

Berks County Fire Services Working Group

September 25, 2025

Officers: Chair Colin Hackman, Vice Chair Chris Schaeffer, Secretary Blair Miller

The meeting was called to order at 1800hrs with 19 people in attendance. There were no additions or corrections to the previous month's minutes (July 2025), they stand approved as read.

Attendance:

Zone 1: Jesiah Newsome, Josh Young

Zone 2: Blair Miller, Rusty Wagner

Zone 3: No Attendance

Zone 4: Colin Hackman, Lance Parmer

Zone 5&6: Brian Sierocinski, Chris Schaeffer

Zone 7: Andrew Getka

BCFA: Roger Weidenhammer

BCFT: Jeff Reinert

BCFPA: No attendance

Forestry: No attendance

DES: Brian Gottschall, Christina Wood, Matt Stairiker, Michael Smith, Nelson Lopez, Philip Salamone

Additional Attendance: Terry Wise, Kathy Gertler, Dave Clark, Jarrod Emes.

Communications: Pennsylvania Canine Search & Rescue (Terry Wise, Kathy Gertler, and Dave Clark) presented a PowerPoint to share resources and capabilities.

Zone 1: No report.

Zone 2: No report.

Zone 3: No attendance/report

Zone 4: No report

Zone 5&6: Chris Schaeffer advised he will be stepping down at the end of the year and thanked everyone for the help over the years.

Zone 7: Probationary class graduates in October.

BCFA: Fall meeting October 25 at 1400hrs.

BCFT: Chimney Fire class on 10/14 at 1830hrs, Hoarding Conditions class on 11/18 at 1830hrs, Vacant Building Fires class on 12/9 at 1830hrs, and Mega Mansions & Large Area Residential Structures class on 01/06/26 at 1830hrs. .

BCFPA: No attendance/report

Forestry: No attendance/report

DES: Flash over simulator - noted that John DeMarco put in a lot of time working with other entities and departments to get this moving forward. Director Gottschall was optimistic that this was going to move forward. However, it is the belief of Director Gottschall that this won't be approved due to other environmental investigations that are being conducted at the FTC. He believes that the County won't be interested in changing what is being burned at the Training Center. Foam being brought into the FTC must be sealed and unopened training foam from a recognized manufacturer of training biodegradable foam (PFAS free). DEP is using monitoring equipment at the PPB level, not PPM. Roger inquired if any other training centers are having similar issues. Gottschall reported that he reached out to Chester and Montgomery who reported they have never used foam at their facilities.

Bob McKay from PA State Academy passed away earlier this week. There will be a memorial service in Lewistown tomorrow. Anyone interested in attending should reach out to the State Fire Academy.

Old Business: Starting with call types:

Zone 1: In favor of everything except small structure as being a structure investigation, adamantly against that. Will propose something down the road on that. Run card changes by the end of the year or first of the year - forgot to ask this at zone meeting.

Zone 2: In favor of everything except small structures being a structure investigation, they should be a structure fire. The biggest concern was perception of the caller being way off on size. Will propose something down the road. Did not bring up time frame at meeting, might be comfortable enough to make end of the year or first of the year work.

Zone 3: no attendance/no feedback.

Zone 4: everyone is in favor as is. 36 stated it would take them 2 weeks to make adjustments. Colin is good with 90 days to make adjustments.

Zone 5&6: Agreed with everything. Forgot to ask about the timeline, doesn't believe it would be a problem with 90 days.

Zone 7: Agreed on everything.

DES: Noted dispatch/response plan issues for dispatching SF and BF simultaneously. Secondly, for a chimney - modified to include "without brands, fire, or sparks" which will then be treated as a SF. Building size was modified to "the fire is **believed** to be in an unoccupied building smaller than 20x20" Gottschall wanted to emphasize on these changes to see if it changes any responses from the zone. Zone 1 talked about possibly proposing an "Out Building Fire" as other counties have done. Gottschall inquired how this would be characterized, citing that in Bethel chicken houses are 100x40. Zone 1 reported they wouldn't be able to characterize this now but noted that if we are changing call types, we should change it all at once. Zone 4 inquired about generating a Chimney Fire call type or including it in Structure Investigation. Gottschall inquired how the call taker should ensure that the fire is isolated in the chimney. Colin said this is no different than that fire reported to be out, sometimes there is extension. Gottschall noted that most of the time, reports of chimney fires are from passersby, not the homeowner/occupant. Colin said that they were fine with the way it is as they can easily adjust it. Zone 1 noted that they would be in favor of a Chimney Fire call type, but also noted they have mixed opinions in their zone. Zone 5&6 agreed with Zone 4. Zone 2 agreed that nobody wants a SF assignment for a chimney fire, believed everyone would be in favor of a Chimney Fire call type due to not needing a full SF assignment. Zone 4 inquired what the fall back would be for those who don't update run cards for the Chimney Fire call type. Gottschall stated they would issue notices of the Chimney Fire call type implementation and if you don't give updates by a certain date, your SF assignment will be copied into the Chimney Fire response plan. Zone 7 inquired the definition of a Chimney Fire. Gottschall noted this would have to be defined such as fire, brands, or sparks coming from a chimney. Zone 4 noted this may be difficult for call takers to categorize this. However, Gottschall, Smith, and Miller noted that it would be easy for call takers to ask if it was unusual smoke, brands, sparks, or fire coming from the chimney. Gottschall inquired if Chimney Fire is a SI or a new call type. There was some discussion of SF vs SI vs Chimney Fire and the response plans. During the discussion, call types and their definitions of SF, Structure Investigation, and Structure Investigation Level 2 were defined.

Zone 1: Agrees as presented.

Zone 2: Agrees as presented.

Zone 3: No attendance.

Zone 4: Agrees as presented.

Zone 5&6: Agrees as presented.

Zone 7: Agrees as presented.

Gottschall advised the spread sheet along with deadlines will be disseminated. If companies ignore the deadline then your SI 2 will be populated with your SF assignment. All Zones, with the exception of Zone 3 (no attendance), agreed. Wood advised she will have the run card form updated by the end of next week. Timeline for upload/implementation will be forthcoming.

High Water Vehicle Discussion. Colin inquired how many of these vehicles are in the County. Josiah noted that they are looking for the unit designation as some apparatus that are currently in service won't meet these needs. Gottschall noted the differences between unit designation vs capabilities vs pseudo types and inquired if everyone was ok with the pseudo type model.

Zone 1: Yes

Zone 2: Yes

Zone 3: No attendance

Zone 4: Yes

Zone 5&6: Yes

Zone 7: Yes

Gottschall then inquired about requirements. Zone 1 noted that they won't put a higher water level requirement than what the manufacturer recommends. Gottschall inquired about the electrical component requirement being above water, what if they are fully sealed and waterproof? Zone 1 noted they didn't have enough experience with this and referred to Rusty. Rusty noted that sealed electrical components under the water level are acceptable. Gottschall noted there was no notation on operator requirements e.g. training. Discussion led to voting on having "Crew minimally qualified in water rescue training and operator experienced in piloting the vehicle in high water conditions." Gottschall asked for a final vote on the classification.

All attending Zone reps agreed.

New Business: None

Good of the Order: Next meeting changed due to Thanksgiving. Next meeting will be 12/4/25 at 1800hrs.

Meeting adjourned at 2000hrs.

Respectfully submitted,

Blair Miller

Blair Miller, Secretary