

TEXAS STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

A DIVISION OF THE TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE

Firefighter Fatality Investigation



Investigation Number FFF FY 13-04

Assistant Chief David Fox

Bluebonnet Volunteer Fire Department
Bastrop County Emergency Services District No. 1
February 20, 2013

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Executive Summary

On February 14, 2013, Assistant Chief David Fox suffered a severe heart attack while driving a department vehicle on his way home from a week-long training conference in Corpus Christi. Assistant Chief Fox was driving with three members of Bastrop County Emergency Services District No. 1 when he stated that he was having severe chest pains and stopped the vehicle. As a new driver proceeded to the nearest hospital, an ambulance met them on the road and Chief Fox was transferred to the ambulance and transported to a hospital in Gonzales, Texas. Chief Fox was stabilized and air-lifted to a hospital in Austin, Texas, where he passed away on February 20, 2013.

This report is intended to honor Assistant Chief David Alan Fox by providing information of lessons learned through the examination of this tragic loss to prevent future injuries or deaths.



Assistant Chief David Alan Fox

Introduction

On February 20, 2013, the Texas State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) received notification from the State Firemen's and Fire Marshals' Association of the death of Bluebonnet Volunteer Fire Department Assistant Fire Chief David Alan Fox. Assistant Chief Fox experienced serious chest pains while driving a department vehicle home from a training conference in Corpus Christi, Texas, on February 14, 2013.

The State Fire Marshal's Office commenced the firefighter fatality investigation under the authority of Texas Government Code Section 417.0075.

- (a) *In this section, the term "firefighter" includes an individual who performs fire suppression duties for a governmental entity or volunteer fire department.*
- (b) *If a firefighter dies in the line of duty or if the firefighter's death occurs in connection with an on-duty incident in this state, the state fire marshal shall investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of the firefighter, including any factors that may have contributed to the death of the firefighter.*
- (c) *In conducting an investigation under this section, the state fire marshal has the same powers as those granted to the state fire marshal under Section 417.007. The state fire marshal will coordinate the investigative efforts of local government officials and may enlist established fire service organizations and private entities to assist in the investigation.*
- (d) *The state fire marshal will release a report concerning an investigation conducted under this section on completion of the investigation.*
- (e) *Not later than October 31 of each year, the state fire marshal will deliver to the commissioner a detailed report about the findings of each investigation conducted under this section in the preceding year.*
- (f) *Information gathered in an investigation conducted under this section is subject to Section 552.108.*
- (g) *The authority granted to the state fire marshal under this section will not limit in any way the authority of the county or municipal fire marshal to conduct the county or municipal fire marshal's own investigation into the death of a firefighter within the county or municipal fire marshal's jurisdiction.*

Firefighter Fatality Investigation

On Thursday, February 14, 2013, Assistant Chief David Fox was returning to Bastrop County after participating in the Southwest Fire Rescue, Texas Fire Chiefs Association annual training conference in Corpus Christi, Texas. Assistant Chief David Fox was driving an Emergency Services District No. 1 vehicle transporting three other fire chiefs from the district. Chief Fox complained of chest pains, pulled over, and stopped the vehicle 22 miles south of the city of Gonzales, Texas. Assistant Chief Fox stated that he needed to be taken to Gonzales as quickly as possible and the fire chief of the 3 N 1 Volunteer Fire Department began driving. A 911 call was made and the Gonzales County Sheriff's Office Dispatcher sent a Gonzales Emergency Medical Services ambulance to meet them on the roadway. Assistant Chief Fox was transferred to the EMS unit and transported to the Gonzales Hospital. Assistant Chief Fox remained awake and alert throughout the episode and after arriving at the Gonzales Hospital requested that his belongings be removed from the department vehicle and left with him at the hospital.

Assistant Chief Fox was transferred to St. David's Medical Center in Austin, Texas, where he remained until his death on February 20, 2013. No autopsy was performed. The cause of death listed is myocardial infarction.

Medical Background of Firefighter

Assistant Chief David Alan Fox, 48, joined the Bluebonnet Volunteer Fire Department in October 2010. He was previously fire chief of the Chisholm Trail Volunteer Fire Department. He was a part time employee of Bastrop County Emergency Services District No. 1 and a volunteer for the Bluebonnet Volunteer Fire Department. Fox became Assistant Chief of the Bluebonnet Volunteer Fire Department in November 2011.

Assistant Chief Fox participated in the mandatory wellness and fitness program established by the Emergency Services District No. 1. A physician's certificate of physical fitness was issued in October 2011. Assistant Chief Fox had a history of coronary artery disease with no recent acute events. Assistant Chief Fox had a normal rest/stress echocardiograph stress test in August 2011. No other medical conditions were noted.

Findings and Recommendations

The State of Texas has not adopted minimum training standards for volunteer fire departments; however, all fire department personnel should know and understand nationally recognized consensus standards, and all fire departments should create and maintain SOGs and SOPs to ensure effective, efficient, and safe firefighting operations.

Bastrop County Emergency Services District No. 1 has an established Wellness and Fitness program as part of the Standard Operating Procedures. The program is modeled after the International Association of Fire Fighters and International Association of Fire Chiefs wellness-fitness initiative and is in accordance with *National Fire Protection Association 1500, Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health; NFPA 1582, Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments, and NFPA 1583, Standard on Health-Related Fitness Programs for Fire Department Members.*

There are no contributing findings to report as a result of this investigation, nor is there any indication that the following recommendations could have prevented the death of Assistant Chief Fox; nevertheless, the State Fire Marshal's Office offers these recommendations to reduce the risk of heart attacks and sudden cardiac arrest among firefighters.

All fire departments should be aware of the content of the following standards and are encouraged to develop programs based on them to increase the level of safety for fire department personnel.

*Consider mandatory pre-placement and annual medical evaluations for all firefighters, consistent with **NFPA 1582, Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments**, to determine their medical ability to perform duties without presenting a significant risk to the safety and health of themselves or others.*

Consider an annual physical performance evaluation to ensure firefighters are physically capable of performing the essential job tasks of structural firefighting.

Ensure that firefighters are cleared for duty by a physician knowledgeable about the physical demands of firefighting, the personal protective equipment used by firefighters, and the various

*components of **NFPA 1582, Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medicine Program for Fire Departments.***

*Fire departments should establish physical performance requirements for firefighters and develop physical fitness programs. **NFPA 1583, Standard on Health-Related Fitness Programs for Fire Fighters,** is an excellent resource.*

*All Texas firefighters must complete a “Courage to be Safe” course, as adopted by the Texas Commission on Fire Protection and the State Firemen’s and Fire Marshals’ Association. The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation has developed a course that details “**16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives**” so Everyone Goes Home® (<http://www.lifesafetyinitiatives.com>).*

What follows is a copy of a previous bulletin issued by the State Fire Marshal.

**State Fire Marshal Alert:
Heart Attacks Leading Cause of On-Duty Texas Firefighter Deaths**

(State Fire Marshal's Office website: <http://www.tdi.texas.gov/fire/fmlodinvesti.html>)

The State Fire Marshal's Office has investigated more than 30 on-duty fatalities of firefighters in Texas since September 2001. These investigations have revealed some vital facts every Texas fire official needs to know.

Heart attacks or related cardiac problems have caused 12 of the 33 deaths investigated through the end of fiscal year 2011.

Since 1995, heart attacks have been the leading cause of on-duty deaths of Texas firefighters.

Every fire department (paid and volunteer), fire chief, and firefighter must take the initiative in reducing the number of on-duty heart attack deaths.

When it comes to physical fitness and overall health, every little bit of effort counts.

Extensive research has shown that you can improve your overall health, thus preventing disease and premature death, by making small adjustments and improvements in your daily activities, including physical activity, nutrition, and behavior.

Five chronic diseases associated with obesity:

- heart disease
- cancer
- stroke
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (e.g., bronchitis, emphysema, asthma)
- diabetes

They account for more than two-thirds of all deaths in the United States. They claim more than 1.7 million American lives each year and hinder daily living for more than one of every 10 Americans. More than 100 million Americans live with chronic disease, and millions of new cases are diagnosed each year.

These chronic diseases are among the most prevalent and deadly health problems facing our nation, but some of them are very preventable. Firefighters and their families can take simple, affordable steps to work physical activity, good nutrition, and behavior changes into their daily routine. You don't have to become a marathon runner or buy a health club membership to improve personal fitness. Your health will improve with modest but regular physical activity and better eating habits.

There are four keys for a healthier America:

- Be Physically Active Every Day.

- Eat a Nutritious Diet.
- Get Preventive Screenings.
- Make Healthy Choices.

The State Fire Marshal's Office also recommends that fire departments and firefighters adopt physical exercise regimens that will best prepare firefighters for the strenuous, often prolonged physical effort involved in fighting fires.

Here are some excellent resources:

Volunteer Fire Service Fitness and Wellness Program: The U. S. Fire Administration (USFA) and the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) have created the Volunteer Fire Service Fitness and Wellness Project, a partnership initiative to reduce loss of life among volunteer firefighters from heart attack and stress. USFA is a part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. You can find out more at http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa_321.pdf.

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) and Pennell Corporation have established a Web site, www.everyonegoeshome.com, for the nationwide Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives program.

An alert issued by the State Fire Marshal's Office in 2003 remains relevant today as cardiovascular disease continues to plague the Texas fire service as a leading cause of death.

ALERT

HEART ATTACKS: LEADING CAUSE OF ON-DUTY TEXAS FIREFIGHTER DEATHS

- Of the **line-of-duty deaths** not caused by heart attacks, autopsies revealed two of these three firefighters had early stages of heart disease.
- Four firefighters that died of heart attacks had a history of some form of heart disease.
- Four out of the five heart attack deaths occurred during the performance of emergency duties.
- All five firefighters who died of heart attacks were less than 52 years old.

Every firefighter (paid and volunteer) and every fire officer must take the initiative in reducing the number of on-duty heart attack deaths. The State Fire Marshal recommends the following:

- Fire departments should make every reasonable effort to screen firefighters and fire officers for heart disease in an effort to reduce the number of heart attack deaths.
- Departments must encourage applicants to be forthright in disclosing medical conditions that may endanger their lives or the lives of other firefighters or civilians.
- Periodic medical examinations of firefighters should be conducted as outlined in NFPA 1582, Standard on Medical Requirements for Fire Fighters and Information for Fire Department Physicians.
- Fire departments should establish physical performance requirements for firefighters and fire officers and develop physical fitness programs. NFPA 1583, Standard on Health-Related Fitness Programs for Fire Fighters is an excellent resource.
- Fire departments should implement SOPs to address these fitness issues.

The Annual Line-of-Duty Death Report and individual investigation reports may be viewed at the State Fire Marshal web site: <http://www.tdi.texas.gov/fire>.

First Responders at Risk

Analysis of recent firefighter line-of-duty deaths revealed that three-fourths of deaths occurred responding to, or within ten minutes of arrival on the scene.