



Department of Community Affairs



Division of Fire Safety

Director's Office

To: All Fire Departments

From: Richard J. Mikutsky – Director / State Fire Marshal *RJM*

Re: NFIRS reporting

Date: October 17, 2019

At the last meeting of the New Jersey Fire Safety Commission, there was a lengthy discussion on the importance of capturing and documenting accurate data from fire and emergency incidents throughout the state. It is critical to have good, thorough data from each incident which leads to making good policy decisions for our fire service.

Over its almost 40-year history, the data collected through NFIRS has resulted in remarkable improvements to fire safety and achieving the goal of cutting the nation's fire losses. Today, more than ever, the NFIRS database is utilized by many agencies and researchers to explore opportunities for enhancing fire protection. Unfortunately, the search for data can often be frustrating because the forms are vague or incomplete.

Though it may not seem like it, firefighter safety is a huge part of the numbers game as well. Those checkboxes on the NFIRS report flags firefighter injuries and fatalities for follow-up. It also allows the U.S. Fire Administration to look for trends in the national data that can be used to adjust our approach to what's really happening in the United States.

The details in a fire report also allow investigators to look back and figure out why firefighters were injured or died. Each crew thoroughly detailing what they did, and when they did it, allows a reconstruction of the event. It is vital to include every bit of that story in a narrative that can be searched for information.

What time do the dispatch notes indicate the fire-attack crew made entry? When did the truck ventilate and how? What reading did the search group get on the TIC in the first-floor bedroom? Small details like this paint a picture for the after-action review with all on scene. These details can also help support a more-thorough examination of the scene. This may help reduce or prevent future fires, and in the case of a line-of-duty death, it may save the life of one of our brothers or sisters in the future.

If we don't have this information, or if the responding crews had written a report poorly without details and without filling in all the blanks, the process becomes harder, less exact. On the other hand, a thorough written record of the event may teach some valuable lessons.

Documentation contained within the remarks field can serve as a legal document, aiding investigators months or even years later. If asked about the number of cars in the garage, or if people were standing around when you arrived, could you provide an answer?

Tips for telling the story:

- The Remarks field is an extension of the incident. Include what actions your department performed on the incident and the effect they had on incident stabilization.
- Answer the following questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how?
- Write your remarks in plain language.
- Avoid the use of acronyms and technical terminology so that a non-firefighter, or someone who was not on-scene, can read your report and understand what happened at the incident.
- Be clear, concise, and "paint the picture!"

As members of the fire service, an important part of our job is to enhance fire safety. Changes are made based on data. Do your part to make your community safer by stressing the importance of properly completing the NFIRS report.

Thorough and accurate reporting is vital for a safer tomorrow!