

# STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

## Firefighter Fatality Investigation



### **Firefighter James Alston Campbell**

Pendleton Harbor Volunteer Fire Department

November 12, 2004

Texas Department of Insurance  
Austin, Texas

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# **STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE**

## **TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE**

### **AUSTIN, TEXAS**

## **James Alston Campbell**

### **Firefighter Fatality Investigation**

Pendleton Harbor Volunteer Fire Department  
January 3, 2006

### **Executive Summary**

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Pendleton Harbor Volunteer Fire Department (PHVFD) Firefighter James Alston Campbell, age 56, died on November 12, 2004 of an apparent stroke sustained at the scene of a house fire. The residence involved in this fire was the Firefighter's personal home.

Firefighter Campbell called 911 at 1424 hours on November 12, 2004 to report a fire in his home. The Sabine County Sheriff's Office notified the Pendleton Harbor and Hemphill Volunteer Fire Departments at 1425 hours.

When the first PHVFD engine arrived at the call at 1427 hours, Firefighter Campbell began approaching the fire truck to assist with hose layout, then collapsed onto his knees

Other PHVFD firefighters began CPR immediately. An ambulance arrived at 1436 hours and transported Firefighter Campbell to the Sabine County Hospital in Hemphill, Texas where he was pronounced dead on arrival at 1509 hours.

Firefighter Campbell became a member of the Pendleton Harbor Volunteer Fire Department in April 1997. He is survived by his wife and two adult children.

### **Introduction**

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The State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) was not notified by PHVFD of the firefighter fatality. A routine review of incoming 2004 TEXFIRS reports by SFMO discovered a casualty form regarding the death of Firefighter Campbell. SFMO assigned Deputy State Fire Marshal Doug McCoy to conduct a preliminary firefighter fatality investigation on June 9, 2006. This investigation was conducted under the authority of Texas Government Code, Section 417.0075.

This statute requires SFMO to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of the firefighter, including the cause and origin of the fire, the condition of the structure, and the suppression operation, to determine factors that may have contributed to the death of the firefighter. The State Fire Marshal is required to coordinate the investigative efforts of local government officials and may enlist established fire service organizations and private entities to assist in the investigation.

Involvement and notification to other entities during this preliminary field investigation was limited to fire department personnel, the Sabine County Sheriffs office, the Justice of the Peace office and the Sabine County Hospital Medical Records.

Photographs used in this report were obtained on June 9, 2006

## **Origin and Cause Investigation**

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An origin and cause investigation was not conducted by the SFMO. Information obtained from Chief Marc Cummings, Pendleton Harbor Volunteer Fire Department, indicates the fire was accidental and caused by a flue pipe extending from a wood burning stove that ignited combustibles.

## **Fire Ground Operations**

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The following sequence of events is based on fire department run records, radio logs and communication with fire department personnel.

The Sabine County Sheriffs Office simultaneously dispatched the PHVFD and Hemphill Volunteer Fire Departments (HVFD) to the residential fire. The PHVFD received the call at 1425 hours, was en route at 1426 hours, arrived at the scene at 1427 hours, and departed the scene at 1602 hours. The HVFD was dispatched at 1425 hours, arrived at 1435 hours and departed at 1525 hours. Fireground operations did not require the HVFD equipment and personnel.

Information obtained from Marc Cummings, Fire Chief of the PHVFD indicates minor flame damage occurred. The interior of the dwelling sustained significant smoke damage.

Fire ground operations were limited to removal of a gable end vent and extinguishment of a small amount of flame located at the point where the wood burning stove vent penetrated the roof. Fire Department run records indicate the use of 150 feet of 1½ " hose and 100 gallons of water.

## **Building Structure and Systems**

This field investigation was limited to an exterior observation; it did not include an interior examination.

The single-family residence is located on Wild Cherry Road, in the Midlake Subdivision, Sabine County, Texas.



The residential dwelling is a wood frame residence having a pier and beam foundation, an exterior vinyl siding, and a metal roof. The roof system consists of a gable design incorporating gable vents. According to Fire Chief Marc Cummings, the residence is a two bedroom dwelling.

## **Personal Protective Equipment Evaluation**

Information obtained from Fire Chief Marc Cummings, Pendleton Harbor V.F.D., indicated Firefighter James Campbell was not donning any protective clothing or utilizing any protective respiratory equipment upon arrival at the fire scene.

## **Medical Background of Firefighter**

Information obtained from Amanda Page, Sabine County Hospital, Medical Records, indicates an autopsy was not conducted. The Sabine County, Texas Certificate of Death indicates the stroke was contributed to an inheritable factor.

This investigation did not include communication with family members and/or medical personnel regarding the medical history of Firefighter James Campbell.

## **Training and Personnel Records Evaluation**

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Chief Marc Cummings stated Firefighter Campbell was not a certified firefighter through any state firefighting organization or governmental agency or national organization.

## **Cause of Death**

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The first responding firefighters included PHVFD Fire Chief Marc Cummings, Ralph Hill, William Fox, Kim Fox, and Sherry Hutto. Upon arriving at the scene, Chief Cummings witnessed Firefighter Campbell approach the engine to assist with hose retrieval. As he approached the engine, Firefighter Campbell pointed at the roof in the direction of the wood burning heater vent, and then Firefighter Campbell collapsed onto his knees.

Firefighters examined Campbell and found he was without a discernable pulse and was not breathing. CPR was immediately administered by PHVFD Firefighters William Fox and Kim Fox, later assisted by Firefighter Larry Martin.

Goldstar EMS was dispatched at 1428 hours and arrived at 1436 hours. Goldstar EMS continued CPR, instituted Advanced Life Support (ALS) measures and departed en route to the Sabine County Hospital in Hemphill, Texas at 1459 hours. Firefighter Campbell was pronounced deceased upon arrival at the hospital at 1509 hours.

The Sabine County death certificate, signed by Dr. Vera M. Luther, MD, listed the cause of death as a stroke (cerebrovascular accident) with underlying causes of “severe stress due to house fire (his home)”, “cerebrovascular disease”, and “inheritable factor”.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

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The following findings of fact and recommendations are based upon nationally recognized consensus standards for the fire service and are excerpted from published investigation reports provided by the Centers for Disease Control’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

While it is unlikely that the following recommendations could have prevented the Firefighter’s death, the State Fire Marshal’s Office offers these recommendations to reduce the risk of on-the-job heart attacks and sudden cardiac arrest among fire fighters.

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

- *Provide mandatory pre-placement and annual medical evaluations to all fire fighters 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.*
- *Perform an annual physical performance (physical ability) evaluation to ensure fire fighters are physically capable of performing the essential job tasks of structural fire fighting.*
- *Ensure that fire fighters are cleared for duty by a physician knowledgeable about the physical demands of fire fighting, the personal protective equipment used by fire fighters, and the various components of NFPA 1582, Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medicine Program for Fire Departments.*