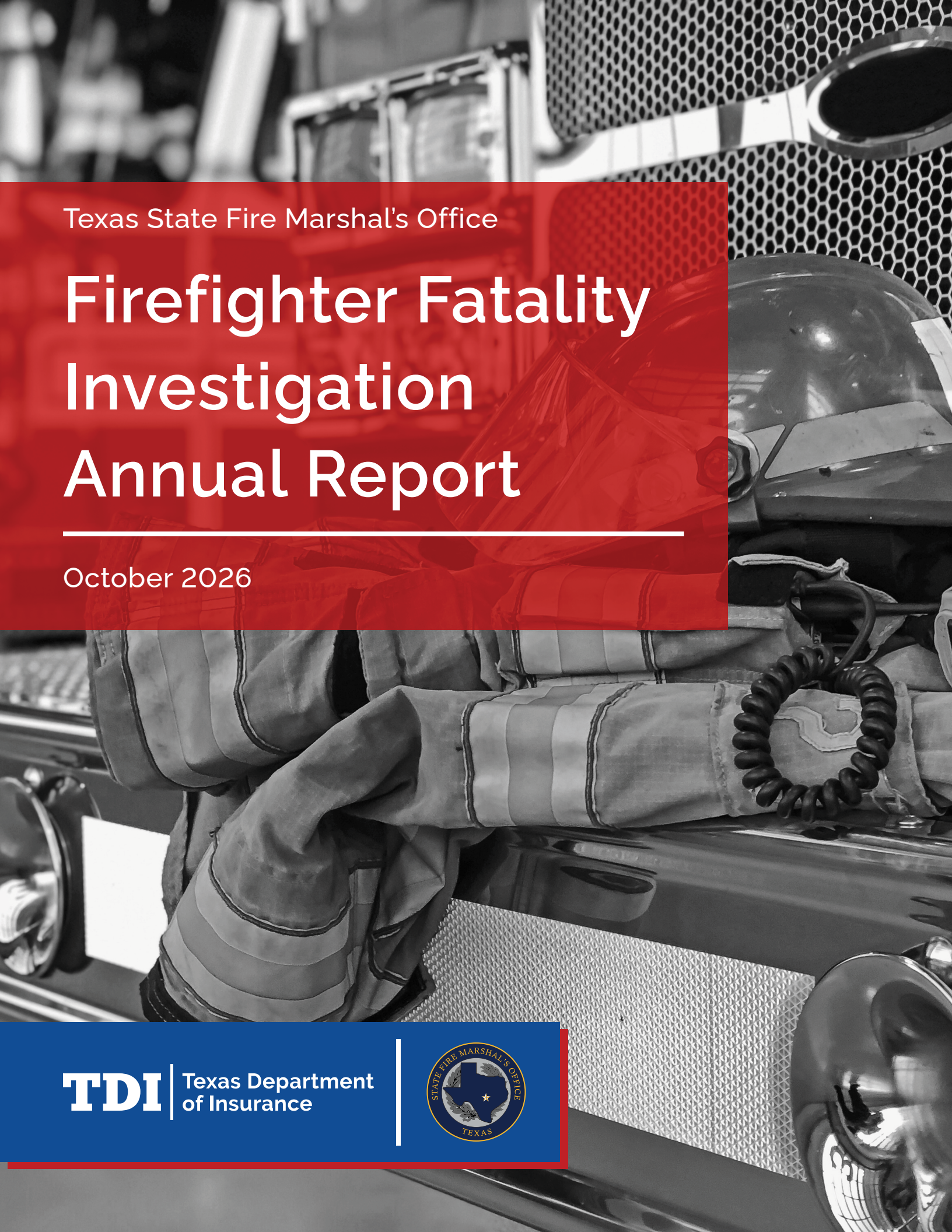


Texas State Fire Marshal's Office

Firefighter Fatality Investigation Annual Report

October 2026

TDI | Texas Department of Insurance

STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE TEXAS

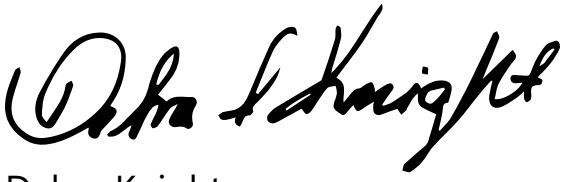
Firefighter Fatality Investigation Annual Report

Fiscal year 2026

by the

Texas State Fire Marshal's Office

Submitted October 2026



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Overview

State law requires the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) to investigate firefighter fatalities that happen in the line of duty or in connection with an on-duty incident. SFMO must investigate the circumstances of the death, including any contributing factors.

In determining whether a firefighter fatality warrants investigation, SFMO considers the circumstances of the death, including whether a medical event occurred during or shortly after duty-related activities. Consistent with U.S. Fire Administration guidelines, certain medical events occurring within 24 hours after duty may qualify for investigation as a line-of-duty death. SFMO's determination to investigate does not establish eligibility for state or federal death benefits. Those determinations are made separately by responsible agencies.

Background
The Texas Commission on Fire Protection sets the criteria for gathering and analyzing firefighter injury data. They also produce an annual report of all firefighter injuries, exposures, and cancer diagnoses. SFMO does not investigate cancer or COVID-19 deaths. These deaths are documented by other entities.

The State Fire Marshal's Office works with various organizations and agencies to provide guidance and review of investigations, including:

- State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association
- Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service
- Texas A&M Forest Service
- Texas Chapter, International Association of Arson Investigations
- Texas Commission on Fire Protection
- Texas Fire Chiefs Association
- Texas Fire Marshals Association
- Texas State Association of Fire Fighters
- Texas metropolitan fire departments (including Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio)

Investigations

In fiscal year 2026, SFMO investigated nine firefighter fatality incidents. The scope of each investigation varies depending on the circumstances of the death. Investigations involving medical events, suicides, or vehicles accidents may be limited to documenting the circumstances of the death and its connection to duty, while investigations involving fireground operations generally include a more extensive review of contributing factors and potential safety improvements.

Fiscal year 2026 investigations

Firefighter Stephen Scott, 62 years old



Houston Fire Department
September 17, 2025 | On-duty medical event

On September 14, 2025, Firefighter/Paramedic Stephen Scott suffered a medical emergency while transporting a patient to a local hospital. Firefighter/Paramedic Scott was admitted to the hospital. Despite surgery and continued treatment, he died on September 17 from a cardiovascular event.

Firefighter Britain Reeves, 46 years old



Fairchild Volunteer Fire Department
December 26, 2025 | On-duty medical event

Firefighter Britain Reeves responded to a medical call at 1:40 a.m. and returned home about an hour later. Around 4 p.m. that same day, Firefighter Reeves' wife found him deceased in a chair in the home's garage.

Firefighter Jeffery Derrick, 67 years old



Tri-Lakes Volunteer Fire Department
February 27, 2026 | On-duty fireground event

Firefighter Jeffery Derrick responded with the Tri-Lakes Volunteer Fire Department to a grass fire. While battling the blaze, shifting winds changed the fire's direction and the fire spread into tall grass and pastureland. Firefighter Derrick tried to make his way out of the fire but became disoriented, was overcome by smoke, and died in the fire.

Lt. Isai Huerta, 29 years old

Odessa Fire Rescue
June 14, 2026 | On-duty fireground event



Lt. Isai Huerta responded with Odessa Fire Rescue to a residential trailer fire. While firefighters were operating on scene, conditions deteriorated rapidly, and Lt. Huerta sustained injuries. He was transported to a medical center where he was later pronounced dead. Five other firefighters sustained non-life-threatening injuries during the incident. They were treated at the hospital and released.

Fire Chief Charles Woodard, 38 years old

Mabank Fire Department
June 27, 2026 | On-duty vehicle event



Fire Chief Charles “Charlie” Woodard was directing traffic outside the Mabank Rodeo grounds. As he stepped into the westbound lanes of U.S. Highway 175, Fire Chief Woodard was hit by a pickup truck. He was treated at the scene and transported to a local hospital where he was later pronounced dead.

Fire Safety Chief Dan Hernandez Jr., 71 years old

Slocum Volunteer Fire Department
July 11, 2026 | On-duty medical event



On July 7, 2026, Fire Safety Chief Dan Hernandez Jr. responded to a brush fire. While at the scene of the fire, Fire Safety Chief Hernandez suffered a cardiovascular event. He was transported to a regional medical center where he was stabilized. He was transferred to another hospital where he died on July 11.

Fire Chief Jeremy Scott Bolduc, 55 years old



Northlake Volunteer Fire Department
July 25, 2026 | On-duty fireground event

Northlake Volunteer Fire Department Fire Chief Jeremy Bolduc responded to a grass fire on July 5, 2026. While conducting fire ground suppression activities, Fire Chief Bolduc was injured and sought medical treatment. On July 25, he died from his injuries.

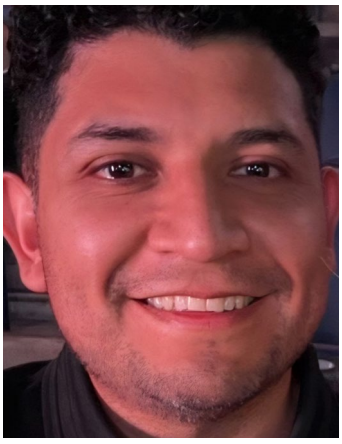
Firefighter/Trainer Gary Wayne James, 80 years old



Adrian Volunteer Fire Department
July 31, 2026 | On-duty vehicle accident

Firefighter/Trainer Gary Wayne James was responding to a vehicle fire in a department brush truck. During the response, he lost control of the truck, and it rolled over. Firefighter/Trainer James was ejected from the vehicle and died at the scene.

Firefighter Oziel “Ozy” Ibarra, 37 years old



Laredo Fire Department
August 9, 2026 | On-duty suicide

Firefighter Oziel Ibarra died while on shift from a self-inflected gunshot wound.

On-duty firefighter fatality investigation statistics

The U.S. Fire Administration tracks and collects on-duty firefighter deaths in the United States. Their data and reports are published by the calendar year. In 2025, there were 81 firefighter non-COVID-19 related fatalities in the country.

SFMO fiscal year on-duty firefighter fatality investigations by event type



Event type	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2022-26
Fireground	-	-	-	2	3	5
Medical	2	5	3	2	3	15
Vehicle	1	4	1	1	2	9
Other	-	1	-	-	1	2
Total	**3**	**10**	**4**	**5**	**9**	**31**

SFMO fiscal year on-duty firefighter fatality investigations by department type



Department	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2022-26
Paid	-	3	-	2	4	9
Volunteer	3	7	4	1	5	20
Combination*	-	-	-	2	-	2
Total	**3**	**10**	**4**	**5**	**9**	**31**

* A combination department is made up of paid/career firefighters and volunteer firefighters. Combination departments are becoming more common due to emergency service districts.

Firefighter fatality prevention strategies

SFMO encourages using proven strategies developed by both SFMO and nationally recognized organizations to reduce firefighter fatalities. SFMO:

- Publishes investigation reports, shares information with the firefighter fatality investigation panel, and makes presentations at fire service conferences to share lessons learned from investigations.
- Provides investigation reports to affected fire departments and publishes report findings and recommendations relevant to improving firefighter safety on the SFMO website.
- Visits fire departments that had a line-of-duty death to see improvements made since the incident.

Fire departments are encouraged to:

- Participate in:
  - Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives Matrix.
  - Firefighter Safety Stand Down.
  - Seat Belt Pledge that encourages firefighters to wear seat belts in department vehicles.
- Implement or expand fire prevention programs to help reduce fires.
- Promote firefighter health and wellness programs, including:
  - Regular medical evaluations and cardiovascular screenings.
  - Wellness and physical fitness.
  - Behavioral health, suicide programs, and access to mental health resources.
  - Education about health risks associated with firefighting.
- Review firefighter fatality investigation findings and recommendations and incorporate applicable lessons into department training, policies, and firefighting tactics.
- Share findings and recommendations from firefighter fatality investigations to help other fire departments identify hazards and improve firefighting safety.
- Promote the use of residential sprinklers to reduce fire deaths and property losses.
- Engage in pre-fire incident planning by suppression personnel for high-risk occupancies. Planning should include firefighter and occupant life safety, water supply, and structural hazards.
- Include fire prevention and firefighter fatality prevention in all firefighter training and education, including initial training in firefighter academies.
- Emphasize modern construction materials training. Lightweight structural materials and green building practices can change building performance and fire behavior and how these elements impact firefighter safety and fire-ground operations.
- Implement a vehicle operations program, such as the Emergency Vehicles Operators Course. Fire department personnel should know driving skills, vehicle and operator limitations, and liability issues.
- Complete the National Safety Council's Defensive Driving Course. Provide periodic refresher training.

Firefighter Life Safety Initiative Matrix

For two decades, 16 firefighter life safety initiatives shaped policy, culture, and standards. While the initiatives improved safety, the fire service recognized a more adaptable, interconnected approach to address emerging risks and avoid stagnation was needed.

In 2024, the Firefighter Life Safety Summit updated the initiatives and launched the Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives Matrix, a dynamic, interconnected framework designed to support firefighter well-being, health, and safety. The initiatives work together, each initiative influencing the others.

Firefighter Life Safety Initiative Matrix snapshot

Perspectives	Survival Culture and Leadership	Health and Wellness	Training and Competency	Community and Government
Firefighter Well-Being	Mentorship Momentum	Mindful Resilience	Lifelong Learning	Community Connection
Practices and Standards	Leading the Way	Evolving Health Practices	Training and Innovation	Engage the Community
Organizational Capacity	Leadership Evolution	Comprehensive Wellness Programs	Organizational Proficiency	Forge Shareholder Partnerships

1. **Mentorship Momentum**
   Foster a sustainable culture of knowledge transfer and motivation to mentor, ensuring that the torch of mentorship is passed through successive generations.

2. **Leading the Way**
   Establish consistent leadership practices that empower all members to model survival-focused behaviors and promote a culture of growth and resilience.

3. **Leadership Evolution**
   Develop leadership training programs that identify and strengthen the attributes and competencies necessary to foster a survival-oriented culture within fire service organizations.

4. **Mindful Resilience**
   Actively promote resilience training and other mental health resources for firefighters to support their overall well-being.

5. **Evolving Health Practices**
   Establish and regularly update health and wellness policies, including health screenings and fitness assessments, to reflect evolving science and best practices.

6. **Comprehensive Wellness Programs**
   Design comprehensive wellness programs that can be integrated into the daily routines of all fire departments.

7. **Lifelong Learning**
   Offer education and training opportunities that are accessible to all firefighters and across all stages of the career, ensuring that firefighters stay up to date with the latest techniques and technologies.

8. **Training and Innovation**
   Leverage innovative learning technologies to expand access to high-quality training.

9. **Organizational Proficiency**
   Maintain awareness of skill proficiencies throughout the organization to address and fill training gaps.

10. **Community Connection**
    Conduct community outreach programs that educate the public on fire safety and prevention, while also advocating for policies that support firefighter safety.

11. **Engage the Community**
    Develop and maintain long-standing policies and procedures for engaging with government and community stakeholders.

12. **Forge Shareholder Partnerships**
    Build partnerships with governmental agencies and community organizations to support fire service initiatives.

Firefighter safety recommendations

Recommendations from past SFMO investigation reports	Resource
1. Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service, including safety, incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability, and personal responsibility.	National Safety Culture Change Initiative (FA-342), 2015
2. Establish standard operating procedures for minimum fire service-related occupational safety and health program requirements.	NFPA 1500, 2021
3. Give all firefighters mandatory pre-placement and annual medical evaluations to determine their medical abilities to perform duties without presenting a significant risk to anyone's health and safety.	NFPA 1582, 2022
4. Perform annual physical ability evaluations to make sure firefighters are physically capable of performing job tasks.	NFPA 1583, 2022
5. Make sure that firefighters are cleared for duty by a doctor who knows about the physical demands of firefighting, the personal protective equipment used by firefighters, and the components.	NFPA 1582, 2021
6. Do not risk the safety of responders if there is no possibility of saving lives or property.	NFPA 1561, 2020 37 Texas Admin. Code 435.15
7. Always attack a wildland fire from the burned area. If a sudden change in conditions or wind occurs, the unit can retreat into the burned area.	Attack from the Black video Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide (IMFG)
8. Identify and communicate exit routes and safety zones to everyone on scene before fire operations begin. Staging areas should not interfere with routes or safety zones.	NFPA 1143, 2018 37 Texas Admin. Code 435.15 (a) Essentials of Fire Fighting (EFF), 7th Edition, Chapter 5 IFSTA.org Wildland Fire IMFG
9. All firefighters on scene and engaged in firefighting operations must be in approved, full personal protective equipment suitable for the incident.	Wildland Fire IMFG EFF, 7th Edition, Chapter 5
10. Fire departments must use an accountability system so the incident commander can quickly see all firefighters on scene, their location, and their assignment at any time.	37 Texas Admin. Code 435.13
11. Educate firefighters and command staff on heat-related illnesses and prevention.	NIOSH Heat-related illnesses
12. Establish a stationary command away from task-level operations. The command provides a quiet vantage point to receive, process, and relay information. It is also helpful in building and maintaining an effective fireground organization.	NFPA 1561, 2020 Fire Command, 2nd Edition (2002) - Alan V. Brunacini EFF, 7th Edition, Chapter 19
13. Personal protective equipment, including self-contained breathing apparatuses, is required when working in areas with potential hazards.	NFPA 1500, 2021 EFF, 7th Edition, Chapter 5 37 Texas Admin. Code, Chapter 435
14. Use tools and tactics that help reduce roof operation dangers. Become familiar with the indicators of a collapse.	EFF, 7th Edition, Chapter 11 Fire Service Ventilation
15. Consider monitoring and recording fire ground activity.	NFPA 1221, 2019



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