

Texas State Fire Marshal's Office

Firefighter Fatality Investigation Annual Report

October 2025

TDI | Texas Department
of Insurance





Firefighter Fatality Investigation Annual Report

Fiscal year 2025

by the

Texas State Fire Marshal's Office

Submitted October 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra Knight".

Debra Knight
State Fire Marshal
Texas Department of Insurance

Contents

Overview	2
Investigations	3
Fiscal year 2025 investigations	3
On-duty firefighter fatality investigation statistics	5
SFMO fiscal year on-duty firefighter fatality investigations by event type.....	5
SFMO fiscal year on-duty firefighter fatality investigations by department type.....	5
Firefighter fatality prevention strategies	6
Everyone Goes Home: 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives	7
Firefighter safety recommendations	9

Overview

[State law](#) requires the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) to investigate firefighter fatalities that happen in the line of duty or in connection with an on-duty incident. The office must investigate the circumstances of the death, including any contributing factors.

Background

The Texas Commission on Fire Protection sets the criteria for gathering and analyzing firefighter injury data. They also produce an [annual report](#) of all firefighter injuries, exposures, and cancer diagnoses. SFMO doesn't investigate cancer or COVID-19 deaths. These deaths are documented by other entities.

The State Fire Marshal's Office works with various organizations and agencies to provide guidance and review of investigations, including:

- State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association
- Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service
- Texas A&M Forest Service
- Texas Chapter, International Association of Arson Investigations
- Texas Commission on Fire Protection
- Texas Fire Chiefs Association
- Texas Fire Marshals Association
- Texas State Association of Fire Fighters
- Texas metropolitan fire departments (including Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio)

Investigations

In fiscal year 2025, SFMO investigated five firefighter fatality incidents that resulted in five deaths.

Fiscal year 2025 investigations

Charles "Buddy" Freeman, II, 40 years old

Montgomery County Fire Department Emergency Services District #2
September 29, 2024 | On-duty medical event

Lt. Freeman responded three times on July 9, 2024, to a hazardous materials incident for possible carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning at a residence. Responders documented high carbon monoxide levels and transported two residents with CO poisoning to the hospital.

The next morning, July 10, 2024, Lt. Freeman went to the hospital with chest pain. Doctors found he had a heart attack and performed multiple heart surgeries. He died due to surgery complications on September 29, 2024.



Howard "Scott" Glass, 43 years old

Perryton Fire and EMS
October 20, 2024 | Fireground injuries

On October 17, 2024, Assistant Chief Glass responded to a residential fire. As members were setting up the water supply a vehicle ran over the hose popping a coupling, causing three firefighters to fall to the ground. Assistant Chief Glass sustained serious head injuries and was airlifted to Northwest Texas Healthcare System in Amarillo. He died on October 20, 2024.



Marcelo "Ox" Garcia, III, 42 years old

Houston Fire Department

November 6, 2024 | Fireground injuries

On November 6, 2024, Firefighter Garcia and other firefighters were on scene at a commercial structure fire. At about 11:05 p.m. a mayday was transmitted for a wall collapse. Firefighter Garcia and another firefighter were immediately rescued and transported to the Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center. Firefighter Garcia died from injuries he sustained in the collapse. The other firefighter was released.



Michael Reedy, 38 years old

Roanoke Fire Department

June 25, 2025 | On-duty medical event

On June 25, 2025, Capt. Reedy completed his required annual physical during his 48-hour shift. He returned home and within 24 hours, Capt. Reedy's spouse found him unresponsive and started CPR. He was transported to the hospital where he died. The autopsy found he died from natural causes due to hypertensive atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease.



Michael Phillips, 66 years old

Marble Falls Area Volunteer Fire Department

July 5, 2025 | On-duty motor vehicle accident

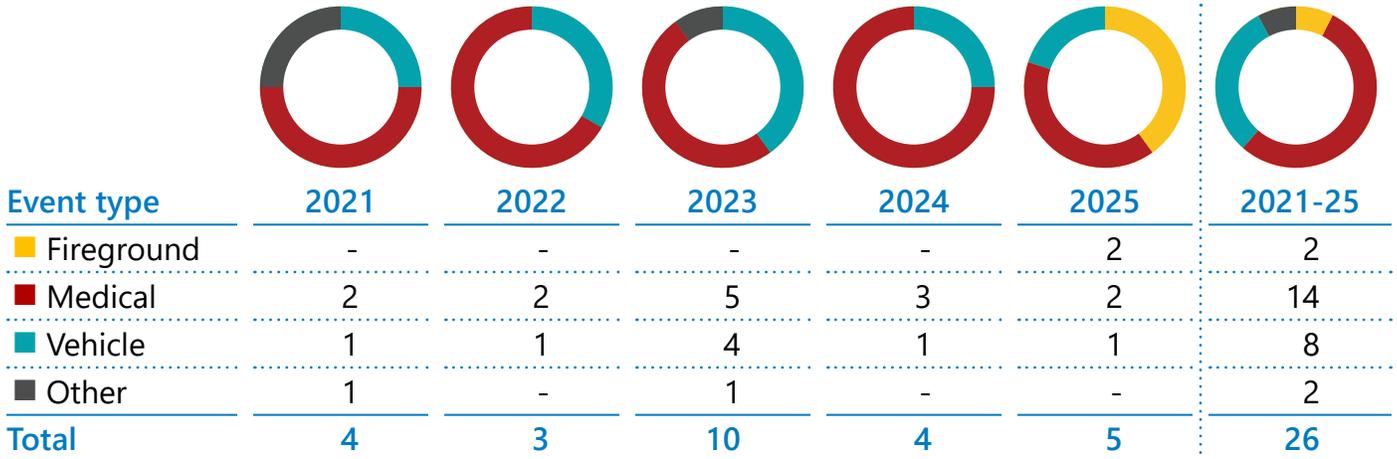
On July 5, 2025, Chief Phillips went missing when his emergency vehicle was swept off the roadway by floodwater. He was responding to a call during severe storms and flooding in Central Texas. The vehicle was later discovered, but Chief Phillips wasn't inside. After days of searching, the Marble Falls Area Volunteer Fire Department announced the end of watch for Chief Phillips on July 15, 2025.



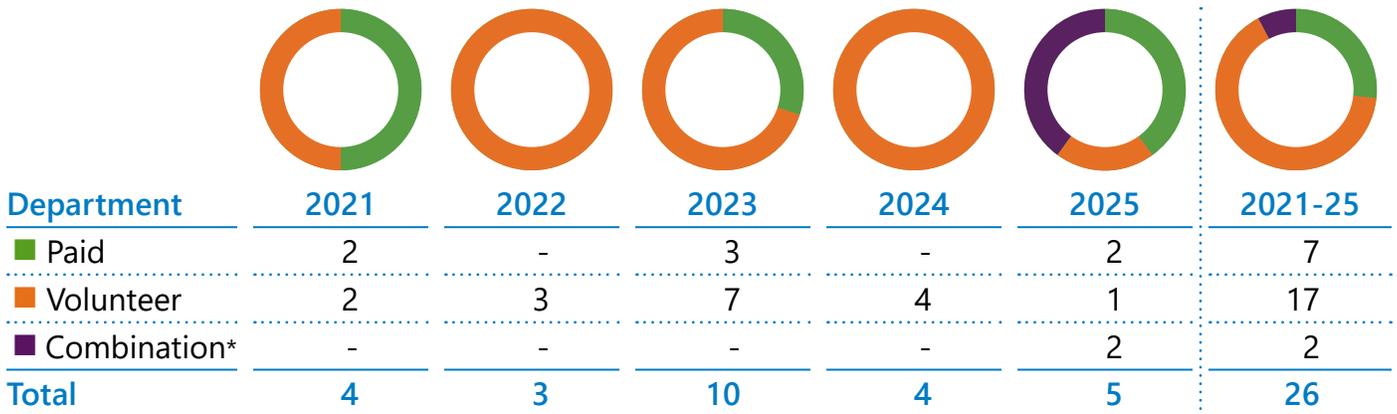
On-duty firefighter fatality investigation statistics

The [U.S. Fire Administration](#) tracks and collects on-duty firefighter deaths in the United States. Their data and reports are published by the calendar year. In 2024, there were 72 firefighter fatalities (non-COVID-19 related) in the country.

SFMO fiscal year on-duty firefighter fatality investigations by event type



SFMO fiscal year on-duty firefighter fatality investigations by department type



* A combination department is made up of paid/career firefighters and volunteer firefighters. Combination departments are becoming more common due to emergency service districts.

Firefighter fatality prevention strategies

SFMO encourages using proven strategies developed by both SFMO and nationally recognized organizations to reduce firefighter fatalities. SFMO:

- Publishes investigation reports, shares information with the firefighter fatality investigation panel, and makes presentations at fire service conferences to share lessons learned from investigations.
- Sends fatality investigation reports to affected fire departments and posts them on the [SFMO website](#).
- Visits fire departments that had a line-of-duty death to see improvements made since the incident.

Departments are encouraged to:

- Participate in Firefighter Safety Stand Down, sponsored by the [International Association of Fire Chiefs](#) and the [International Association of Fire Fighters](#).
- Participate in the Courage to be Safe program, which emphasizes the message that "[Everyone Goes Home](#)."
- Implement or expand fire prevention programs to help reduce fires.
- Participate in the [National Fallen Firefighters Foundation's](#) National Fire Service [Seat Belt Pledge](#) that encourages firefighters to wear seat belts in fire department vehicles.
- Explore safer strategies and tactics for fighting enclosed structure fires by publishing findings and recommendations revealed during firefighter fatality investigations.
- Promote the use of residential sprinklers to reduce fire deaths and property losses.
- Engage in pre-fire incident planning by suppression personnel for high-risk occupancies. Planning should include firefighter and occupant life safety, water supply, and structural hazards.
- Include fire prevention and firefighter fatality prevention in all firefighter training and education, including initial training in firefighter academies.
- Emphasize training on [modern construction technologies](#). Lightweight structural materials and green building practices can change building performance and fire behavior and how these elements impact firefighter safety and fire-ground operations.
- Implement a vehicle operations program, such as the Emergency Vehicles Operators Course. Fire department personnel should know driving skills, vehicle and operator limitations, and liability issues.
- Complete the National Safety Council's [Defensive Driving Course](#). Retake the course every three years.

Everyone Goes Home: 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives

The [16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives](#) were developed by representatives of major fire service constituencies at a Firefighter Safety Summit.

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation was tasked with creating awareness about the initiatives and developing material to support the implementation. The initiatives have become the foundation for fire departments and EMS organizations to ensure firefighters and medics return home safely after every shift.

1. Cultural change

Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety; incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability, and personal responsibility.

2. Accountability

Enhance the personal and organizational accountability for health and safety throughout the fire service.

3. Risk management

Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management with incident management at all levels, including strategic, tactical, and planning responsibilities.

4. Empowerment

All firefighters must be empowered to stop unsafe practices.

5. Training and certification

Develop and implement national standards for training, qualifications, and certification (including regular recertification) that are equally applicable to all firefighters, based on the duties they are expected to perform.

6. Medical and physical fitness

Develop and implement national medical and physical fitness standards that are equally applicable to all firefighters based on the duties they are expected to perform.

7. Research agenda

Create a national research agenda and data collection system that relates to the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives.

8. Technology

Utilize available technology wherever it can produce higher levels of health and safety.

9. Fatality, near-miss investigation

Thoroughly investigate all firefighter fatalities, injuries, and near-misses.

10. Grant support

Grant programs should support the implementation of safe practices and procedures and/or mandate safe practices as an eligibility requirement.

11. Response policies

National standards for emergency response policies and procedures should be developed and championed.

12. Violent incident response

National protocols for response to violent incidents should be developed and championed.

13. Psychological support

Firefighters and their families must have access to counseling and psychological support.

14. Public education

Public education must receive more resources and be championed as a critical fire and life safety program.

15. Code enforcement and sprinklers

Advocacy must be strengthened for the enforcement of codes and the installation of home fire sprinklers.

16. Apparatus design and safety

Safety must be a primary consideration in the design of apparatus and equipment.

Firefighter safety recommendations

Recommendations from past SFMO investigation reports

	Resource
1. Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service, including safety, incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability, and personal responsibility.	National Safety Culture Change Initiative (FA-342), 2015
2. Establish standard operating procedures for minimum fire service-related occupational safety and health program requirements.	NFPA 1500, 2021
3. Provide all firefighters mandatory pre-placement and annual medical evaluations to determine their medical abilities to perform duties without presenting a significant risk to anyone's health and safety.	NFPA 1582, 2022
4. Perform annual physical ability evaluations to ensure firefighters are physically capable of performing job tasks.	NFPA 1583, 2022
5. Ensure that firefighters are cleared for duty by a doctor who knows about the physical demands of firefighting, the personal protective equipment used by firefighters, and the components.	NFPA 1582, 2021
6. Don't risk the safety of responders if there is no possibility of saving lives or property.	NFPA 1561, 2020 37 Texas Admin. Code 435.15
7. Always attack a wildland fire from the burned area. If a sudden change in conditions or wind occurs, the unit can retreat into the burned area.	Attack from the Black video Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide (IMFG)
8. Identify and communicate exit routes and safety zones to everyone on scene before fire operations begin. Staging areas shouldn't interfere with routes or safety zones.	NFPA 1143, 2018 37 Texas Admin. Code 435.15 (a) Essentials of Fire Fighting (EFF), 7th Edition, Chapter 5 IFSTA.org Wildland Fire IMFG
9. All firefighters on scene and engaged in firefighting operations must be in approved, full personal protective equipment suitable for the incident.	Wildland Fire IMFG EFF, 7th Edition, Chapter 5
10. Fire departments must use an accountability system so the incident commander can quickly see all firefighters on scene, their location, and their assignment at any time.	37 Texas Admin. Code 435.13
11. Educate firefighters and command staff on heat-related illnesses and prevention.	NIOSH Heat-related illnesses
12. Establish a stationary command away from task-level operations. The command provides a quiet vantage point to receive, process, and relay information. It's also helpful in building and maintaining an effective fireground organization.	NFPA 1561, 2020 Fire Command, 2nd Edition (2002) - Alan V. Brunacini EFF, 7th Edition, Chapter 19
13. Personal protective equipment, including self-contained breathing apparatuses, is required when working in areas with potential hazards.	NFPA 1500, 2021 EFF, 7th Edition, Chapter 5 37 Texas Admin. Code, Chapter 435
14. Use tools and tactics that help reduce roof operation dangers. Become familiar with the indicators of a collapse.	EFF, 7th Edition, Chapter 11 Fire Service Ventilation
15. Consider monitoring and recording fire ground activity.	NFPA 1221, 2019



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