



# Minnesota State Volunteer Firefighters Association Inc.

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## MSVFA

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## Message from the Chair

On March 6<sup>th</sup> the Minnesota State Volunteer Firefighters Association (MSVFA) was awarded a **Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)** grant to develop and conduct a recruitment and retention study of the volunteer fire service throughout the State of Minnesota.

Two-thirds of all career and volunteer fire departments across the United States, departments that serve large cities, suburbs, small towns and rural areas, do not have sufficient personnel to adequately protect the public. These staffing shortfalls often result in fire departments responding to the scene of a fire with fewer than four firefighters per vehicle.

Responding with fewer than four firefighters per apparatus prevents the first responder unit from complying with OSHA's "2-in/2-out" standard for safe fireground operation, and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards which adds unnecessary risk to the already dangerous job of fire suppression.

The focus of the grant is firefighter recruitment and retention and the various causes and concerns that surround recruitment and retention. Increasing statewide recruitment by 20% in the next three years from the current level is one of the goals.

This will be a multi-year project and our intent is to work with everyone that is impacted by recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

- We will gather information from active firefighters to determine what is keeping them as an active member on their department.
- We will make every attempt to locate those firefighters who have recently left the fire service to properly gauge the various reasons for leaving the department.
- We will be conducting surveys of the local citizens as to why they have not joined the local fire department.

Finding and analyzing the data will provide the base to help in current retention efforts and also in future recruitment of our firefighters.

Another goal is to work with the local leaders and the community to provide an action plan for retention and recruitment and have detailed, useful information to insure success for the fire service in Minnesota.

We will have the ability to conduct a Staffing Needs Assessment for each of Minnesota's Volunteer or Paid On Call fire departments in regards to their recruitment and retention status.

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The landscape of fire protection is changing in Minnesota. In the last few months most communities have lost their experienced firefighters to the economic down turn in the relief association funds among other reasons. This has left communities in dire straits with the loss of this valuable resource, the volunteer firefighter.

Many in your community, who could volunteer, are not as willing to make the commitment as you and your predecessors were.

Coupled with many other factors are the incredible costs associated with bringing on new firefighters ranging from \$3,600 to \$5,000 when you factor in all the requirements of firefighter training, personnel protective equipment, immunizations, and other related costs, most within the first year of service. We basically can't afford to lose our investment.

The time commitment required has turned away many from the fire service, as most families are two income families and have precious little family time together **even** without outside the family commitments.

The Minnesota State Fire Department Association and the Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Association have been contacted to participate along with the Minnesota State Volunteer Firefighters Association in this crucial project to gain valuable data to further insure the continued protection that the citizens of Minnesota now enjoy and have come to expect.

We have been in contact with the League of Minnesota Cities, the Association of Minnesota Townships and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and the State Fire Marshal who are all onboard with this project and ready to lend support.

While many can surmise they know the answers to the recruitment and retention problem. With this comprehensive study funded by the SAFER program, we will be able to collect hard data to accurately and decisively assist the fire service in solving the recruitment and retention problems we face.

There may be a few that decide not to participate in this great opportunity which will be unfortunate. Together, with your help and participation we can make a positive impact on recruitment and retention, create a safer work environment for our firefighters and attempt to increasing statewide recruitment by 20% in the next three years. Providing staffing and response times as recommended in NFPA 1720 will help in providing the best of all services to the citizens of Minnesota.

Watch this website in the coming months for updates and the project.

**Participation starts with you!**