



# The Blaze

A Publication of the Idaho State Fire Commissioners' Association

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello Fellow Commissioners,

I cannot believe it's Mid-September already. Where did our summer go? The last couple weeks have been great up in the northern panhandle since we can now see most of the mountains and air quality has moved towards normal. However, we know fire season is not completely over yet.

*I hope that everyone is aware of the change in the dates and location for our 2018 Annual Conference. We will be returning to the Riverside Hotel in Boise November 9-11, 2018.*

Speaking of the conference, we have Nicole Harms of 212 Training, LLC kicking off our conference with the "Power of Laughter" and "Juggling Work and Life" and later in the day, discussing "Communicating with Impact". On Saturday morning, she will dive into "Generational Diversity". We look forward to her joining us for the conference and the education we will gain. On Sunday morning, we will have the Idaho State Fire Marshall, Mr. Knute Sandahl discussing with us "The Elected Official and the International Fire Code". We have implemented a new day for the vendors and sponsors who are a great benefit to ISFCA and our Fire Districts. We feel that they will have a better opportunity to discuss and present their products or services, which may help your district when needs arise. I could go on and on about this year's upcoming conference, but want to save the rest for you to experience in November.

In July, ISFCA held its first Legislative Summit in Post Falls, ID. We want to thank Kootenai Fire and Rescue for the use of the awesome classroom. We had approximately 20 attendees and ISFCA's attorney William "Bill" Punkoney did the review of the numerous changes in statues. ISFCA's Commissioner Handbook is almost done being updated and will be presented to attendees at the conference.

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## 3rd Quarter Blaze 2018

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## Continued ... President's Message

We discussed some of the topics that may reappear during next year's legislative session. Rob Shoplock from the Professional Firefighters of Idaho (PFFI) phoned in, and they shared what they are looking at in legislation next year. The topic that is high on the radar is PTSD/PTSI and how worker's comp currently processes those requests. We hope to have more information at the conference. We also would like to get feedback if the members would like a north and south legislative summit in the next year.

By now, you and I have gone through another budget cycle. Based on my district's budget challenges, and those in surrounding fire districts across the state, it has become very apparent that our income (Tax dollars) is not keeping pace with expenses. Many districts are looking at possibly a levy, maybe consolidation or operational agreement with a neighboring district, outsourcing and/or having to adjust levels of service to align with current tax dollars available. I do not think anyone of us has the crystal ball but our taxpaying citizen may. With them (taxpaying citizen), we need to hold factual informational meetings, be able to show the steps we have taken to live within our income, and the potential impacts of any and all choices. Some districts are seeing some help with the use of impact fees. One of the ways to show the taxpayer is with the effective use of auto and mutual aid agreements. When my district staff provided a breakdown report of the incoming and outgoing of mutual aid (Fire and EMS), it was clear our county has grown exponentially, which means your district has grown. Another possibility for future funding is perhaps a change in the taxing laws and adequate funding of emergency services to address the rapid growth we are faced with daily, alongside the operational costs outpacing available taxes.

Can we show the citizens we have a robust and effective volunteer recruitment and retention program, a residential and seasonal program, a healthy working relationship with the career employees, the administration and the elected fire commissioners in understanding and concern for the taxpayer's best interest? I know I have mentioned several known and perhaps unknowns, but at the end of the day, we the elected fire commissioners, have to make some tough recommendations and be held accountable to deliver the best possible customer service no matter what the emergency. We also are reminded that as the elected official we cannot show or display support for or against any levy and can only use taxpayer resources for education of the facts. In closing, I hope this paragraph has stimulated conversation and look forward to hearing back at the conference in Boise, ID of your successes, failures and questions so we may all learn.

I thank every member district, our valuable sponsors, vendors, legislators, speakers and presenters from many areas in working together to make ISFCA successful year after year. This makes me proud to be part of this great association whose only purpose is to serve the elected official and fire districts within Idaho.



## Personnel Management & Handling Discipline

*Tim Vargas, Consultant, Jerome Rural Fire District #1*

Having to discipline a person on your fire protection team is one of the most stressful jobs of being a fire commissioner. I've been at this now for well over 25 years and I can say without a doubt that this subject is the least favorable of the many duties and tasks expected of us. Over the years the fire commissioners in my district have been fortunate to have had many good people to work with both as volunteers and employees; however, recently we have had a few occasions when the need to address personnel problems has arisen.

I bring this up because sooner or later you will be faced with the need to discipline a volunteer or an employee of your fire department and you need to be prepared. A little over a year ago and in response to declining turnout by some of our firefighters, Jerome Rural Fire Commissioners instituted a turnout policy requiring every firefighter to meet a minimum turnout percentage on a per quarter basis. Along with that program we put in place consequences and remedial action for falling below those minimum requirements. The policy is specific and calls for removal of the firefighter for having two consecutive quarters below the minimum turnout. It also allows the affected firefighter the opportunity for a face to face meeting with the commissioners, in the event any unforeseen life circumstances may have contributed to the subpar turnout. Since this policy was implemented we have had sit downs with 3 firefighters and we have had to let one firefighter go. The important thing here is to have a process in place and document your actions. Have a file for each of your firefighters and place copies of all relevant information concerning meetings with the individual(s) and any records in support of any action taken. Keep your firefighters informed and explain to them why programs have been put in place and what is expected of them.

In another situation, we had an individual who consistently pushed the envelope of acceptable behavior. It started out with the individual posting department sensitive topics on Facebook. I urge caution when dealing with this type of problem. We all have rights protecting speech, but they only go so far, and I recommend you contact your lawyer before proceeding. A person may have the right to say it, but it doesn't mean he or she has the right to say it and maintain their employment. This person has also had problems interacting with fellow firefighters when on the scene. We called the individual in to meet with the commissioners and we had the person sign a statement outlining the reason for the meeting and what corrective action was necessary for him to continue working with the department. That form went into his file thereby documenting the problems we discussed with him to date. Recently, still other problems were encountered with this individual while Jerome Rural Fire was assisting BLM under contract. As a result, the commissioners in concert with the fire chief and assistant fire chief agreed to terminate the individual.

These are stressful situations but having a process in place to handle them eliminates much of the burden on the commissioners. Do yourself a favor and implement a program that will ease a considerable amount of the stress associated with employee disciplinary proceedings. All you need is a couple of basic things in place such as personnel files, so that signed documents concerning any disciplinary meetings or actions can be safely kept. Let the person know in writing what is expected of him and her and then have them sign the document. Make sure performance policies are understood by everyone and provide the reason or reasons they are needed. Employee disciplinary matters can be costly to you and your department, so if in doubt, always seek legal advice. Bill Punkoney is there to help you and remember, if you didn't write it down or make a record of it, it didn't happen!

## Our “Expanded” Roles as Commissioners

*Wayne Cavender, Region 1 Director*

As Idaho State Fire Commissioners we approve budgets and purchases, such as, new engines, turnouts, SCBA’s, etc. We also try to inform, represent, lead and educate while serving the fire districts of Idaho. Our aim is the preservation of life and the protection of property.

We also may flip a few pancakes at the occasional breakfast fund-raiser or take a seat in an engine or other piece of apparatus for the Memorial Day Parade. Throwing candy and waving to the crowd is great fun!!

I believe, though, that we need to expand our roles as commissioners. Do we know our firefighters? They are the lifeblood of our local organization. They put in hours and hours of training to be the best they can be. On the bulletin board at Station One in Naples, at the top, is the simple sentence, “Train ‘til you can’t get it wrong”!

Perhaps you could take in a training night or two. See first hand what your guys and girls are doing. Learn some of their names, get to know them and let *them* get to know *you*. (Commissioners are people, too!) Those who can may want to participate in training. Now I know some Commissioners are retired firefighters, but those of us who weren’t can learn what it’s like to pull hose off the truck (on a drill) or pack it back on. There are plenty of avenues for lending a hand without crawling into a burning building with visibility next to zero!!! Most of us commissioners are beyond doing that, but we can help with Rehab on bigger scenes, we can roll or repack hose, help with taking care of equipment on Maintenance Night, washing those parade trucks the night before or the morning of, etc. Plenty of things that don’t require turnouts and SCBA’s!!

Some organizations have a Junior Firefighter status for sub 18 yr olds who are interested in learning the trade but are too young to be put at risk. Some Commissioners are ‘retired’ firefighters who would have a lot of information and experience to share with young future team members. They could be taken under a wing of a Commissioner and current firefighters alike. Care must be taken, though, that these young boys and girls be protected and cared for as they grow in our organizations. I’m sorry to have to even mention this but the times, *they have changed*, and this, I believe, must be said!!

So . . . fellow Commissioners, let’s get out there!! Signing checks is *very* important, but there’s more to being a good Commissioner!! Let’s get out there and meet the men and women who are the lifeblood of our organizations. Work with them. Get to know them. They are dedicated. They are a great bunch!!!

## Communication , *Steve Frazee, ISFCA Vice President*

When I started as a fire district commissioner a several years back, I had the privilege of attending the Annual ISFCA Convention, and it was well worth my time and effort. When we were in the Round Table discussion at the end of the convention, a fire district commissioner said that he was not on speaking terms with his Chief. That statement, even to this day, distresses me. Why, because not having good communications is a threat to the safety of your firefighters.

I had worked my way through college fighting wildland fires in the Salmon/Challis area. I am a retired District Engineer for the BLM and had the good luck of being able to finish my career back in Salmon. In addition to my job as a district engineer, I helped out in the wildland fire program in the wildfire program and often times I would do night shifts in the initial attack dispatch and at two o'clock in the morning, there is not much going on. So, I would look for something to do to keep myself awake and on the ball. One thing I would do was read the after action reports on fatality wildland fires around the nation, for example the Ship Island Fire, Kramer Creek Fire and the Kuna Point fire here in Idaho and the Storm King Mountain and Battlement Basin fires in Colorado. One reason I read those reports was that I personally knew two wildland firefighters killed in two of the above listed fires, and I wanted to know what went wrong that lead to these young mens untimely deaths.

You might be thinking, what does this have to do with me?? More than you think, please read on. Firefighting, be it wildland or structural is an inherently dangerous job. So far this year there have been 14 wildland firefighter deaths, some do to equipment accidents, some due to falling snag trees, and some directly by the fire. The two firefighters I knew were burned over by the fire and killed by smoke inhalation and burns. In my opinion, their deaths and most of the others I've read about are preventable.

While reading the fatality fire reports, I noticed a common thread. Starting with the firefighters that died and going all the way to the top of their local agency, bad decisions were made. Had just one of those decisions gone the other way, they would not have been killed. For example, had the firefighters paid closer attention to what the fire was doing, or to what was going on with their escape routes, or had been informed or red flag warning, or had been given the correct radio frequencies, they would have lived. Also, and just as important, had the fire managers set better priorities, provided better leadership, and/or more or better training, and/or better equipment and radios, or made better decisions those fire fighters would have lived.

What scared me the most about the comment that a commissioner and his chief we not speaking meant lack of communication between the two, and to me that was a threat to their fire fighter's safety. In the reports I had read, in most all of the times, communication problems had been a big contributor to the fire fighters' deaths. Had someone in the chain of command fixed the problem, the outcome would have probably been much better. In my opinion, that fire district commissioner and his fire chief were failing miserably when it comes to their fire fighter's safety.

Wildland and structure fire fighters both fight fires, and unfortunately some die, many deaths are preventable. You as a fire district commissioner are ultimately responsible for the safety of your fire fighters, be a contracted fire department, or your staff. Have you provided the training they need? How about their equipment, do they have all the equipment they need to safely fight fire? Are your funding priorities in the right order?

You, after all, are responsible for their safety, do your best to insure that after every incident all of your fire fighters go home to their families.



## **2018 Legislative Summit** *Roy Barrett, Region 6A Director*

Attended the very first Idaho Legislative Summit for the Idaho State Fire Commissioners' Association. Kootenai County Fire District was gracious to allow us to use their facility on July 14th in Post Falls.

The meeting was kicked off with a welcome by President David "Rudy" Rudebaugh and then attorney William Punkoney of White Peterson Law Firm took the floor. Mr. Punkoney devoted his time discussing the many bills that the Idaho Legislature considered and either passed into law or rejected during the last legislative session. Mr. Punkoney encouraged questions and the attendees readily obliged. It was a great opportunity to learn and the experience drove home a statement that I made in a past Blaze article. "The legislature will likely either do something for you or to you". It is obvious that our state politics are dynamic. The times are changing. So are laws. So is our state. I reflected upon what I heard and learned on the drive back to Lemhi County. I learned that Krystal Hinkle, William Punkoney and others represent ISFCA quite well. Without the very effective effort of "our" team, no doubt bills that we need would not have likely passed while some bills that could damage your district could have likely become law. At your expense. The value of ISFCA was driven home. My time and effort to attend the meeting was well spent.

Toward the end of the meeting, there was a short conversation regarding the upcoming ISFCA 2018 Conference scheduled for November. Although initially slated for Idaho Falls, issues with the Shilo Inn dictated that the conference be held in Boise. While it is human nature to want meetings to be held close to our own home, the fact is we are a state wide organization, and consequently effort is made to hold the conference in various cities throughout the state. Sadly through no fault of ISFCA, the Eastern Idaho venue did not pan out. Regardless, the agenda is packed with topics and speakers that promise to be informative and worthwhile. Well worth your time. Regarding the conference and your need for attendance, I am reminded of a quote from one of my favorite philosophers (Yoga Berra) when asked, why he attended so many funerals? His response was " Always go to other peoples funerals: otherwise they won't go to yours". Same could be said for conferences. The number of departments, districts and individuals that compose ISFCA make it a force to be reckoned with. ISFCA represents and speaks for all of us. Our success is due to our size, unity, purpose and commitment. You can demonstrate your unity, purpose and commitment by attending the Annual Conference, November 9-11 in Boise, Idaho.

Enjoy the trip and bolster your organization and primary line of defense.

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## **Are you Firewise?**, *Doug Mayne, ISFCA Secretary/Treasurer*

We in Elmore County and the surrounding Idaho counties live in an area that has the highest incidence of rangeland fires in the country. The following article is well worth reading, reviewing and discussing in your districts. I hope this helps your districts with forming and implementing "Firewise" plans in your districts. <https://idrange.org/range-stories/southwest-idaho/blm-paradigm-project-seeks-to-break-fire-cycle/>

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## **Impact Fees, *Bud Beatty, Region 3B Director***

I will give you the steps the Kuna Fire Department followed to implement Impact fees for our District. If, this appears to be an endorsement for Anne Wescott and Galena Consulting it is meant to be as their plan from start to finish has been clear, concise and very easy to follow.

The Kuna Rural Fire District retained Anne's service in 2017 to prepare an impact fee analysis as required by State law in order to provide the District with information necessary for the Commission to consider and potentially adopt impact fees.

As required by law, early on in the process we brought together six members of the community representing local stakeholder groups in development, banking, real estate, insurance and local commerce. Along with Chief Palmer and District staff, this Development Impact Fee Advisory Committee has provided input and advice on data points critical to the impact fee calculation including land use/growth projections; existing capital assets; existing service levels; existing capacity and/or deficiencies; capital infrastructure needed to support the projected growth; and proportional share of each growth-related capital item.

The final draft Impact Fee Report was presented and the Committee recommended that the District Commission adopt the fees for residential and non-residential land uses as set forth in the report.

The Kuna Fire District Commission elected to proceed with this plan. The next several intergovernmental discussions and agreements were needed to be facilitated. As the District cannot collect impact fees itself because it does not issue building permits, the City of Kuna, Ada County and Canyon County will need to collect them on the District's behalf.

Anne Wescott in conjunction with Bill Gigray of White Peterson P.A. completed all the necessary agreements and were present when they were presented to the City and County.

I strongly recommend using a firm such as Galena Consulting as their process kept the plan moving ahead and on schedule. Now that White Peterson P.A. has been through the process from start to finish, they will be a great resource for all Departments.

This has been a great way for our Department to help have growth pay for itself and to provide funds for future stations and equipment. The City of Kuna is now collecting the fees and is sending them to our Department monthly.

Galena Consulting  
Anne Wescott  
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White Peterson Law Firm  
Bill Gigray  
208-466-9272

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