

2023 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

TRAINING CENTER GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE SAFETY REPORT

Submitted January 2024

ROBERT H. WOOD JR. CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND FIRE SERVICE TRAINING CENTER



2023 TRAINING CENTER GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE SAFETY REPORT

Pursuant to Number 118, Section 12. 29 V.S.A. § 842 (a), there is a safety subcommittee created under the Training Center Governance Committee. The safety subcommittee shall meet annually on or before February 1, review the safety records of the Training Facility and, on or before July 1, submit to the Training Center Governance Committee its recommendations on how safety at the Training Facility can be improved upon.

The Training Center Governance Committee shall review the report and shall consider the recommendations of the safety committee. The Training Center Governance Committee shall report annually, on or before January 15. The report shall address any safety issues discovered at the Training Facility and what steps, if any, have been taken to remedy those issues, and whether the Governance Committee has instituted any of the changes.

This report was prepared by the members of the Training Center Safety Subcommittee and approved by the subcommittee on December 28, 2023. The report has been reviewed and approved by the Training Center Governance Committee and is hereby presented to the General Assembly.

Safety Subcommittee Members:

Lindsay Thivierge, Director of Administration
Vermont Police Academy


Michael Skaza, Chief of Training
Vermont Fire Academy

Dan Whipple, VOSHA Program Manager
Vermont Department of Labor

Chris Pixley, Lead Training Coordinator
Vermont Fire Academy


Rebecca White, Risk Management Director
Vermont Agency of Administration

Trevor Whipple
Vermont League of Cities and Towns

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Michael Desrochers, Executive Director
Division of Fire Safety
Chair, Training Center Governance Committee

1/3/2024

Date

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Heather Simons, Executive Director
Vermont Criminal Justice Council
Vice-Chair, Training Center Governance Committee

1/9/2024

Date

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Training Center Governance Committee convened with members of the Safety Subcommittee with respect to the content in this legislative report. Law enforcement and firefighter training occur on campus in Pittsford and off campus at outreach locations throughout the state. The Fire Academy relies on two national safety standards and Standard Operating Guidelines to guide instructors through a consistent application of course delivery. The Vermont Police Academy follows rules, statutes, best practices, and court rendered decisions. Both are specified below:

Vermont Fire Academy:

- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards. NFPA 1403 – *Standard on Live Fire Training Evolutions* is applied to ensure the safety of instructors and students.
- The Fire Academy has created a rehabilitation program based on NFPA 1583 - *Standard on Health-Related Fitness Programs for Fire Department Members* to ensure all personnel are physically capable of starting and continuing strenuous activity.
- The Fire Academy follows Vermont Fire Service Training Council approved Standard Operating Guidelines and procedures to ensure that training is delivered as safely as possible in a consistent manner.

Vermont Police Academy

- Training is delivered through rules outlined in the Vermont Criminal Justice Council Administrative Procedures.
- Vermont Statute include 20 V.S.A. § 2351, 20 V.S.A. § 2352, and 20 V.S.A., Chapter 151
- State and Federal court decisions that evolve and change regularly.
- Nationally recommended best practices from a host of different law enforcement entities such as the International Association of Police Chiefs (IACP), The International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST), and expert committee recommendations.

Throughout the pandemic the Police Academy began monitoring illnesses in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Since that time the Police Academy continues to monitor illness to ensure officer wellness while they are in the training program and to identify any areas where we can make changes in the future or provide additional resources. In 2023, the Police Academy reported two COVID-19 cases and 17 other non-COVID related illnesses. In 2023, the Fire Academy discontinued the formal monitoring and reporting of COVID-19 cases and moved to a posture consistent with how we treat other common illnesses in accordance with Health Department guidelines. The approach of managing illness in line with community guidelines works well as most of the Fire Academy students are commuters and are not housed communally during training.

In 2023, the Vermont Fire Academy trained 618 students within certification programs and 1,118 in non-certification courses. The Vermont Police Academy trained 87 law enforcement officers in Level – III basic training, 61 law enforcement officers in Level – II basic training programs, as well as a varying number of non-certification training to over 1,500 Vermont Law Enforcement officers. This represents a continued increase in annual enrollment for both the Police Academy

and the Fire Academy. To ensure we are taking a holistic approach to wellness for officers in training, the Vermont Police Academy monitors mental and physical illness, as well as reportable and non-reportable injuries that occur during training. In 2023 the Police Academy had 19 illnesses, 8 reportable injuries, and 27 non-reportable injuries. Most injuries were related to physical overuse injuries due to the change in the PT entrance standard. In 2023, The Fire Academy incurred two reportable injuries, which were both orthopedic physical overuse injuries. Despite increased enrollment in 2023, both the Vermont Police Academy and the Vermont Fire Academy experienced a decrease in the number of injuries when compared to 2022.

The Fire Academy and Police Academy are maintaining well-established protocols on preventing, reporting, and investigating injuries. The training center continues to have an excellent safety record given the high number of student encounters and high-risk training activities that we deliver each year. Both agencies continue to take advantage of the benefits of working together and the sharing injury reporting policies that have been fostered by the Training Center Governance Committee and the Safety Subcommittee. In addition to attending the Safety Subcommittee meetings, staff from the Police and Fire Academies meet regularly to share information. The Safety Subcommittee continues to examine injury reports to understand how to prevent future injuries. The committee looks at proactive ways to reduce the overall number of injuries through programs. Together, we developed joint solutions to complex safety issues such as preventing exertional heat-related illness during training and mitigating the spread of COVID during training programs.

In 2021 the legislature allocated \$50,000 in capital funding for a two-part study to address safety issues within two separate buildings. The first part of the study was to determine if a roof can be installed over the small arms range to eliminate ice accumulation that occurs in the winter months and to suggest a design and provide a cost estimate for a new roof system. The second part of the study assessed the interior spaces within the Main Building, Gym, and West Cottages to determine if existing spaces can be reconfigured to meet current use needs. These projects were completed late in 2022 and the reports are currently being reviewed and analyzed by the Department of Buildings and General Services and the Governance Committee. Part of the analysis includes updates to the gym to reduce condensation on the floor during summer months.



The Small Arms Range is uncovered and fills with ice and snow in the winter months.

INTRODUCTION

The Training Center Governance Committee was created in 2015 under the authority of Act 26. The purpose of the committee is to govern access, use, and future capital investments at the training facility for efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, economy, and continuity of operations. The Governance Committee provides a single voice to the legislature on key areas of responsibility ensuring all users are represented resulting in continued fair access and use of the facility. The Governance Committee also provides an avenue for users to resolve conflicts on the site and brings a consistent management system to the facility. A primary goal of the Governance Committee is to pave a path forward working with the Vermont Legislature to enhance the infrastructure of the aging 1907 training center facility so we can better prepare our first responders and emergency service personnel. Since 2015, the Governance Committee has been able to constructively use its authority to enhance the facility's use by working collaboratively together with the same visions and goals for long term sustainability.

Delivering training to those who respond to and manage dangerous situations can present challenges to the instructors and students. Firefighters and law enforcement officers have an inherent risk of injury on the job and at training. The risk of injury is clearly associated with the physical attributes of the job performance requirements.

Vermont Fire Academy delivers training using national safety standards/models published by the National Fire Protection Association, coupled with Standard Operating Guidelines to address specific safety concerns. Title 20, Chapter 179 of Vermont Statutes requires that a Fire Training Council govern Fire Academy training. The Vermont Fire Academy and the Vermont Fire Service Training Council share a positive relationship that provides stakeholder representation, checks and balances, and a beneficial forum to vet policies and guidelines pertaining to the delivery of fire training and issuance of certifications.

Vermont Police Academy delivers training through rules outlined in the Vermont Criminal Justice Council Administrative Procedures, Vermont Statute, State and Federal court decisions (which evolve and change regularly), nationally recommended best practices from a host of different law enforcement entities such as the International Association of Police Chiefs (IACP), The International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST), and expert committee recommendations.

JOINT INITIATIVE ON INJURY REPORTING POLICY

An Injury Report Form was created jointly by the Vermont Police Academy and Vermont Fire Academy. Instructor(s) administering training in which an injury is reported are required to submit an Injury Report Form documenting the event. This reporting tool allows for the collection of information from all parties involved and witnesses. All reports are reviewed by the Safety Subcommittee as needed and presented to the Training Center Governance Committee with recommendations on how to reduce or mitigate the injury. Any injury that is defined by OSHA

300, as a recordable work-related injury and illness are those that result in one or more of the following: medical treatment beyond first aid, one or more days away from work, restricted work or transfer to another job, diagnosis of a significant injury, loss of consciousness, or death will be reported appropriately and documented within this report.

POLICE AND FIRE ACADEMY INJURY REPORTS

The following are the individual reports for the Police and Fire Academies as submitted by both agencies. The report reflects training related injuries from January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023. The individual report includes current injury reporting data, explanation of injuries, and the mitigation measures employed to prevent future injuries. The Safety Committee met periodically throughout the year to review past and future program deliveries to ensure best safety practices are in place.



Recruits at Flag Call.



Recruit driving on the driving pad.



Recruit teambuilding.

Vermont Police Academy

The Vermont Police Academy administers training under rules outlined by Vermont Criminal Justice Council Administrative Procedures, Vermont Statutes, Federal Law, State, and Federal court decisions (evolving regularly), and nationally recommended best practices from entities such as the IACP, IADLEST, CALEA, ASCIA, FOP, etc. The Vermont Criminal Justice Council (Council) is comprised of 24 members, twelve pre-existing members, and twelve new members, which include seven Governor appointees and five new positions. With the vision to create lasting community partnerships and high standards of excellence, the Vermont Criminal Justice Council created 17 subcommittees and working groups to focus on the overall mission of safety and excellence in Vermont law enforcement. These committees further recommend best practices and policies to aid in governing Academy operations. The Academy utilizes a manual of internal standard operating procedures to further guide operations and processes.

The mission of the Vermont Criminal Justice Council is to improve public safety by promoting excellence in law enforcement through the implementation of the highest standards for training, certification, and recognized best practices. The Academy's vision is to consistently advance standards of excellence within the law enforcement community. This is accomplished through the enlistment of the highest standards in training and professionalism, fostering partnerships, promoting teamwork, and providing a modern, efficient, and welcoming training environment where everyone is encouraged and empowered to succeed.

Injury Prevention Measures

Law enforcement numbers are beginning to increase although agencies are still experiencing shortages. These shortages paired with a process of evaluating potential disparities in the training landscape caused the Council to research and implement new entry standards for the Vermont Police Academy. Previous physical testing and training were based on the Cooper Standards which were deemed invalid as a standard. Through a re-evaluation of our physical entry standards, a 2000-meter row was implemented, and physical training was adjusted to elevate varying levels of physical fitness. As part of this evaluation Academy staff track all injuries, both reportable and not, to evaluate where training needs to be adjusted and areas to focus on injury prevention. Injury forecasting and prevention continue to be a priority for the Vermont Police Academy; the safety of trainees at the basic and in-service levels is always of paramount importance. All injury mitigation strides the Academy has made have become a routine part of institutional culture.

In addition to the steps taken in recent years, additional injury mitigation processes have been instituted. One such shift has been incorporating the recruit into their own care plan when previously the decision would be made with the agency. Care plans developed with the recruit allow them to leave the program if an injury was sustained that impacts their continuation, and then pick back up where they left off in their training in the next Academy after they have healed.

Academy staff are open to further methodologies and are constantly seeking ways to not only improve training but also to ensure training is administered in as safe a manner as possible. The Academy continues to take a holistic approach to the physical and psychological safety of training participants. The injury mitigation and prevention methods outlined in this document are new for Calendar Year 2023. Please refer to prior publications of this report for a more thorough description of the Academy's ongoing and evolving injury prevention and mitigation measures.

Illness Mitigation

COVID-19, although not as present in the community, does continue to fluctuate and COVID response is consistently evaluated for training impacts as are additional illnesses that put recruits at risk in a residential academy. Response protocols that were put in place during Covid-19 have allowed us to shift when required. There were two classes this past year and only two cases were reported, one in each class. Remote learning was implemented and through quick action and monitoring staff only had two weeks out of forty-two weeks where training was impacted for the two recruits. The fluctuating risks that continue to impact the residential community with not only Covid-19, but also other illnesses, have kept the Academy vigilant in its operations. When an illness is identified, care is taken to separate them from the class when it is necessary for their health and the health of others. Recruits are advised to wear masks when displaying symptoms of illness and given medical attention when staff determine it is necessary or when requested and adjustments to training and operations immediately followed.

We have seen a total of 19 instances of illness to include 14 related to viral illnesses, 1 mental health, and 4 allergen related issues. Academy staff continue to evaluate procedures and mitigation strategies for a holistic view of the wellness of officers training in the Academy setting.

Additional funding was used to purchase COVID-19-related equipment. This includes scenario-based training props that are easy to sanitize, virtual-based simulation training upgrades, sanitization measures, a medical room, as well as projectors and sound equipment so instructors and staff can deliver in-service training off-site and remotely.

As part of a holistic wellness program academy staff are monitoring mental health, nutritional health, and physical health when creating learning environments to ensure that recruits can focus fully on their training and success in the program.

Mental Health awareness has been introduced at orientation to ensure that recruits know what to look for in themselves and others and to offer resources and strategies for minimizing any negative impacts of stress. Initial conversations were also had with the Fire Academy regarding physical baseline testing. Internal discussions are continuing about how to incorporate this into the schedule for the Level III certified recruits.

CY/2023 Injury Report

The following represents injuries reported and documented by the Vermont Police Academy for Calendar Year 2023. The Academy had a total of 35 injuries.

23 injuries occurred during PT or training:

- slipped and twisted shoulder while doing a push-up
- Achilles tear during knee strikes OC
- ankle sprain during PT entrance test run
- Left hand and left thumb
- Sciatic pain while running
- Rolled ankle during scenario
- Chemical burn on eye – OC
- Pectoral muscle tear during PT
- Sprained finger during a scenario
- 14 injuries were due to soreness and overuse – hip strain, (3) Pain in knees during PT, Lower leg soreness during PT, (2) Pain in shoulder, (2) Lower back pain, Rotator cuff strain, ankle and knee strain during PT, left shoulder pain, upper thigh pain, pulled abdominal muscle.

12 injuries occurred during outside of PT or training:

- 1 dizziness due to dehydration and use CPAP machine.
- 2 prior injuries that were reagravated.
- 8 injures were activities on grounds not directly related to training - (i.e. Ultimate frisbee, closing a window, playing dodgeball, lower abdominal pain, collision with recruit, hit head while cleaning, ran during mail call, tripped on stair)
- 1 injury happened outside of the academy, and they did not continue with their training.

Of the 35 injuries 9 were reportable and they were as follows:

Shoulder Injury – February 2023

A Level-III recruit sustained a shoulder injury that continued to aggravate during PT. The recruit

was sent to Urgent Care and referred for an orthopedic and physical therapy appointment. The recruit was assigned a physical therapy regime from the Doctor as well as over the counter medication. Staff continued to monitor the recruit until full use was returned. Evaluation following this injury revealed nothing could have been done to prevent the injury from occurring. This individual was able to complete Level-III phase training following this incident.

Hip Strain – March 2023

A Level-III recruit experienced pain in their hip while performing push-ups and sit-ups. The recruit was given ice, over-the-counter pain relief, and crutches while awaiting a doctor's appointment. The recruit was referred to orthopedic and physical therapy appointments for a hip strain. After a return to training, alternative PT was assigned. Firearm was secured lower on the waist to prevent added weight to the waist due to recovery restrictions. Evaluation following this injury revealed nothing could have been done to prevent this from occurring. The recruit was able to complete training.

Achilles Injury – March 2023

A Level-III recruit was participating in OC certification training in the Fire Academy truck bays and sustained an injury performing knee strikes. The recruit was transported to the emergency room and was given a splint, crutches, ice, medication, and prescribed limited participation until a follow-up could be scheduled. It was determined the injury was an Achilles tear and required surgery. The recruit was not able to complete training but after developing a return to training plan with staff they came back to the next academy and continued from where they had left off.

Knee Injury – April 2023

A Level-III recruit was participating in extra-curricular exercises outside. The recruit jumped and landed wrong which resulted in a partial dislocation. The recruit was brought to the hospital and given x-rays, a wrap, ice, and crutches. Recruit returned to training with restrictions with limited use of knee. Evaluation following this injury revealed that nothing could have been done to prevent the injury. The recruit was able to complete training.

Shoulder Pain– August 2023

A Level-III recruit reported pain in their shoulder when trying to lift their arm, the injury while performing PT push-ups and planks. The recruit was taken to a doctor and prescribed over-the-counter pain relief and physical restrictions. Evaluation following this injury revealed nothing could have been done to prevent this from occurring. The recruit was not able to graduate from basic training.

Lower Back Pain – August 2023

A Level-III recruit reported a pain in the lower back region extending down the leg while running. The recruit was given ice, and over-the-counter pain relief then sent to urgent care. The recruit was referred to Orthopedics and physical therapy and prescribed PT restrictions. Evaluation following this injury revealed nothing could have been done to prevent this from occurring. The recruit was able to graduate from basic training.

Ankle Injury – September 2023

An instructor was injured during an armbar takedown in a Use of Force Scenario. The officer was taken to the hospital, provided care, and released. Work restrictions were put in place.

Thigh Pain – October 2023

A Level-III recruit experienced a severe pain in their upper thigh while running. The recruit was given ice, crutches, and over-the-counter pain relief as needed then taken to urgent care the following day. The recruit was referred to orthopedics and Bone and Joint urgent care.

Evaluation following this injury revealed nothing could have been done to prevent the injury. The recruit was unable to graduate from basic training.

2023 Police Academy Annual Reportable Injuries

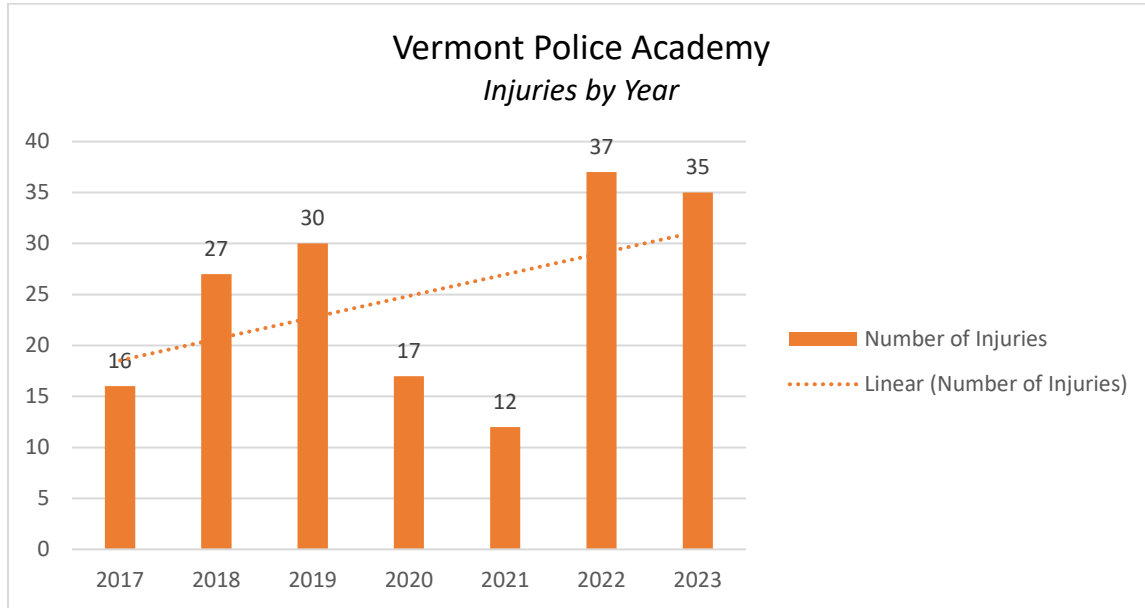
INJURY TYPE	SKILL PERFORMED	LOCATION	COURSE NAME	ER / DR	Met OSHA 300 Reporting Requirements	COMPLETED TRAINING
Shoulder	Police Officer	Grounds	PT	Yes	Yes	No
Hip	Police Officer	Unknown	Break-time	No	No	Yes
Knee	Police Officer	Gym	Use-of-Force	No	No	Yes
Achilles	Police Officer	Gym	Use-of-Force	No	No	Yes
Shoulder	Police Officer	Gym	Use-of-Force	No	No	Yes
Thigh	Police Officer	Gym	PT	No	No	Yes
Back	Police Officer	Grounds	Use-of-Force	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ankle	Police Officer	Grounds	Use-of-Force	Yes	Yes	Yes

NOTE: This table reflects only reportable injuries identified by the Vermont Police Academy.

Conclusion

There were 35 injuries, of which, 9 were OSHA reportable in 2023. Many reported injuries required only basic first aid, if that, and were not considered reportable by OSHA standards, as no medical treatment was sought. Every known injury was included in this publication to illustrate the detailed level of tracking and continued commitment the Police Academy takes to mitigate, investigate, and prevent injury, despite the often rigorous and arduous demands required for training law enforcement officers both at basic and in-service levels. The Academy's level of documentation allows staff to continually make targeted changes to training practices where appropriate.

2023 Police Academy Individual Injury Chart



NOTE: This table reflects all injuries identified by the Vermont Police Academy, even those considered non-reportable by OSHA, 2020-2022.

OSHA 300 Recordable work-related injuries and illnesses are those that result in one or more of the following: medical treatment beyond first aid, one or more days away from work, restricted work or transfer to another job, diagnosis of a significant injury or illness, loss of consciousness, or death.

The Police Academy had 9 reportable incidents during the 2023 training year.

2024 Moving Forward

After evaluating the years injuries and illnesses we did see a small decrease of injuries but over half of the injuries could be attributed to overuse. The PT program that was designed and developed for our exit standards is in the process of being evaluated to modify PT standards to ensure that the fitness level of incoming candidates aligns with the PT program that exists. Concurrently the VCJC is beginning a full curriculum review which will create adjustments with standards and programs. Staff have scheduled extended periods for warm-ups and cool down during physical activities.

PT program evaluation includes planning and anticipating a contractor that will consult in the development of a wellness program that will incorporate physical and mental health, nutrition, physical therapy, and onsite availability of medical personnel.

Purchases and anticipated purchases for 2023-2024: OSHA Safety Plan, eye wash stations for OC day to reduce number of eye injuries, full length gym mats that Velcro to increase stabilization and safety for the hard surface of the gym, water and fruit stations for the classroom and areas of high activity, masks and sanitization stations, desk dividers, additional medical safety equipment, classroom air purifiers, upgraded equipment where possible to include touch free options to reduce hand contact contamination.

Additional Safety Adjustments

The Police Academy incorporates risk mitigation into the continual improvements in training programs. Updates for the 2023-2024 year include firearms updated safety rules, incorporating a verbal review of all range rules at the start of all range activities, and safety plan verbalized in range prior to any shooting event. There is now an additional safety waiver that is completed prior to any use of force class, and all safety rules are read verbally to students by the instructor prior to use of force training every day.



Fire Officer students developing fire investigation skills.



Firefighter I students practicing Wildland Fire Control skills by making a fire line.



Students observe a fire in the Flashover simulator to learn about fire behavior.

Vermont Fire Academy

Description of Injury Reporting

Vermont Fire Academy staff or students who incur injury or illness during training that requires more than basic first aid are reported and documented by the Instructor In-Charge. These reports are submitted by utilizing the Injury Report Form adopted by the Vermont Fire Academy and Police Academy. The Site Coordinator performs follow-up in accordance with Vermont Fire Academy guidelines to investigate the incident to ensure that proper procedures and policies were followed, determine if actions can be taken to mitigate reoccurrence of future injuries, and to ensure that any ill or injured participant makes a safe return to training activities. An after-action report is generated following each incident and is reviewed by the Chief of Training.

Response to Injury

When someone becomes injured and needs more than basic first aid or experiences a medical event while participating at any Vermont Fire Academy function, medical assistance is called for immediately. Most Vermont Fire Academy staff are medically trained, and the Fire Academy provides essential first response equipment to begin assessment and treatment while waiting for local emergency services to arrive. The Vermont Fire Academy has a guideline that requires certification of fitness for duty from a qualified healthcare provider following a significant illness or injury before returning to training. This guideline has been beneficial in fostering a participant's safe return to physical activity and preventing re-injury.

2023 COVID-19 Management

Throughout the pandemic, the Vermont Fire Academy strictly followed all Vermont Department of Health guidance regarding the prevention of COVID-19. These guidelines allowed us to safely continue with the mission of training Vermont's firefighters. Formal COVID-19 mitigation measures such as screening and reporting were stopped in July 2022 and we

transitioned to the guidance in place for general communities. The Fire Academy continued to maintain a heightened awareness of safe practices within our programs and encouraged our students to stay home when sick. During 2023, we did not experience outbreaks of cases within our student or instructor groups nor did we experience high levels of absenteeism from illness.

2023 Injuries and Mitigation

In 2023, participants in Vermont Fire Academy training events experienced two reportable injuries. Outlined below are the injuries that occurred with summaries of the investigative findings and any recommended changes to prevent re-occurrences.

Knee Injury – September 30, 2023

A student was participating in a practical skill exercise involving donning personal protective equipment and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) at an outreach training location. While maneuvering to don a SCBA, the student stepped awkwardly and felt a pop in his knee. The student was treated in the Emergency Department for a dislocated patella. There are no recommended changes following review of this incident.

Knee Injury – November 27, 2023

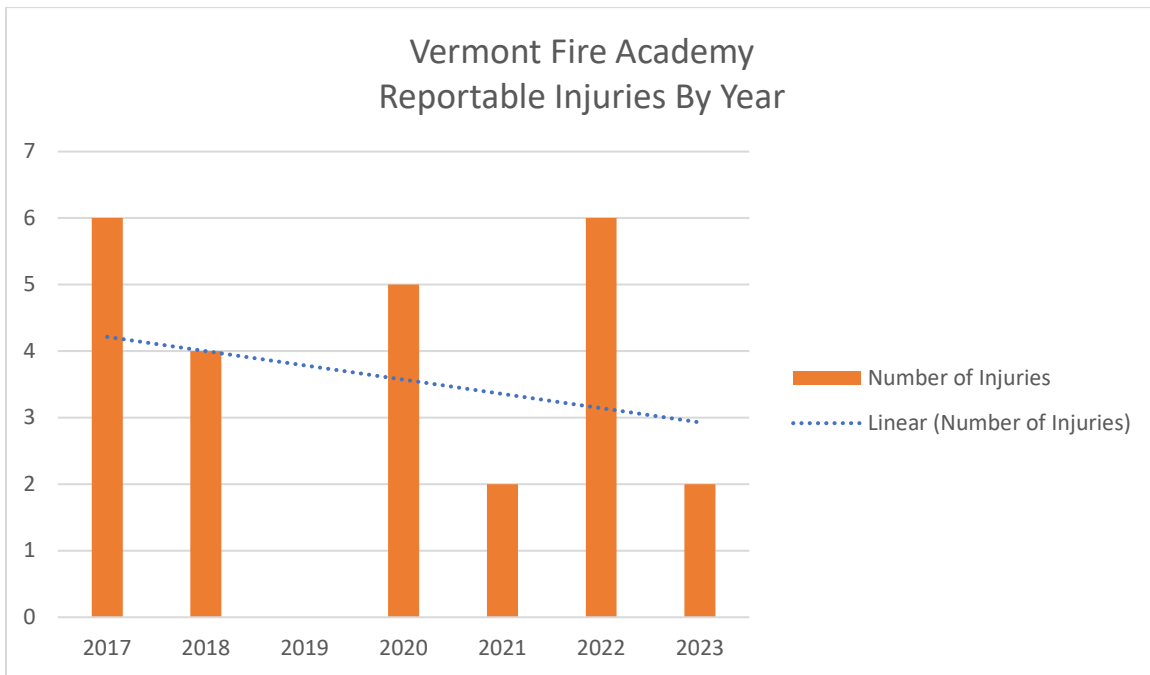
A student was participating in practical skill training at the Vermont Fire Academy wearing full personal protective equipment and self-contained breathing apparatus. While preparing to begin a hose advancement training evolution, the student felt sudden pain on movement of his knee. He was treated in the Emergency Department and referred for follow up with an orthopedist. The student required surgical intervention to repair a tear in his knee and withdrew from the training program. There are no recommended changes following review of this incident.

2023 Fire Academy Individual Injury Summary

INJURY OR ILLNESS TYPE	TRAINING EVENT	LOCATION	COURSE NAME	MEDICAL CARE	MET OSHA 300 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS	COMPLETED TRAINING
Knee Injury	SCBA Training	Shelburne	Firefighter I	Yes	Yes	No
Knee Injury	Hose Handling	Vermont Fire Academy – Pittsford	Firefighter I	Yes	Yes	No

OSHA 300 Recordable work-related injuries and illnesses are those that result in one or more of the following: medical treatment beyond first aid, one or more days away from work, restricted work or transfer to another job, diagnosis of a significant injury or illness, loss of consciousness, or death.

Vermont Fire Academy – Annual Reportable Injuries



Prevention

The Vermont Fire Academy works hard to promote a culture of safety within all our training offerings. The two reportable injuries that occurred this year represent a decrease from last year and our review of each incident found them to be unavoidable and concluded that all practical safety processes were employed during each event. Both injuries were orthopedic injuries and are representative of the inherent danger and physical nature of the job performance requirements of a firefighter.

Four years ago, we instituted a blood pressure screening program within our Firefighter I classes. This program is aimed at early identification of hypertension as a preventative measure for heart disease, which is a leading cause of firefighter deaths. This program has been successful in identifying numerous cases of hypertension that have resulted in referrals to healthcare providers. Most of these cases have resulted in the firefighter receiving medical care, returning to finish their training, and going on to serve their communities with a much lower risk of heart disease.

Our Rehabilitation Policy continues to be successful in ensuring student and instructor safety by requiring periodic rest periods based on environmental conditions and providing wellness monitoring of all participants in strenuous training activities. These practices continue to keep our illness and injury rates very low during our highest-risk training events. The Vermont Fire Academy will continue to monitor this program to ensure that it remains up-to-date and effective.

The Vermont Fire Academy modified our scheduling methods two years ago to bring safety improvements through coordinated scheduling. We have been successful in splitting one long live fire training session into two separate shorter sessions. This has allowed us to reasonably space strenuous activities to reduce fatigue during one of our highest risk training segments. We have also modified our delivery schedules and segments within Firefighter I and II programs to ensure that live fire exercises are conducted during the cooler months of fall and spring. This also provides an opportunity to further prevent fatigue and heat related illness. We will continue this practice as it has provided the benefits that we anticipated.

The Vermont Fire Academy has continued its focus on cancer prevention through education and decontamination practices. We are demonstrating cancer prevention practices at live fire training events by separating, sealing, and segregating contaminated personal protective equipment. Training participants are provided with information on proper decontamination techniques. The Fire Academy provides students and instructors with cleaning wipes, designed specifically for firefighters to wash their face, hands, and neck during our training events. All training participants are provided with access to showers at the Fire Academy to perform immediate personal decontamination. We have also started outfitting our instructors with particulate filtering hoods to provide a better barrier between them and the contaminant that they encounter during live fire training.

FIRE AND POLICE INJURY SUMMARY

The goal of both Training Academies is to conduct training operations in a safe environment where the risk of injury is mitigated to the highest extent possible. Today's training environment demands realistic scenarios and physical rigor to prepare our responders for the challenges that they will face in the real world. Realistic training scenarios are created in the training environment with a focus on safety, but not all risks can be mitigated. Our training center continues to provide well-planned training activities with strict monitoring by trained professionals to promote injury prevention.

The Safety Subcommittee conducted after-action reviews of the injuries to identify potential causes and future mitigation measures. No unexpected or significantly repetitive injury patterns were identified during the injury analysis. It should be noted that both the Police and Fire Academies experienced significant increases in student enrollment in 2022 and 2023 which statistically contributes to an expectation of a corresponding increase in the number of injuries. Despite this increase in enrollment, both academies reported a decrease in the number of injuries from last year.