



Fireworks – The Silence Is Deafening

The Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs is bound by the integrity of our profession and, as such believes the sale and use of consumer grade fireworks should be banned in the State of Michigan. We are agonizingly aware, however, that accomplishing this is not that simple. It is the purpose of this writing to describe the circumstances that have placed us in this position.

In 2009, there was a legislative move to approve what we now know as the State Fireworks Law. The Michigan fire service, and others, took the position that this would be bad for Michigan, and worked with many in the legislature to successfully oppose that bill. In 2011, the Fireworks Bill was reintroduced and presented to the Michigan fire service as a revenue-generating bill that would fund desperately needed fire service training across the State. At the time, this was viewed as a replacement and increased funding stream as General Fund monies were not anticipated to be budgeted to support fire service training. As a result of being placed in a no win situation, and with no time to create an alternate plan, the Michigan Fire Service was not in a position to oppose the 2011 fireworks legislation.

In just five years, the fund for fire service training stands in excess of six million dollars. That fund balance continues to build and is neither being spent as the law was intended, nor as it was written. For reasons unknown, the Michigan fire service has been denied access to this fund balance. Equally as ludicrous and negligent is that the cost to run the Fireworks Program at the State Fire Marshal's office is underfunded by approximately two hundred and eighty thousand (\$280,000) per year. This is two hundred and eighty thousand (\$280,000) that is supposed to be spent in other areas of our State's fire prevention and education efforts, but is instead spent on running the Fireworks Program – while the fund balance climbs.

Data from the hospitals and fire service incident reports demonstrate that fireworks have proven to have an unacceptable negative impact on the State. Both the injury rate and the per-incident property loss rate from fireworks have doubled to twice what they were pre-2011. These statistics validate our previous position. In addition, the consumer use rules are virtually unenforceable, many times leaving no responsible party for the injuries and damage.

There are currently few areas of Michigan's fire service that are not under duress and/or attack. This is particularly evident at the State level; we have been handed, arguably, the weakest state building and fire code in the nation, and our State Fire Marshal's office and Firefighter Training Council is being systematically dismantled, neutralized, and set up for failure. This is disturbing at any time, but especially at a time when Michigan is leading the nation in fire deaths, well ahead of states with 3 and 4 times our population. This is unconscionable and alarming!

The State of Michigan Fire Chiefs are in favor of repealing the State Fireworks Law. In addition, the entire fire service of the State of Michigan is appalled at the manner in which the current revenue, the Training Council, and the Fire Marshal's Office are being handled by the State. Tying fire service training to fireworks tax revenue simply has not worked. We ask that the funding provided by law for fire service training be immediately released for training. We propose a separate, appropriate funding source be identified by the Legislature with a system that allows the funds to be utilized for much needed fire service training. Failing to address these issues has and will continue to cause devastating harm to the public that Michigan's fire service serves.

This position paper was approved by the Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs Board of Directors on January 13, 2016.