

**Vermont Fire Service Training Council**  
*Minutes of the December 12, 2019 Meeting*

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The meeting was held at the Vermont Fire Academy Administrative Building, Pittsford and called to order by Christopher Corbin.

**ROLL CALL:**

**Organization Representatives**

Vermont Career Chiefs Association	Aaron Collette
Secretary of Education	Absent
Vermont Fire Chiefs Association	Absent
Commissioner of the Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation	Lars Lund
Professional Firefighters of Vermont	Christopher Corbin, Chairperson
Commissioner of the Department of Health	Absent
Vermont State Firefighters Association	F. Tom Estey
Commissioner of the Department of Labor	Dan Whipple
Vermont Domestic Insurance	Absent
Division of Fire Safety Director	Michael Desrochers
General Public	John Marcus, Vice Chairperson
Commissioner of Public Safety	Absent

Visitors: Peter Lynch, Michael Skaza, Jessica Pomainville, Terry Farr, Ben Whalen, Jim Larsen

**Approval of Minutes:**

*A motion was made by Estey and seconded by Lund to accept the previous meeting minutes of June 13, 2019 minutes. Motion passes unanimously.*

**Report from the Executive Director of the Division of Fire Safety:** Michael Desrochers

The Commissioner apologizes for not being able to attend today's meeting. Commissioner Schirling is very interested in modernization efforts to look at all of Public Safety's programs and IT systems to improve service delivery to all our customers.

Robert Sponable has been promoted to Deputy Director of the Division of Fire Safety. Joe Benard is retiring this month. There will be a retirement get together in his honor at the Central office on December 18. Bob Sponable will be sitting on the housing, apprenticeship board, elevator board, access board, classification review board.

The Director is looking forward to a busy season in Legislature. Rental Housing Safety may be taken over by the Division of Fire Safety. Short term rentals are not included in this. An energy efficiency committee wants the Division of Fire Safety to be energy efficiency code enforcers.

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Michael Desrochers has been elected to serve as the Chair of the Governance Committee for the training complex in Pittsford.

The revised Council Rules are about to be submitted for the third and final time. There will then be a 30-day grace period before they go into effect.

The 2020 Fire and Building Code update is about 80% complete.

The Director has testified against the use of flammable refrigerants. They use these products in Europe, and it has been fine, however, in the US the levels would be much higher creating more risk.

The Division of Fire Safety budget is not doing well as revenue from plans review continues to be down. The Director is continuing to manage the budget responsibly to accomplish the mission of the Division.

The USAR Team has purchased a couple of boats. The VFA recently acquired a new tow vehicle through an AFG Grant and the USAR team has taken possession of one of VFA's tow vehicles. The Division of Fire Safety also gave the USAR Team a tow vehicle. The USAR team has also purchased a drone and has three licensed operators. They have been spending a lot of money on training.

### **Report from the Chief of Training: Peter Lynch**

The VFA is currently running Firefighter I Programs in Chester, Lyndonville, and Middlebury/Hinesburg. The Firefighter II Program in Grand Isle is finishing up. The Orleans Firefighter II Program was cancelled due to low enrollment. This program was then reallocated to Ludlow but was also cancelled due to low enrollment. The two combined Firefighter I/II Programs are being held in Castleton and Thetford. We are finishing a Fire Inspector I Program in Hartford. Students were waitlisted for this program due to the demand and the VFA is looking at ways to offer training to those who were placed on the wait list.

Pumping Apparatus Driver Operator (PADO) Programs were held in Groton and Burlington. Another program is scheduled to be held in Putney in the Spring.

Rapid Intervention Crew Courses were held in Williston and Brattleboro.

National Fire Academy courses have been filling up and only one has been cancelled to date due to low enrollment.

Instructor performance evaluations are ongoing. The VFA has hired one new instructor and one new specialist since the last meeting.

While the VFA has grown its instructor group, we have also seen an increase in the volume of

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requests for training. The training calendar is full through the end of the fiscal year and Council members may hear from their constituents that the VFA is not awarding classes until after the end of the budget year.

Additional events on the Spring calendar are as follows:

Evaluators from the Connecticut Fire Academy will be coming to Vermont to certify our Rope Operations Instructors so that we can begin issuing Pro Board Certifications in this program. Following that, we will hold a Rope Operations program that is Pro Board Certified.

The National Fire Academy grant funding for Fire Officer and Fire Instructor programs was lost, so the VFA will be holding one Fire Instructor program most likely on a weekday schedule at the Academy this fiscal year. The VFA is trying to figure out financially and logistically if a Fire Officer program can be held.

All five Regional Fire Schools have buy-in and most likely will be requesting courses from the VFA this Spring. They most likely will be requesting courses like Flammable Gas and Flashover which are not one instructor deliveries and are held on the weekends which will conflict with Firefighter I and I/II Live Fire Exercises.

The VFA is looking for new ways to strengthen our budget in addition to the Special Fund and General Fund.

Ben Whalen shared the design layout that the Fire Academy has decided on for the East Cottage Dorm space. This dorm space will provide sleeping accommodations for 24 students in double occupancy rooms and each room will have its own assigned bathroom. There is space for an RA or an instructor. There will be space for studying and downtime. This space will allow the VFA to offer more courses such as six NFA courses. It is expected that bids will be solicited in mid-January and the estimated completion date is December 2020.

Over 125 people have attended the Entry Level Exterior Firefighter Course Train-the-Trainer, representing approximately 65 departments. The delivery of these courses did not take money from the other courses the VFA offered as Director Desrochers provided alternate funding for it.

Responder Wellness has been a focus of the VFA lately. The VFA now follows the vital sign parameters that are called for in NFPA 1584 which is the standard for rehabilitation operations. The VFA has become proactive knowing that when we get to live fire season, we have students that we had contact with for six or seven months and some are not going to be able to participate in live fire training due to high blood pressure. All Firefighter Programs now have a blood pressure kit and our qualified Rehabilitation Officers will be able to check student blood pressure throughout the program. This will allow us to provide information and get them educated on how to take better care of themselves. We hope that early identification of health issues will allow them to participate in live fire exercises at the end of the program and be more well in the long term. The VFA is tracking the results of the screenings and have found that 61% of those screened have some degree of hypertension. One student was found to be in hypertensive crisis. We are continuing to hear good feedback from instructors and believe that students are taking it seriously. Hopefully, no one will be disqualified from participating at live fire training due to high blood pressure.

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The VFA Rehabilitation Officers are also trained to screen for medical complaints as vital signs alone are not the only indicator of an underlying health problem. A discussion took place concluding that the majority of fire departments do not conduct medical monitoring. Although this new initiative is a step in the right direction, it was asked if the VFA should be campaigning for fire departments to do medical monitoring, but no conclusion was drawn. It was asked if we should be requiring physician medical clearance prior to attending courses and programs. Although that would be ideal, it was felt that the VFA is not in position to make it mandatory at this time, but they are closely monitoring other states who have taken that measure to see what the outcome is.

The VFA is looking to improve the responder wellness in the new curriculum with the adoption of the new firefighting edition. Recently, the VFA paired with Rutland City to bring great speakers in to talk about Health and Wellness. A Health and Wellness committee has been put together and are trying to get legislative backing. This same committee just held a Responder Wellness Conference with approximately 250 people in attendance. Corbin asks if the VFA has thought about requiring it physicals for instructors? The VFA does require instructors to fill out a medical questionnaire and submit it to Occupational Health and if after reviewing the paperwork there is a red flag the instructor will be requested to schedule an appointment with Occupational Health. Chief Collette submits the IAFF live fire criteria to his primary doctor as it is much more comprehensive than what the Occupational Health office uses. It is explained that the Occupational Health office follows the OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard, not the NFPA Standard. The VFA indicated that perhaps before renewing our contract with them we could modify the evaluation criteria.

The VFA lost federal money in FY19 but has been successful in getting an increase in Hazardous Material Emergency Planning Grant funding from the Pipeline and Hazardous Material Safety Administration. This funding has also been expanded to cover more training that it previously has. HSU and AFG grant application periods are about to open and VFA has intentions of applying for funding from them as well.

The VFA asked the Director and the Commissioner to reapprove the \$60,000 budget item that was approved in FY20 for curriculum development so that this funding can continue in FY21. The VFA also asked to move the \$330,000 of employee salaries from the Special Fund back to the General Fund, which would make that money available for training delivery. The VFA recognizes they may not get all that money this year but hopes to get some of it and will keep asking for it in future budget years until that amount has been restored. For the last five or six years the Department has been level funded while fixed costs have increased so, the Department has been trying to come up with ways to make up that money. The Department is estimated to be about 7 million dollars in the red. It was discussed that VFA doesn't charge for classes however most other states do. The VFA is predicted to be \$200,000 in the red if they honor all the courses and programs that they have planned so they will continue to look for ways to be fiscally responsible.

The VFA has a strategic plan and has now made a work plan. There is a meeting Monday with Lead Instructors to review the work plan. The Chief of Training will bring it back to the Council at the next meeting on March 26<sup>th</sup>.

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2020 is our Pro Board reaccreditation year. Some of the Council members will be questioned on the work of the Fire Academy. Discussion on why there is not a shorter process since we were so successful at our last visit. The Pro Board is unwilling to since they are still finding agencies that do not pass the Pro Board reaccreditation site visit.

### **Report from the Council Chair:**

No Report

### **Statute and Rule Revision:**

The revised Vermont Fire Service Training Council Rules have been reviewed by ICAR and a public hearing has been held. Chris Corbin will be signing it and submitting the final documents and then hopefully the process will be done.

### **Unfinished Business:**

The Chief of Training asked that the Certification testing process, presentation and discussion be tabled to the next meeting so that the VFA has more time to receive feedback and guidance on this issue and to present this discussion when the Council has better attendance. Changes need to be made to the VFA certification testing processes with the changes that the NFPA are making in the professional qualification standards. The VFA is asking what this group want the checks and balances to be. The NFPA is doing an overhaul on the verbs that they use in the job performance requirements to establish consistency and to give certification agencies clear direction of what the expectations are of each JPR. Previously the certification agencies were able to test either the JPR as a whole, the requisite skill, or the requisite knowledge attached to that JPR. The changes that the NFPA is making is going to require the VFA to test the job performance requirement only. The VFA will continue to test requisite knowledge and skills through quizzes and practical skill days however we will not be able to do that with Challenge candidates who received their training elsewhere but are coming to the VFA for certification testing. Discussion took place on the presentation that was held at the last Training Council meeting. The VFA wants the Council to keep thinking about the concept of having a single certification exam system instead of having one for challengers and one for VFA students. The VFA asks the Training Council for thoughts or input going forward as they work through this proposed process change.

The Career Chiefs did not realize that the Chief of Training would be asking to have the topic tabled but would like the Academy to address the question about instructor accountability and what level of oversight would the academy have at the local site to make sure that a credentialed person is presenting the curriculum in a non-fire academy training environment? The academy explains that an eligibility filter would ensure this. The academy explains that the Council and the Academy needs to have a conversation about what would be an acceptable filter to meet the need of what they are asking. Does the academy mandate that a certain curriculum be used or do we leave it up to the local to select a curriculum that meets the NFPA standard? What are the instructor qualifications? All of these components need to be established in a future conversation as well. There needs to be solid checks and balances to make sure that the right material is being taught by the right person who has the right qualifications and that there is a legitimate validation done prior candidates being eligible to take the certification exam. This is all part of the future conversation that needs to be had between the Academy and the Council. Many small

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departments have people who are Fire Instructor qualified in accordance with NFPA 1041 and should be allowed the same opportunity to train their members as those departments who have VFA instructors. The Academy feels that the Training Council should be deciding the checks and balances since it is within their authority.

The first Rapid Intervention Crew pilot was held in Williston and a large number of instructors worked at that delivery and 9 students finished the course. The second pilot course was held in Brattleboro with 10 people completing the course. The VFA will be meeting with the Lead Instructors and other instructors that helped with the deliveries to make any final adjustments to the course. Content does need to be moved around in the schedule to modularize it. The pace and depth of the material is driven by the previous training and experience of the students. The VFA hopes to have a plan to deliver RIC Module 1 in as many parts of the state as possible in the next fiscal year.

The classroom portion of Flammable Gas has been revised. The VFA is working on the practical revision. There a class delivery already scheduled for April 25<sup>th</sup> at the Addison County Regional Fire School where this course will make its return.

### **New Business:**

The VFA is working on adopting a new curriculum for Firefighter I and II and Hazardous Materials Awareness and Operations. There is a plan in place to help the Academy decide what curriculum should be adopted. The VFA instructor group is being solicited to see who wants to serve on this committee. Discussion about how the VFA recommendation for a curriculum will be decided. By March 19<sup>th</sup> the committee will decide which curriculum to recommend to the Council at the March 26<sup>th</sup> meeting. The VFA asks that if the Council has any recommendations for this evaluation processes to let the VFA know. A discussion took place on changing the hours. The Chief of Training indicated that there will need to be compelling reasons for lengthening the programs.

Michael Skaza says that there are very minor changes to the professional qualification standards which should not impact the length of the programs. The NFPA now clearly states that Firefighter II has to receive ICS 200 training where Firefighter I only has to follow the NIMS guidance, but the Academy is sure that they will stick with the ICS 100 and 200. There is also a new requirement that students be learn information on PV systems and battery storage systems and there is very specific language requiring behavioral and physical wellness be taught as well.

NFPA 1001 requires Firefighter I personnel to be trained to Hazardous Materials Awareness and Operations with mission specific competencies of PPE and product control. Currently, we go beyond that and include decontamination, mass decontamination, metering, and sampling. The VFA asks the Council if they would like to offer the minimum required by NFPA 1001 or continue offering the additional mission specifics within the program. The historical reasoning is that the if the State Hazardous Materials Team needs decontamination then it is the local firefighters that are doing it and because local departments do metering on scenes routinely, we should be teaching it. An alternate option would be to offer the mission specifics as stand-alone programs but many were skeptical if students would go on to take that training. The Council decided that it would like the VFA to keep decontamination and metering within the Hazardous

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Materials Operations programs.

Standard Operating Guideline Revisions

The chairperson asked Council members to comment if needed and if there were no comments he would entertain a motion to approve or endorse the SOG's since members have had them to review.

*After no comments were offered on the Course and Program Cognitive and Psychomotor SOG, a motion was made by Collette to approve and seconded by Estey, motion carries.*

*After no comments were offered on the Age Requirements SOG a motion was made by Estey to endorse and seconded by Collette, motion carries.*

*After no comments were offered on the Course and Program Student Minimum and Maximum Requirements SOG, a motion was made by Estey to endorse and seconded by Lund, motion carries.*

No comments were made on the SOG's that were sent to the Council for their information.

**Coalition Report:**

The next meeting is December 17<sup>th</sup> in Williston

**Vermont Career Chiefs: (Collette)**

No Report

**Vermont State Firefighters Association: (Estey)**

No Report

**Vermont Fire Chiefs: (Perkins)**

Absent

**Professional Firefighters of Vermont: (Corbin)**

No report

**Agency of Natural Resources: (Lund)**

ANR has two new employees and they are learning how to be Wildland Instructors. One is stationed in Barre and the other is in the Northeast. The Wildland trailer was vandalized so now they keep their equipment at the VFA. ANR will be working with the Division of Fire Safety to track wildland fires. ANR is willing to get distribute information from the VFA to the fire wardens at their meetings.

**Department of Education: (Rob Evans)**

Absent

**Department of Health: (Dan Batsie)**

Absent

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**Department of Labor: (Whipple)**

Trench incidents have been on the rise. A discussion took place on what Fire Departments should be telling private companies who call and say they will be doing trench work in their jurisdiction. Departments who do not have the proper equipment and training should be telling companies that we will respond, however, we will not be pulling your people out because we don't have the equipment or training to help you.

**Vermont Domestic Insurance: (Miles)**

No Report

**General Public: (Marcus)**

Marcus asked who the contact is for the Wellness Committee and the Chief of Training says that Colonel Baker is the Chair while he, Michael Desrochers, Bill Elwell, John Heffernan, John Buffard, and Firefighter McDonough from Burlington are on the committee representing the Fire Service. Also, on the committee are Police and EMS associations, Corrections, dispatchers, and clinicians. The Chief of Training encourages anyone to give him feedback and he will pass it on to committee and if people want to attend the meeting to let him know and he will gladly share the meeting schedule.

Election of 2020 Training Council Chair and co-Chair

***Tom Estey nominated Chris Corbin as the Council Chair, seconded by Aaron Collette. No other nominations, Corbin elected.***

***Aaron Collette nominated John Marcus as the Council Vice-Chair, seconded by Chris Corbin. No other nominations, Marcus elected.***

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 26 at 10:00 am at the Division of Fire Safety Central Office in Berlin.

***Tom Estey makes a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Christopher Corbin. Motion passes unanimously.***