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NATIONAL FIRE
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THE FEDERAL ROLE IN FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL

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The Federal Role in Fire Prevention and Control
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The fire problem in this country can be measured by some 12,000 deaths, by about a quarter of a million serious burn injuries every year, and by several billion dollars of annual property loss. The Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 recognized that the time has come to devise solutions to these problems using modern technology, education techniques and other resources that are available to us. In looking for those solutions we must recognize, as the Act does, that fire prevention and fire control are state and local responsibilities. It is a fundamental principle upon which this Act is based: that state and local government has as one of its most important missions the fire safety of our citizens. The Act recognizes the need for Federal Government help. Thus, the President and the Congress have seen that we have a serious fire problem, that this problem is a prime responsibility of state and local government, and that the Federal Government must help if solutions are to come as soon as they are needed.

The Act identifies a number of items for specific attention. The need for improved education and training, particularly for the fire services, is very great. The need for fire prevention emphasis is also great. The question of firefighter's injuries

is one recognized clearly by the Act. The need for improved data on the fire problem is recognized, and the need for medium-and-long-range solutions through research, engineering and technology is also recognized.

Taking these general and specific findings together with about twenty other sections of the Act outlining specific programs, we are now in the process of putting together an organization which is responsible directly to the Secretary of Commerce. This organization, the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration, is committed to the fire safety of all Americans. Under the Administrator, we are establishing four units: a National Fire Data Center, a Public Education Office, a Research and Development Office, and a National Academy for Fire Prevention and Control. Following is a brief description of these four areas.

THE NATIONAL ACADEMY

Section 7 of the Act calls for the establishment of a National Academy for Fire Prevention and Control whose purpose is the professionalization of the fire service and of others concerned with fire safety. The professionalization of the fire service is a long-sought goal of the International Association of Fire Fighters, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the National Fire Protection Association, the International Society

of Fire Service Instructors and similar organizations. Their collaboration in the Joint Council of National Fire Service Organizations is applaudable.

The legislation outlines five major program elements for the National Academy: training of fire service personnel, developing model curricula and training materials, developing and administering a correspondence course program, developing model questions for entrance and promotional examinations, and finally, encouraging fire prevention and detection practices through architects, builders, designers, city planners, and others who so frequently have inadequate information on fire safety problems and solutions.

A question that is asked of us frequently is, "Where will the National Academy be located?" The legislation outlines a procedure by which the search for the optimum location for the National Academy will be carried out. By October of 1976, the Secretary of Commerce must make a decision on the site that represents the headquarters of the National Academy system. The National Academy will build on existing establishments, but the headquarters for this National Academy system is a significant item so a Site Selection Board will make recommendations to the Secretary on where the Academy should be located. Many items have to be considered, including the programs of the Academy, environmental effects, and the possibility of using a surplus

Federal, state or local government facility. We have been authorized up to \$9 million for the Academy facility, but I hasten to point out that the actual appropriation of a specific amount is yet to be made by the Congress. A strong case must be made to the Congress to obtain the funds needed to do the job.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Certainly, public education activities provide a very useful mechanism for spreading the message of fire prevention to each community, spreading the message about what each citizen can do. We encourage the fire services to help in the primary schools, secondary schools, junior colleges, and in the universities. NFPCA is studying public education programs which have been and are being carried out, such as those of the National Fire Protection Association. We will be working closely with the NFPA in looking for new and effective means of reaching the public with the message of fire safety. We believe that public education can make an impact on fire loss; we believe it but we need more evidence to show that public fire safety education can be cost-effective. If you have evidence that a public education campaign in your community or in your state has actually reduced fire loss, please send those data to us; let us know about those campaigns that you have carried out which have been effective in reducing fire loss. To date, we have documented over a dozen campaigns which have reduced fire loss statistics.

DATA CENTER

We need detailed evidence on the magnitude of the fire problem in this country. We currently have good estimates, but they are only estimates. Remember that in years to come we will be asked, "Have you met the goal that you set out for yourself in 1974?" That goal is to reduce by half the fire loss in this country over the next generation. What can we do to measure our success? We need data; we should have them from every state. An excellent means of collecting that evidence is through the fire service. We need firefighters who are educated and trained to recognize an arson fire, to estimate the amount of loss incurred in any fire, to fill out detailed data sheets that can be put into a computer. We need the firefighter at the end of the hoseline, and we need the firefighter at the end of the pen, filling out those forms so that we can measure our success in the coming years. We need a firefighter who is educated and trained so that the data generated are reliable and accurate, and so that we can depend on those data to measure the success of our efforts.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Finally, I would like to give you an overview of our science and technology efforts aimed at medium-and-long-range solutions to the fire problem. Basic and applied fire research activities have been conducted since the early 1900s at the National Bureau

of Standards (NBS) which is also part of the Department of Commerce. We are working closely with NBS as they conduct the basic and applied scientific research on the fire problem called for by Section 18 of the Act.

One of the programs that was transferred to NFPCA from NBS by the legislation has been known as the Fire Services Program. That program which looks at protective equipment for the firefighter and management studies for the fire service, is now a responsibility of NFPCA under Section 8 of the Act. In addition, Section 8 calls for us to encourage development, testing, and evaluation of residential fire protection, since about half of our 12,000 deaths occur in residences. Many authorities now believe that heat and smoke detectors in residences can make a cost-effective impact in reducing residential fire deaths. We are actively working in this area and expect some new thrusts in 1976.

Section 10 on Master Plans calls for us to submit a report to the Congress within four years, that is October 1978, on the establishment and effectiveness of master planning for fire protection in the United States. We are now planning for that report to Congress, and your activities in master planning are important and vital to us; we need to know about them. Since these master plans for fire protection are the responsibility of the states and their subdivisions, NFPCA wishes to encourage their use. As an important adjunct to urban and rural plans, master fire plans for

an area usually include (1) a survey of fire service resources as well as of fire and building code effectiveness, (2) an analysis of fire safety needs, (3) a plan to meet these needs, and (4) a forecast of costs and possible problems in implementation. We ask you to send us the documentation of the master planning activities that are now going on in your communities.

Section 12 of the Act gives NFPCA the authority to review, evaluate and suggest improvements in codes, standards and regulations concerned with fire safety. Section 22 calls for us to assist the Consumer Product Safety Commission in developing flammability standards. We are also establishing working relations with other Federal agencies, such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Agriculture. We are expected to be a focal point and a basic source of information for fire safety for the Federal Government; our Federal Fire Council acts as liaison with all Federal agencies to accomplish this coordination. Additionally, we are establishing liaison with state and local governments so that we can assist in the Nation's new thrust toward fire safety.

This gives an overview of all programs of the Fire Administration. NFPCA's broad authority under this legislation will evolve programs that will impact on each and everyone of us in the coming years.

