**IFSTA Update**

**Plans Examiner for Fire and Emergency Services**

*by Jeff Fortney*

A comprehensive community fire protection program requires more than just fire suppression and other emergency-response activities. A successful fire protection program must also have a strong fire prevention influence. Fire prevention is that part of the science of fire protection that deals with preventing the outbreak of fire by eliminating fire hazards through activities such as inspections, enforcement, education, and investigation programs. Effective fire prevention consists of the three Es: education, enforcement of code requirements, and engineering.

A key component of fire prevention is plans examination, the process of reviewing building plans and specifications to determine the safety characteristics of the proposed building. Plans examination or review should be accomplished before permission is granted to begin construction to ensure that fire safety is being engineered into the project. On far too many occasions, buildings and structures were built without adequate fire protection built into them and these deficiencies were not discovered until later inspections uncovered them or a fire occurred exposing them. At the very least, the costs of retrofitting fire protection into such structures can be quite expensive. At the far extreme, the loss of life because of such failures is unacceptable.

Modern fire and emergency services recognize the need to have trained plans examiners on staff to ensure construction drawings are examined to determine if adequate fire protection is engineered into buildings within their communities. Written to address NFPA 1031, Plan Examiner I and key parts of Plan Examiner II, IFSTA’s *Plans Examiner for Fire and Emergency Services* will prepare the new plans examiner for this vital function. This manual was validated by a

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**From the Director**

**Essentials V: Meeting the Challenges of Tomorrow**

The *Essentials of Fire Fighting V* committee convened this past summer at the 72nd Annual IFSTA Validation Conference for its first committee meeting. The fifth edition of *Essentials* is slated to be released in conjunction with the 2007 edition of the NFPA 1001 *Standard on Professional Firefighter Qualifications*. In order to meet this schedule, the committee must present the manual for validation no later than the fall of 2006. Needless to say, this committee’s task is challenging in scope and extremely fast tracking!

*Essentials* is the cornerstone for Oklahoma State University’s Fire Protection Publications and the International Fire Service Training Association’s validation process. It serves as not only the foundation for all other manuals, but also as “best practice” in knowledge and applied practices as the first step of the training process for our nation’s fire service. It is a reflection of the very best our service has to offer, namely the sharing of technical expertise and the camaraderie shared in that effort.

So, what are the challenges facing the committee? The first is to strive for nothing less than excellence, and therefore set the standard yet once again that all others aspire to. As committee members, we represent a cross section of our service, representing paid and volunteer, urban and rural, large departments and small, diversity of positions and experiences, and from all corners of North America and beyond! And your faith in us to represent you and our next generation of firefighters is sobering, we won’t let you down! Make no mistake, this is what makes IFSTA, the *Essentials*, and indeed all of our “red books” unique. Although others may copy “essentials” somewhere in their title, or make their covers red, their efforts are only superficial. It’s what falls between the covers that makes Essentials unmatched.

The other and probably less visible challenge is to meet the needs of the rapidly changing face of the American firefighter. Particularly since September 11, 2001, America’s firefighters have emerged as our nation’s recognized and long unsung heroes. And concurrently, these heroes are facing a dynamic and challenging period where the needs of those in our community are drastically changing. The NFPA recently released the fire statistics for 2003 which indicates that the national percentage of response for “fire” is at seven percent, while that for emergency medical services is 67 percent. These are striking figures! Obviously, this is all tremendous news! Not only has applied technology supported quicker detection

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Interschutz 2005

The Interschutz Fire Exposition was held in Hanover, Germany, on June 6-11, 2005. IFSTA/FPP had a booth in the American Pavilion and those who attended talked to representatives from more than 50 countries. Interschutz reported a record high in exhibitor participation and visitor turnout as well as a huge upswing in international involvement, particularly from Asia. They estimated 140,000 visitors (30,000 from abroad) at the six-day show. This was considered to be one of the best shows in terms of interest and traffic to the booth for IFSTA/FPP. Most visitors to the booth were familiar with many of the IFSTA manuals.

and suppression, but it has also contributed to a reduction in the number of fire responses and arson-related fires. Along with the increase in EMS calls, it is obvious that the traditional role of our firefighter MUST change to meet these changing demands on our service. Although the number of fires may have dropped, they are no less perilous, stressful, or require any less skill to control. As such, firefighting continues as a risk we must train for, along with so many other emergencies.

September 11, 2001 also marked the day that our nation’s fire service began to operate in a new environment, responding and operating in a time of war. Terrorism challenges us to fight fire and rescue victims that result from man-made events. Never before has our fire service had such a role, and now is the time to identify the training needs to best prepare you to meet these challenges. Obvi-ously, it will take resources to address these training needs, and with resources comes obligations. Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 is going to focus our attention to an all-hazards environment as well as develop the standards and assessment of our capabilities to respond. The carrot held high by our government is simple: funding - either comply with the directive or you will not be eligible for federal funding. And these regulations don’t just apply to homeland security. According to a recent Department of Homeland Security information bulletin, they also apply to a vast number of other federal grant and aid programs. The obligations within HSPD 8 that apply to the fire service focus on the need to be compliant with NIMS. And in order to be compliant, we must begin by assessing our capabilities, (of which one is clearly firefighting), for which we will be measured by universal tasks within these capabilities -- all to standardized scenarios, and all within ICS. This is indeed an exciting prospect, particularly since it will lead to eligibility for federal grants. But, what are we doing today that will enhance our ability to assess, prepare, and respond to our maximum capability for the scenarios that have application to us? What are we doing to further enhance our capabilities to prepare and meet the response needs of the future? As a result, what changes are we proposing for the 2007 edition of NFPA 1001 so that we will be better positioned to meet these challenges in the future? If we simply let the future to come to us by waiting for the next edition of NFPA 1001 in 2012 to make the necessary changes to prepare our firefighters, it will leave us more than 10 years behind in providing for the emergency response needs of today’s firefighters. What’s important is what we are doing NOW to make these changes and integrate our business -- the nation’s fire service -- with the other nine response disciplines. As such, consideration and action needs to be immediate, positive, and progres-sive in the following areas in NFPA 1001, Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications:

- Minimum of Hazardous Materials Operations certification
- Minimum of the inclusion of the DHS Emergency Responder Guidelines at the operational level
- Minimum of NFPA 1670 Standard on the Operations and Training for Technical Search and Rescue Incidents, competencies for all rescue functions at the awareness level
- Minimum of NFPA 1006 Standard for Rescue Technician Professional Qualifications competencies for RT VMR at the Firefighter II level
- Minimum of First Responder Basic (emergency care) at the Firefighter I level, and Emergency Medical Technician Basic at the Firefighter II level.
- More emphasis on the prevention aspect of our business.

All of this brings us back to the challenges facing us in the development of the new Essentials, 5th edition. It would be expedient and most profitable to simply revise and update the materials that are currently in the text, or to only slightly enhance the materials, adding new information to a level that results in the most profitable product. But that is not what IFSTA and FPP are about. Instead, we are committed to address the integrated response challenges and opportunities that face us, and provide you with the highest quality product that best ensures your profi ciency and safety. This will require that we take advantage of our years of combined, shared experiences and skills to yet again set the new benchmark for training.

Essentials V is your manual, your primary, number one resource for the essential skills of firefighters. As your representatives in the IFSTA process, the Essentials Validation Committee is interested in your thoughts and recommenda-tions. After all, it’s up to all of us, the family affectionately known as “America’s Fire Service,” to look after each other and our next generation. So don’t hesitate to let us know your thoughts.

Russell Strickland, Assistant Director/Field Programs MFRI
Chris Neal, Director, Fire Protection Publications
The Courage To Stay Safe... So “Everyone Goes Home”
A National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Life Safety Initiatives Program

Firefighters must have the courage to face a multitude of risks in order to save lives and protect their communities. Their courage allows them to willingly risk their own lives so that others can be saved. A different type of courage is required to avoid needless risks and tragic consequences.

This provocative and moving presentation is designed to change the culture of accepting the loss of firefighters as a normal occurrence. Building on the untold story of LODD survivors, it reveals how family members must live with the consequences of a firefighter death and provides a focus on the need for firefighters and officers to change fundamental attitudes and behaviors in order to prevent line of duty deaths. The central theme promotes the courage to do the right thing in order to protect yourself and other firefighters and ensure that “Everyone Goes Home” at the end of the day.

The original concept of having survivors reveal their stories was conceived by Chief Billy Goldfedre. The National Fallen Firefighters Life Safety Initiatives Team built on this concept to conceive The Courage to Be Safe presentation to fulfill a request by Fire Commissioner Ed Mann. Commissioner Mann has adopted the Foundation’s Firefighter Life Safety Initiative Program to develop, train, educate, and increase awareness to reduce the overall line of duty deaths in Pennsylvania. His is the first state to implement the program at a full-scale statewide level. The program has been delivered by instructors across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A national release version has also been developed, with opportunities for presenters to add local or regional content.

The Courage to Be Safe So Everyone Goes Home program package consists of a PowerPoint® presentation on a CD as well as an instructor guide and sample handout materials. The CD includes embedded video clips of fire service leaders and excerpts of the emotional presentation made at FDIC-2005 by Reverend Bevon Smith, father of Paul Smith, a firefighter who in died in the line of duty in 1989. The packages will be made available through State Training Organizations, by sending an e-mail to: everyonegoeshome@firehero.com

This program is a must see for all who care, share, and have a feeling for the safety of all firefighters.

Production Team: Rich Anderson, producer; PowerPoint® by Captain Matt Tobia, Anne Arundel County Fire Department, Pat Pauly, Pennsylvania State Fire Academy,

Video: FETN, Cool Water Media

Technical Advisers: Deputy Chief Billy Goldfedre, Loveland-Symmes Fire Department, OH; Battalion Chief John Salka, FDNY Tim Dunkle, Administrator Pennsylvania Fire Academy; I. Gordon Routley, Larry Curl.

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Plans Examiner

committee of highly trained plans examiners and engineers with vast experience in the review of construction plans.

Chapter list:
1. Role of the Plans Examiner
2. Plans Review Process
3. Codes and Standards
4. Plan Sets
5. Site, Plot, Utility, and Landscape Plans Reviews
6. Architectural Plans
7. Structural Plans
8. Mechanical Plans
9. Electrical Plans
10. Fire Protection System Plans
11. Other Fire-Protection Related Plans Reviews
12. Alternate Design Methods
13. Renovations and Tenant Improvements

A glossary, two appendices, a Bonus Disc CD-ROM containing numerous samples and examples, and a sample set of plans referenced within the manual complete the manual.

Chief officers and officer candidates will find this manual a valuable resource and a foundation for personal educational growth. If you are interested in ordering Plans Examiner for Fire and Emergency Services, please call 800-654-4055 or go online www.ifsta.org

The item number is 36643 and the cost is $47.00.

Jeff Fortney is a Senior Technical Editor with Fire Protection Publications.

Winners of 2006 IFSTA Calendar Photo Contest

This year there were some wonderful photo entries which made it all the more difficult to make the final selection. FPP wishes to thank all who took the time to send in their photos.

Teresa Wolfe, Orrstown, PA
Chris Mickal, New Orleans, LA
Rita Huss, Wasilla, AK
David Jackson, Saginaw, MI
Michelle French, Lakewood, CO

Rick Montemorra, Mesa, AZ
Dayna Hutton, Clarksville, AR
Micah Hudlet, Hayden, ID
Adam Alberti, Kenvil, NJ
Stephen Foley, Washington, D.C

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Recently, Fire Protection Publications completed acquisition of the assets of Emergency WORLD, LLC, a pioneer and leader in the field of electronic emergency services training. Emergency WORLD, headquartered in Loveland, Colorado, develops NFPA- and OSHA-compliant training courseware. This format makes possible more hands-on training time by providing the industry’s most comprehensive, interactive, Blended e-Learning (BeL) training system.

Background
Founded in 1986 by fire department training officers, Emergency WORLD’s courseware offers Internet-delivered multimedia training allowing for the tracking of training progress throughout a responder’s career. The company has trained over 5.45 million students in over 15,000 agencies worldwide. With this acquisition Fire Protection Publications (headquarters for IFSTA) offers a way for instructors to meet everyday training challenges with interactive technology.

Blended e-Learning (BeL) Methodology
Blended e-Learning is a methodology that combines self-directed, instructor-led, and skills-based or hands-on training. Students can direct their own learning experience at their own pace, while instructors can track and analyze their progress online. The courseware utilizes a state-of-the-art learning management system (LMS). The LMS allows the instructor to monitor the progress of the individuals or the class as a whole in real time. The benefit for the instructor is a good handle on which topics the class is having trouble or which they have a good grasp. The result is a better use of resources for the instructor-led portion of the class.

The BeL courses consist of a blend of four elements, including:

- The online portion of the course, which replaces much of the time previously spent in lecture in the classroom
- The classroom-delivered instruction that cannot be replaced by the online element
- The student textbook for in-depth reading and study
- Hands-on, performance-based skills instruction to meet the practical portion of the training

What does this mean for you – the instructor/training academy?
Adopting the BeL concept has many advantages for a training agency and its personnel. Some advantages include:

- Blended e-learning significantly decreases the time and effort instructors spend delivering the knowledge/classroom portions of the learning equation
- It increases the availability of training to remote locations within a jurisdiction
- Reduces classroom time which equates to reducing the ongoing strain of instructor recruitment
- Less instructor time in the classroom and less travel time by instructors and students which means lower delivery and attendance costs
- Allows more students to be enrolled in classes
- Increases the quality, consistency, and accessibility of training (anytime and anyplace)
- More hands-on training time

Blended e-Learning courseware available soon through FPP includes:

- Hazardous Materials Awareness
- Hazardous Materials Operations
- Hazardous Materials Technician
- Hazardous Materials Incident Commander
- Emergency Response to Terrorism-Awareness Level
- Emergency Vehicle Operator (EVO)
- Pumpers/Driver Operator
- Confined Space—Awareness
- Confined Space—Operations
- Confined Space—Technician
- Fire Officer I
- Fire Instructor I
- Fire Inspector I
Additional courseware acquired by FPP from EWORLD includes video/textbooks.
Video/Textbook course packages come complete with videotapes, a student textbook, an instructor guide with lesson plans, and pre- and post-test exams and supplements — everything an instructor needs for in-house training.

**Video/textbooks include:**
- *Fire Attack* (2nd edition) by Chief Bob Ramirez and Gene Chantler
- *Making a Difference – the Fire Officer’s Role* by Chief Ron Coleman
- *Surviving the Hazardous Materials Incident*
- *Silent War – Infection Control for Emergency Responders* (2nd edition)
- *Recruiting, Training and Maintaining Volunteer Fire Fighters*
- *Silent War – Law Enforcement*

**Additional Information:**
For more information about how FPP’s Blended e-Learning works and how it can be set up in your organization, please call Jon Bubke at 405-744-8835 or visit our web site [www.ifsta.org](http://www.ifsta.org).
The Marvin Austin Award is presented by the staff of Fire Protection Publications in recognition of individuals who have made significant contributions to Fire Protection Publications and IFSTA. It is not awarded every year, but only when the need is warranted.

The 2005 recipients of the Marvin Austin Award are Jimmie and Charlotte Badgett. This is only the second time that this award has been made to a couple; the first being Max and Vera Thomas in 1986.

"To be selected to receive this honor was, and will always be, the “highlight” of my career."

– Jimmie Badgett

2005 Marvin Austin Award
Jimmie and Charlotte Badgett

I experienced two tragic fire incidents in my youth. My seven-year-old cousin Henry suffered third-degree burns on his feet and legs resulting in years of suffering and surgery. My great-grandmother’s death resulted from a house fire and the ignition of her bed clothes. I knew at an early age that I wanted to prevent fires if there was any way I could be involved. Jim came along and I convinced him to join the Abilene Fire Department.

Soon afterwards I became a volunteer fire fighter on a rural volunteer fire department. I graduated from a community college with an Associate of Fire Protection Technology degree and later completed my Bachelor of Applied Science with a major in Fire Protection Administration.

I have been fortunate to have served as a firefighter, fire prevention officer, environmental specialist and college instructor in Fire Protection Technology. I am particularly proud to have served as the FEMA Region VI Fire Representative serving Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, New Mexico and Arkansas for several years.

My affiliation with IFSTA as a delegate for many years and lately as a spouse has been the highlight of my summer’s activities. One of my greatest accomplishments was establishing the International Professional Women in the Fire Service Association in 1978 and serving as their first president. I want to express my appreciation to IFSTA for awarding Jim and me the Marvin Austin Distinguished Leadership Award. I especially wish to say “thank you” to three of my mentors, Henry D. Smith, past Chief of the Texas Fireman’s Training School, Howard Boyd, deceased, past Fire Marshal of the Nashville Metro Department, and Jim Badgett, who has always supported throughout my entire career.

Words from Jimmie…

I was personally acquainted with Marv and enjoyed his friendship for so many years. I also know all the recipients who have been honored by receiving this prestigious award, and have such high respect for them.

To be selected to receive this honor was, and will always be, the “highlight” of my career. I have been blessed to have served in the fire service through so many changes, and to have been associated with so many devoted individuals dedicating their lives to our wonderful profession.

I especially wish to thank the IFSTA Staff for showing us this honor, as this is an award presented by them. Their devotion, knowledge, and many hours of hard work allows IFSTA to provide the essential knowledge required for today’s emergency services personnel to stay abreast of these changing times. The change for “Red Books” to “Ready Books” reflects IFSTA’s desire to stay at the forefront in education and training. We are now in an era where emergency services must prevent, respond, recover, train, exercise, and access for a different response than we have known in the past. We will be ready.

Thanks to IFSTA for the award and for allowing us to be a part of the family for over 30 years. I wish to thank the participants for electing me to the Executive Board and allowing me to serve them in this role. Thanks to the Executive Board for allowing me to serve as Committee Chair and for allowing me to serve on various committees. On behalf of Charlotte and myself, we appreciate receiving this honor.

Words from Charlotte…

Jimmie and Charlotte are both deserving of this award because of their enormous contributions to IFSTA and the validation conference for more than 30 years.

Jimmie has had a long fire service career, serving in a number of positions. He spent 12 years with the Abilene, Texas Fire Department and 8 years as a training consultant with the Texas Commission on Fire Protection Personnel Standards and Education. In 2003 he retired after serving 22 years as the Fire Marshal for Dallas County, Texas. Since his retirement he has also worked for the Dallas County Sheriff’s Office and has served as Emergency Preparedness Coordinator. Jim has also been actively involved as an instructor for a number of fire service organizations and colleges and has been actively involved in the volunteer fire service. He holds several college degrees, including a Master’s in Public Administration.

Jim has attended IFSTA conference since 1974. He received his 30-year award at the 2004 Validation Conference. He has served on 18 different committees, serving in all roles including Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary. He was a member of the IFSTA Executive Board from 1992 until 2003.

Charlotte has also been attending the IFSTA Validation conference since 1974. Through the years she has served on a number of IFSTA committees, including the Inspection, Public Education, Fire Streams, Fire Cause Determination, and Investigation committee. She has served the fire service in a variety of prevention, inspection, and fire marshal capacities for jurisdictions including the University of Texas, City of Addison, Texas, and Haltom City, Texas. In recent years she has been a mainstay of the Ladies Brunch and Program during the Validation Conference.

It would be hard to imagine an IFSTA Conference in the past 30 years without Jimmie and Charlotte’s participation. They have been leaders in both the working part of the conference as well as the social part of the conference. They have been a great team and their dual acceptance of this award is most appropriate.

Words from Charlotte…

I wish to express my appreciation for the awarding of the Marvin Austin Distinguished Leadership Award to Charlotte and me.

I have known in the past. We will be ready.

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Hudiburg Award
Denis Onieal Named 2005 IFSTA Everett E. Hudiburg Award Winner

Each year the Executive Board of the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) selects one person who has made significant contributions to the training of firefighters to receive the Everett E. Hudiburg Award. Through the years some of the nation’s most notable fire service leaders have been honored with this award. In keeping with this tradition, the IFSTA Executive Board is pleased to announce that the 2005 edition of this award was presented to Dr. Denis Onieal at the opening ceremonies of the 2005 IFSTA Validation Conference held on July 10, 2005 in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

A native of Jersey City, Denis began as a career firefighter in his hometown in 1971, rising through the ranks to become Deputy Fire Chief in 1991, and acting chief in 1995 of a uniformed force of over 600 personnel. He spent his entire time “in the street” as a line fire officer.

He earned a doctorate in education from New York University, a master’s degree in Public Administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University, and a bachelor’s degree in Fire Administration from New Jersey City University. He was a professor in the master and doctorate degree programs in education at New York University prior to his appointment at the National Fire Academy, and has over 20 publications in fire related issues.

Dr. Onieal was appointed Superintendent of the National Fire Academy in 1995 and he continues in that role today. He was the first non-political appointee to the position and was selected after a competitive, nationwide search. Since accepting the Superintendent’s position Dr. Onieal has worked hard to reconnect the National Fire Academy with the nation’s fire service and fire service training systems. He has been a dedicated leader in the movement for improved education for fire service personnel and advancing the fire service as a true profession. He has been a passionate advocate of firefighter health and safety issues and has committed to lowering the nation’s injury and death rates for firefighters. In many cases he has performed these chores under the difficult conditions of a shrinking federal budget for fire programs.

In reaction to his award, Denis said, “Having a job you love means you never have to work a day in your life. I get to work with the terrific men and women at the National Fire Academy – the staff, the instructors and the people who make the place run. We get to meet firefighters from all over the country and help them improve their service delivery at home. In every classroom, you get to see the discovery of learning and the satisfaction of accomplishment. The Hudiburg Award is recognition of everything the NFA does, every day, all over the country, and I’m pleased to be a part of that.”

In awarding him the 2005 Hudiburg award, the IFSTA Executive Board recognizes the tireless efforts of Dr. Onieal in improving firefighter training and safety. His passion and accomplishments in these areas makes him a deserving candidate for this recognition.

IFSTA Holds 2005 Executive Board Election: Two New Members Named

The International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) held its 2005 Executive Board election at the 72nd Annual IFSTA Validation Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma on July 11, 2005. Three incumbent members of the Executive Board were reelected to their positions. They include:

- Executive Board Chair Jeffrey Morrisette, Fire Administrator, State of Connecticut
- Board Member Paul Valentine, Fire Marshal, Mount Prospect Illinois
- Board Member Paul Boecker III, Lieutenant, Sugar Grove, Illinois Fire Department

IFSTA is also pleased to announce the addition of two new members to the Executive Board. The first is Fire Chief Bradd K. Clark of the Claremore, Oklahoma Fire Department. Chief Clark has served on or chaired numerous IFSTA Validation Committees over the years. He currently serves as Chair of the IFSTA Aerial Apparatus Driver/Operator Handbook committee. Clark holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in Fire Protection and Safety and Fire and Emergency Management from Oklahoma State University. He is a graduate of the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Officer Program and was the first person in the State of Oklahoma to receive the Chief Fire Officer Designation from the Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation. Clark, a native of Poquoson, Virginia, has also served as the Fire Chief in Sands Springs, Oklahoma and the Fire Marshal in Stillwater, Oklahoma. He currently represents IFSTA on the NFPA 1500 committee.

Also appointed to the IFSTA Executive Board at this meeting was Dr. Lori Moore, Assistant to the General President of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) in charge of Technical Assistance for Labor Issues and Collective Bargaining, Fire and EMS Operations, and IAFF Field Services. She has extensive expertise in emergency response system design, staffing and deployment of mobile resources, system performance measurement, and evaluation. Dr. Moore began her career as a firefighter/paramedic with the Memphis, Tennessee Fire Department and Local 1784. She joined the IAFF headquarters operation in 1993 and has risen through the ranks of that organization. Dr. Moore holds an undergraduate degree in Education and EMS from the University of Memphis and has Master’s and Doctoral Degrees from the George Washington University School of Public Health. Dr. Moore is a respected lecturer, writer, and researcher with a long list of accomplishments over the course of her career. She serves on numerous boards and committees and has been the recipient of the prestigious James O. Page Achievement Award by the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC).

The IFSTA Executive Board welcomes these two outstanding individuals as the newest members of the Board. Formed by a group of state fire training directors in 1934, IFSTA’s mission is to develop and validate high-quality training materials for the fire service. Since their inception, IFSTA has worked with Fire Protection Publications (FFP) at Oklahoma State University (OSU) to produce and distribute these materials following their approval by the assigned IFSTA committee. FFP is an auxiliary enterprise of the College of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology at OSU in Stillwater, Oklahoma.
Smoke Signals
Tulsans among first in Oklahoma with smoke alarms designed for disabled people

Cindy Finkle, Research Coordinator at OSU, FPP, (left) is part of a group from the Fire Safety Solutions for Oklahomans with Disabilities project that is providing smoke alarms designed for people with hearing, vision and mobility disabilities. Here Tulsan George Harris, one of the first in Oklahoma to receive the alarms reviews fire safety messages provided for him. The project is a federal grant awarded to Oklahoma State University, Fire Protection Publications.

George Harris says he’s in another world, a quiet one, when he takes his hearing aids out before going to bed. Still, he’s confident he’ll know instantly if his smoke alarm goes off while he’s asleep.

Harris, an 87-year-old midtown Tulsa resident, is among the first in Oklahoma to receive a smoke alarm from an Oklahoma grant project specific for his hearing problem.

His alarm was made available through a $699,600 grant from the Federal Management Agency to Oklahoma State University’s Fire Protection Publications and Oklahoma ABLE Tech.

Oklahoma ABLE is a federally funded program to assist people with disabilities to increase access to, provision of and funding for assistive technology. Fire Protection Publications is the largest provider of firefighter training materials and curriculum to all 50 states.

The two agencies have combined their expertise to distribute and install free smoke alarms to Oklahomans with disabilities.

“That sucker really shakes,” Harris said, laughing heartily as part of his alarm shook in his hand.

The three-part alarm includes what looks like a regular smoke alarm, a strobe light and a heavy-duty vibrator said Cindy Finkle, research coordinator for Fire Safety Solutions for Oklahomans with Disabilities program that is providing smoke alarms for people with various disabilities including vision impairments.

“A smoke alarm is connected via radio frequency signal to the bedside strobe light and vibrator that goes between the mattress and box springs,” said Tom Ruane, senior technical editor at Fire Protection Publications.

The alarm has two batteries because it takes extra power to send the radio signal to the receiver. The receiver is plugged into the wall and powers the strobe light and bed shaker.

The radio frequency signal, which can work up to about 100 feet, sets off the strobe and vibrator in about 15 to 20 seconds.

“That’ll give me time to get out the window or however I can, head first or feet first,” Harris said.

After the installation, Finkle reviewed a variety of safety education material with Harris, and Thomas Hughes, graduate researcher with Fire Protection Publications, designed an escape plan.

“The preference, of course, is to get out of your house the fastest, easiest way, usually through your front or back door. But, in case those are blocked, we want you to know other ways out,” said Hughes who installed the alarm in Harris’ home.

“We want two ways out of every room, the regular way and an alternative,” Finkle said.

She said having an escape plan and reviewing it occasionally is good because people don’t think as quickly in an emergency situation.

“Now it is time for us to concentrate on the segment of society that comprises those who are at a greater risk of fire,” Finkle said.

“Once the project, still in development, is completed, the information will be on Oklahoma ABLE Tech’s Web site, Hughes said.

“The program is for people who are blind or have low vision, deaf or hard of hearing, or who have mobility impairments,” Finkle said.

“We have more than 100 applications so far for alarms for people with disabilities throughout the state and are on the way to Owasso for an installation as soon as we finish Mr. Harris,’” Finkle said.

Once the project, still in development, is completed, the information will be on Oklahoma ABLE Tech’s Web site, Hughes said.

“The program is for people who are blind or have low vision, deaf or hard of hearing, have mobility impairments,” said Nancy Trench, assistant director of Fire Protection Publications who developed the grant proposal.

She said according to the 2000 U.S. Census, 60 percent of people over the age of 65 reported having at least one disability.

“For the past 30 years, we have been concentrating on enabling people to protect themselves from fire,” Finkle said.

“As we made progress with the general public, we began to look at smaller segments of society who have a higher risk of death and injury by fire; the very young, the very old and the poor.

“Now it is time for us to concentrate on the segment of society that comprises about 30 percent of Oklahoma’s population - people with disabilities.” Finkle said.

For more information about how an individual or organization can participate in the Fire Safety Solutions for People with Disabilities project, contact Oklahoma ABLE Tech at (888) 885-5588 or (405) 744-9748.

ABLET Tech’s Web site is http://okabletech.okstate.edu

*Please note that show dates may be subject to change.