

TESTIMONY OF  
RICHARD A. MARINUCCI  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER  
UNITED STATES FIRE ADMINISTRATION  
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND  
SPACE  
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
JUNE 29, 1999

On behalf of FEMA Director James Lee Witt and United States Fire Administrator Carrye Brown, I am pleased to appear before you today in support of the reauthorization of the United States Fire Administration and its valuable programs. In my testimony today, I will describe the fire problem, address some of the plans and programs of the United States Fire Administration (USFA) as reflected in the Fiscal Year 2000 budget request, and summarize our current activities.

The United States' fire loss rate is serious. America's fire death rate is one of the highest per capita in the industrialized world. Fire kills more than 4,000 people and injures more than 25,000 people each year. Today, 11 people will die due to fire. Two of these people are likely to be children under the age of 5. Another 68 people will be injured due to fire.

The true scale of the fire problem is somewhat masked because fire deaths occur one or two at a time. Fires kill more Americans than all natural disasters combined. These losses are unacceptable, because most can be prevented. Reducing the loss of life and property caused by fire remains a significant challenge for the United States Fire Administration. After 49 deaths from improperly used automobile air bag systems, major regulatory ac Coordinated law enforcement initiatives are mounted after the truly tragic school shootings that we have witnessed of late. Yet calls for similar community-based draw national attention. Raising this awareness, and taking the actions to deal with these fire losses, are roles for the USFA.

Most of the 4,000 Americans who are statistically likely to die by fire this year will do so in their own homes. Many Americans believe that "fire only happens to others-not to me and not in my home." Fire is not an occurrence in another city; fire deaths do not take place in someone else's neighborhood. Over 70% of fire deaths occur in reside seniors, the disabled and economically disadvantaged. The USFA, and the entire fire prevention community, faces the challenge of reducing the fires

While the numbers remain high, progress is being made to reduce the toll of fire. Twenty five years ago, the annual cost of fire in terms of deaths, injury and property loss was much greater than today. At that time, the original National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control produced the Report on America Burning Act of 1974, establishing the United States Fire Administration.

Through data collection and analysis, public education and awareness, research least half, making our communities and our citizens safer. The U.S. Fire

Administration is a national leader in fire safety and prevention, and is tasked with supporting the efforts of local communities to reduce the number of fires and fire deaths.

In the area of public education and awareness, the USFA works with the fire service, the media, other Federal agencies and safety interest groups to develop and deliver fire safety awareness and education programs.

Second, USFA's National Fire Data Center enables us to better educate citizens and firefighters on preventing fire losses. The USFA monitors fire losses, and annually compiles an analysis of national loss trends on fire and emergency incidents to State and local governments and the fire community. This information helps to focus our research, public education and training needs by identifying the fire problem. The National Fire Incident Reporting System is being upgraded and updated to increase the accuracy and speed with which data is received and analyzed. Thus, those areas that can be most effectively impacted by our programs within existing funds are more readily identified.

Through research, testing and evaluation, USFA sponsors the development of life-saving technology to protect citizens, communities, and firefighters. The federal focus on research efforts must continue on how fires ignite, the initial growth of fire, and the interaction of occupant response and fire extinguishing systems. These factors are critical to reducing fire deaths and injuries, and reducing monetary losses.

Finally, since fire is primarily a local problem, the USFA provides training to enhance the capability of America's fire departments to better serve your communities. The National Fire Academy (NFA) offers educational opportunities for the advanced professional development of the mid-level and senior fire and Emergency Medical Services officers, and allied professionals involved in fire prevention and other life safety activities. These programs developed by the NFA are intended to support State and local fire service training.

I am honored to be working with Director Witt on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Panel. It has been over a year since the Director met with fire service leaders to discuss the future vision and direction of the fire programs in the USFA. That meeting marked the beginning of our efforts to develop a plan to improve upon the services we provide to the fire service professionals, allied professions, and to individual citizens across America. After that meeting, Director Witt convened a Blue Ribbon Panel and asked them to outline their recommendations for improving the operations of the USFA. That panel consisted of thirteen members of major fire service organizations.

I am pleased to inform you that we are moving forward with implementing a

number of the recommendations contained in the Blue Ribbon Panel's report. The panel's recommendations are divided into three main categories: leadership, resource management and communications. Each of these areas are being addressed, including the need for advocacy at the Federal level. In July, the USFA is conducting a management review and developing a business plan to address the future of USFA's major programs, develop funding and resource management plans, and create a closer integration of fire issues into FEMA's ongoing strategic planning process. This plan will reflect FEMA's and USFA's emphasis on proactive prevention, as also reflected in the Fiscal Year 2000 budget request. Later this summer, USFA will submit the draft version of this report to your Committee for input, and upon completion of the plan, we will provide a final copy for the Committee.

The Blue Ribbon Panel recommended that FEMA host an annual meeting with representatives from the fire service community. The first of these annual meetings is scheduled for August 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in Emmitsburg, Maryland. During this meeting, we will review the implementation of the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations, and continue the dialogue we began last year.

The Panel's report also recommended that the fire service become a partner in Project Impact, FEMA's pre-disaster mitigation program, with 118 communities in all 50 states participating. On April 21, Director Witt and Administrator Brown signed a memorandum of agreement with the fire service community to formally support FEMA's Project Impact. The fire community will provide valuable contributions to this program.

To continue the progress made since the initial America Burning report, FEMA is re-commissioning America Burning. This new Commission will be able to measure our progress against the proposals of the original report, and address the challenges that face America's fire services that did not exist 25 years ago. The Commission will provide a launching point for future preparedness and response activities within the fire community that will carry us into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

USFA must continue to change people's attitude about fire, and enhance their knowledge about fire safety. As an agency with a federal fire focus, USFA must communicate the significance of the fire problem to local policy makers. All aspects of the solutions must be identified, including: technological solutions for safer built environments, reasonable codes and standards based on performance measurement, more efficient equipment and systems for fire detection and suppression, public education and fire prevention programs to teach our citizens how to protect themselves, and cutting-edge training so that emergency responders have the best chance of saving lives and protecting property in the safest manner possible.

USFA's greatest challenge is to put limited resources to work where they will make the most difference in saving lives and reducing losses. USFA is carefully examining its programs to ensure that we meet the needs of our customers, the American people and the Nation's fire and emergency personnel. Our goal is to increase the safety of fire service personnel and the citizens of this nation.

If enacted, FEMA's Fiscal Year 2000 budget request would significantly enhance the USFA's baseline appropriation level. Congressional add-ons for specific purposes such as the Arson Prevention Act, Fire Suppression Agents Study and, Counter-Terrorism have been directed, but the base level has not increased in the past several years. Many of the budgetary recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Panel confirmed the need to enhance various areas of USFA's budget, and the 2000 increase of \$12 million will help pay for the implementation of many of those recommendations.

The request for \$45,130,000 will provide the USFA with the resources to support its mission, expand current capabilities and strengthen fire prevention measures at the local level. For example, the funding would improve the USFA's data collection system so that the national fire problem can be better defined and addressed. The funding would allow the USFA to better focus its public education materials and firefighter training courses to meet the needs of the fire community, local citizens and all professional involved in fire prevention. Each of these activities give local fire departments better tools to respond to a local incident, whether it is a fire, a flood or an EMS call. The fire community is one of this nation's emergency management "prevention" leaders. Local fire departments are being asked to do more and more each year. The successful response to any natural disaster nearly always begins with the successful efforts of this nation's first response team, including the local firefighter. The USFA's programs are an integral part of providing these responders with the necessary expertise to respond to all events.

In the year 2000, these new funds will enable us to enhance and expand our existing capabilities in each of our main program areas: training, public education and awareness, technology and data. In addition to maintaining current programmatic activities, our programs will be modified and expanded as we work to meet the goals and objectives of our Government Performance and Results Act Performance Plan; to reduce the rate of loss of life and property from fire and fire-related hazards. To succeed in doing this, we need your support and leadership as we work to implement these changes.

In closing, let me reaffirm our commitment to reducing the Nation's losses from fire. Fire safety programs and strategies must be cooperative efforts, with ever-widening public and private participation. Today's fire problems require strategies that are in step with the times and ahead of the curve. The USFA readily accepts the challenge. With the continuing support of America's

dedicated fire service and the U.S. Congress, we will succeed in our all-out battle against fire.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me this opportunity to appear before you today. Your continuing support as well as the support from this Subcommittee is greatly appreciated. I will be glad to answer any questions you and other Members of the Subcommittee might have.