pressurized hydrant and a static water source such as a cistern or pond
- Ventilation training prop.
- Forcible Entry training prop.
- Flashover simulator
- Below grade & Confined Space Rescue Training
- A working sprinkler & standpipe system
- Prop suitable for training attack and extinguishment of Class B fires utilizing two hose lines.
- Prop or concrete pad suitable for training and extinguishment of vehicle fires
- Concrete pad or other suitable surface and open area for vehicle extrication, portable fire extinguisher operation and similar training needs such as the MFSI vehicle fire prop.
- Storage building that provides for dirty and clean turnout gear and equipment storage. Along with an area for gross decontamination.
- Suitable access for fire apparatus
- Heated classroom with seating for min. of 30 students including ADA compliant restroom facilities, and adequate student parking.



Tier II Facilities are intended to be slightly smaller in size to better reflect the occupancies in the areas they are envisioned for, but also be designed to meet the various needs outlined above in a live burn building or prop designed for less intensive use.

In lieu of fixed on-site props tier II facilities should have concrete pads suitable to support mobile training props and aids that MFSI can bring on-site as needed.

Implementation Plan

The implementation plan includes four components:

- Conducting a survey of Maine's fire service to update data from previous studies to quantify need and obtain specific data on gaps in firefighter training resources.
- Designing a robust competitive grant program to provide an objective process to award funding to regional training sites strategically located across the State based on data from the survey.
- Submit legislation to authorize a bond issue to fund the competitive grant program to support regional firefighter training facilities.
- Engage the fire service and our many stakeholders to lobby our legislators and the public we serve to assure passage of the bond issue.

To determine the resources required to undertake this initiative the Fire Commission has authorized a survey that will be sent out to capture current needs and identify gaps in firefighter training state-wide. The data collected from this survey along with that from previous studies will determine the number and types of regional sites needed so that we can adequately forecast the total funding required.

The Fire Commission recommends refining the current Regional Training Facility Grant Program that MFSI has implemented on a small scale with available funding into a more robust and competitive process modeled after the very successful DHS Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG). The Fire Commission will oversee and collaborate with our stakeholders and MFSI on that effort. The grant program will publish guidance and set priorities to assure sites are geographically spread across the State within a 60 minute travel time of 90% of Maine's firefighters, and to maximize return on the State's investment. The program will assign scoring criteria that incentivizes regional collaboration and leverages other available grant and sources of local funding.

The Fire Commission plans to work with our legislative partners to submit legislation to support the Regional Training Facility Grant Program through a bond issue. This mechanism will provide the citizens of Maine with the opportunity to support the fire service in its mission, while also providing the flexibility to conduct multiple grant application and award processes over a five-year period. Management of the grants will be the responsibility of MFSI and they will bear the administrative cost of managing the program including grant administration, site inspections, and overall compliance out of existing operational budget funding using funds that have traditionally been allocated to upgrading and maintaining regional sites.

Finally it is imperative that the fire service and our many stakeholders come together to speak with one voice to support this plan by testifying at legislative hearings, contacting their local legislators, and reaching out to the citizens in their local communities to support this important initiative. The Fire Commission can only do so much. Ground root efforts by every firefighting organization and every firefighter in the State of Maine is what is required to bring this vision to reality. We have struggled since 1999 to get to this point, now is the time to improve the safety and effectiveness of fire training in the State of Maine.