

The Gateway Report

- Gateway Eight -

Issues Critical to North Carolina's Fire Service Leadership

***A report presenting the conclusions and
recommendations from the participants of***

The Gateway VIII Conference

***Holiday Inn Brownstone
Raleigh, NC
February 20 – 22, 2008***

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Introduction

At the invitation of NC State Firemen's Association President Wesley D. Hutchins, on February 20, 2008 twenty-five elected or appointed fire service leaders from fourteen state organizations or agencies, met in Raleigh, NC for the eighth annual Gateway Conference. The title for "The Gateway Conference" recognizes that we stand in the "Gateway" to our future. We have the opportunity to lead our industry through a portal, or gateway, of positive change. This leadership opportunity gives us a chance to reflect upon lessons learned from past experience, and plan for our future direction. The following is a report documenting the discussions, conclusions, and recommendations of the participants of the conference.

The hope is that the fire service in North Carolina will benefit from the experiences of our leadership in attending the conference, and act upon the issues and recommendations in this report. Action should come at the association level, and at the individual level. Above all, it is hoped that the contents of this report will stimulate additional, continued thought and discussion on these and other issues relevant to our fire service. May these discussions create a passion to seek out improvement in all aspects of our service to the community we protect, and to those dependent upon us for leadership.

Purpose

The purpose of "The Gateway VIII Conference" and previous conferences was to facilitate a meeting among the leaders of North Carolina's fire service to foster consensus on key major issues facing our industry and develop a vision for working towards those issues in a consolidated manner.

Goals

Five goals were established for the conference (*original goals from Gateway 2000*).

1. Provide an environment for leaders from different arenas to meet and network.
2. Provide individual leadership development.
3. Identify the means to success and the roadblocks that create failure.
4. Identify 4-6 issues that all participants can agree upon as being "key" major issues to advancing our industry.
5. Develop a strategic vision and plan for partnering solutions to the key issues.

Participants

The participants of The Gateway Conference represent almost every professional fire service association in North Carolina, along with representatives of national and regional organizations from inside and outside the State. The following agencies/associations were represented at Gateway 8:

- North Carolina State Firemen’s Association (NCSFA)
- North Carolina Association of Fire Chief’s (NCAFC)
- Eastern North Carolina Firemen’s Association (ENCFA)
- Piedmont North Carolina Firefighter’s Association (PNCFA)
- Western North Carolina Firefighter’s Association (WNCFA)
- Professional Firefighters & Paramedics of North Carolina (PFFPNC)
- Volunteer Safety Workers Compensation Fund (VSWCF)
- North Carolina Society of Fire-Rescue Instructors (NCFRI)
- NC Association of Hazardous Materials Responders (NCHMR)
- North Carolina Fire & Life Safety Education Council (NCFLS)
- North Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM)
- North Carolina Fire Rescue Commission (NCFRC)
- North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS)
- National Volunteer Fire Council - NC Director (NVFC)

NAME	ORGANIZATION
AC Rich	N.C. Association of Hazardous Materials Responders
David English	Eastern N.C. Firefighters Association
Richard O'Brien	Professional Firefighters & Paramedics of NC/IAFF
Dave Anders	Professional Firefighters & Paramedics of NC/IAFF
Ken Mullen	N.C. Association of Fire Chiefs
Bill Walker	N.C. Association of Fire Chiefs
Len Needham	Piedmont N.C. FF Association
G. Winfield Abee	N.C. Community Colleges
Mike Hill	Volunteer Safety Workers Compensation Fund
Jeff Cash	National Volunteer Fire Council---NC Director
Larry Stanford	N.C. Fire Marshals Association
Paul F. Miller	N.C. State Firemen's Association
Randall Sexton	N.C. Fire and Life Safety Education Council
Jack Parker	N.C. State Firemen's Association
Jim Hanline	N.C. Society of Fire-Rescue Instructors
Steve Sloan	N.C. State Firemen's Association-Ex. Director
Jimmy Hensley	Western N.C. Firefighters Association
Steve Sloan	N.C. Fire and Rescue Commission
Tim Bradley	N.C. Office of State Fire Marshal
Wesley Hutchins	N.C. State Firemen's Association
Larry Hughes	N.C. Office of State Fire Marshal
Rick Plunkett	N.C. County Fire Marshals Association
Scott Alderman	N.C. State Firemen’s Association
Phil Batts	N.C. Community College System
Jackie Ireland	VFIS

Wesley Hutchins, President of the North Carolina State Firemen's Association served as the Gateway Conference Facilitator.

Vision

The members of Gateway VIII discussed and reaffirmed the original vision for Gateway conferences. It is the desire of the members that the participating agencies adopt the same vision for North Carolina's fire service.

Gateway Vision

"A fully inclusive NC fire service that fosters consensus on major issues facing our members and the citizens we serve, and that develops coalitions for working towards solutions."

Executive Summary

The members shared opportunities to interact in an open forum, individual organization issues and concerns, small work group and networking opportunities. These informal forums allowed each agency to review progress on previous Gateway issues, identify current issues of significance to North Carolina's fire service industry, select important topics for Gateway VIII, and identified the on-going tasks for existing Gateway committee or task forces.

After considerable debate, the conference agreed to focus new efforts of Gateway and its participant agencies to make a significant change on that one issue to improve the safety and survival of our industry members and to provide a better and safer service to our citizens.

The primary issue selected for Gateway VIII was to reaffirm the goals and objectives of the Gateway intent. Discussion centered on the original goals, purpose, and focus of Gateway. Positive outcomes of previous Gateway conferences were identified, those are as follows:

- Line of Duty (LODD) clarification and implementation "Hometown Heroes".
- VFIS/NCSFA "25 in 5".
- Sprinkler issues.
- Gateway focus fostering consensus.

Action plans involve three strategies:

Education: Heighten awareness and gain commitment at Chief Officer Level.

Training: Identify and define scope of problem, issue position statements and promote training and certification.

Regulation: Seek elimination of exemptions and explore statutory or procedural options like licensing.

Overall Issues

The following issues were identified by the group as the most significant issues facing the fire service in North Carolina today. The issues relate to both the citizens of North Carolina, who depend upon our industry for protection, as well as members of our industry and the environment in which we work. The issues are relevant to all of the more than 60,000 members of the North Carolina's fire and rescue services, whether from volunteer, paid, or combination departments, and regardless of the size of the community.

From the conference discussion, the issues were broken into two separate categories: 1) Issues to be supported (monitored), and 2) Issues to work on.

SUPPORT/MONITOR

- **Communication/Coordination**
 - N.C. State Firemen's Association will be the lead agency.
 - Communication efforts **must** improve with a focus on both "internal" (Gateway) communication and "external" (organizations represented) communication and coordination (top priority to keep the Gateway momentum).
- **Emergency Vehicle Operations and Drivers Safety – "25 in 5"**
 - Change in Attitudes from Chief down.
 - Update Instructional Materials.
 - Mandate.
 - Institutionalize Seat Belt Use.
 - Educate/Control Speed of Emergency Vehicles
 - Address Safe Use of POVs.

WORK and ACCOMPLISH

- **Firefighter Safety:**
 - Set a goal for measuring achievement, **25 in 5!**
 - Develop a campaign to change attitudes and enhance awareness of emergency vehicle operation safety at the chief officer level.
 - Analyze and define the scope of the seatbelt problem.

- Display activity geographically and by fire department or county. Possibly set up a link on the NCSFA web site to announce 100% seatbelt compliance within member departments (peer pressure).
- Issue a position statement with simple guidelines and seeking commitment statements from the fire service leadership.
- VSWCF to coordinate issues on lifting and moving injuries.

- **Junior Member Programs:**
 - Requirements for participation.
 - Fire service understanding.
 - Seriously evaluate age issues.
 - May be exposing to unnecessary risk without proper training.
 - Eligibility for and Impacts upon benefits.

- **Residential Sprinkler Issues:**
 - Support the group initiative and sprinkler coalition.
 - Educate Building Code Council and advocate for appointments, pursue code enhancements at state and national levels.
 - Support for BCC appointment (Reed Jarvis).
 - One voice (*education and public awareness*).

- **Benefits:**
 - Instructor Benefits (rewrite HB 1563 to introduce in the short session).
 - Retirement equity comparable to North Carolina Law Enforcement.
 - *Retirement bill equity.*
 - Continue to advocate for inclusion.
 - *Participation in local government retirement by combination department employees – continue to advocate inclusion.*
 - Pension fund equity (career vs. volunteer retirement draw).
 - IRS/Disability coding (1099 coding).
 - 401K equality.
 - Non-profit vs. career retirement.
 - Health and wellness issues.
 - Heart healthy.
 - Wellness programs.

Reoccurring Issues

Other topics that continue to generate discussion, and which were also identified during this conference were:

- Minimum Competencies.
- Recruitment and Retention.
- Organizational/Interpersonal Communications.
- Political Involvement.
- NC Fire Problem – At Risk Populations.
- Mandatory use of NIFIRS.

- Training & Career Development (task force work in progress).
- Funding.

Recommendations

Strategic Recommendation

Each agency agreed to the following strategic actions to address implement the Gateway Plan:

- Each participating Gateway organization will present this report to their governing body and/or membership for approval and adoption by June 1, 2008.
- A written correspondence stating the particular associations (organization) commitment and approval will be forwarded to the N.C. State Firemen's Association also by June 1, 2008.
- Each participating association will include the Gateway Vision, Issues and Priorities presented in The Gateway VIII Report to update their own strategic plan.
- Each association will disseminate a briefing paper or executive summary to association members to provide awareness of major issues and priorities identified in Gateway VIII.
- Each association (partnering) organization will advocate the use of their association "logo" to be used when conveying consensus issues that originate in Gateway.
- Each association (partnering) organization will strive to be an integral part of Gateway and openly and honestly voice concerns and issues directly related to their membership.
- Gateway updates and reports will be presented at each association meeting.

The members agreed that an overall strategic effort must be made to market Gateway initiatives and create a demand among our state industry for Gateway leadership, direction, and information.

Follow-up

The participants of The Gateway VIII Conference will meet in conjunction with the North Carolina State Firemen's and North Carolina Chief's conference in August to make progress reports. The agreed upon schedule for Gateway is as follows:

- Gateway Conference – **February** of each year.
 - Central location (***Greensboro meeting location was strongly suggested***).

Gateway VIII Conference 2008

- Reports, updates, and accomplishments.
- Agency reports and accomplishments.
- Agency concerns, issues and change in leadership.
- Annual Conference – **August** of each year.
 - Gateway report overview.
 - Updates and accomplishments.
- Mid-Winter Conference – **January** of each year.
 - Reports and/or concerns.
 - Gateway update