



2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 14-17, 2026 • DULUTH, MN

800-743-0911 • OFFICE@MSFCA.ORG • WWW.MSFCA.ORG/ANNUAL-CONFERENCE

SYMPOSIUM HIGHLIGHTS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15

9:00 am – 10:00 am

**Opening Symposium: Bitter to Brass:
Better Conversations with Real Purpose**

Chief Gene Landers

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17

8:00 am – 10:00 am

**Closing Symposium:
Lead the Culture
or Inherit It: What Fire Service
Culture Protects, Tolerates, and
Passes Down**

*Chief Chris Armstrong, Founder,
The Thinking Chief Leadership Group, LLC*

REGISTER TODAY!





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Greg Peterson
MSFCA President

On behalf of the Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Association, I am honored to welcome you to the 2026 MSFCA Annual Conference in Duluth.

I'm excited for the opportunity to bring together fire service leaders from across Minnesota for three days of learning, networking, collaboration, and fellowship. The Annual Conference continues to be one of the most valuable opportunities for chiefs, officers, and department personnel to share ideas, strengthen relationships, and grow professionally.

This year's conference will feature a strong lineup of educational sessions, the Memorial Service, Awards Banquet, and Vendor Show—along with opportunities to connect with industry partners

and fellow fire service professionals from every corner of the state. Our goal each year is to build on past successes and provide an even more meaningful and impactful experience for everyone who attends. As an added benefit, fire chiefs registered for the conference may receive complimentary expo passes and administrative track passes for members of their department.

We encourage departments to register early to assist with planning for meeting space, meals, and refreshments while also taking advantage of discounted early registration rates.

I invite you to join us in Duluth and help make the 2026 MSFCA Annual Conference our best one yet. I look forward to seeing you there.

Stay safe, and we'll see you in Duluth!

Greg Peterson, MSFCA President

CONFERENCE DETAILS

Conference Location

All the sessions, exhibits, meals, and networking events will be held at the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center unless otherwise noted.

Complimentary Expo Passes

If a department's Fire Chief is registered for the Annual Conference, they receive complimentary expo passes for the trade show on Thursday, October 16 to share with non-registered individuals from their department. Expo passes do not include meals. To take advantage of the complimentary passes, please complete the form on the MSFCA website.

Administrative Support Track

If a department's Fire Chief is registered for the Annual Conference, department administrative support personnel can attend the Administrative Support Track Session on Thursday, October 15 from 8:30am – 2:00pm for no cost. There is a separate registration form for the Administrative Support Track on the MSFCA website.

Cancellation Policy

A cancellation penalty of 50% shall be imposed if cancellation occurs between 30 and 60 days from the first day of the event. If cancellation occurs under 30 calendar days of the first event day, a 100% penalty shall be imposed. Substitutions are permitted and not subject to a fee. Extenuating circumstances, such as a death in the family, will be handled on a case-by-case basis, please e-mail the MSFCA Office at office@msfca.org.

MAKE HOTEL RESERVATIONS EARLY - ROOMS WILL GO FAST!

HAMPTON INN - CANAL PARK

310 Canal Park Dr, Duluth, MN 55802
218-720-3000

HOLIDAY INN & SUITES DULUTH DOWNTOWN

200 W First St, Duluth, MN 55802
218-722-1202

THE INN ON LAKE SUPERIOR

350 Canal Park Dr, Duluth, MN 55802
218-726-1111

PIER B

800 W Railroad St, Duluth, MN 55802
218-481-8888

THE SUITES HOTEL AT WATERFRONT PLAZA

325 S Lake Ave, Duluth, MN 55802
218-727-4663

**MENTION YOU ARE WITH THE MSFCA
TO RESERVE AT A DISCOUNTED RATE.**

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SCHEDULE & SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2026

5:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Registration

7:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Welcome Reception

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2026

7:00 am – 5:00 pm

Registration

8:30 am – 9:00 am

**Conference Welcome/
Opening Ceremonies/
Business Meeting**

8:30 am – 2:00 pm

**Administrative Support Track:
Coming Soon**

9:00 am – 10:00 am

**Opening Symposium: Bitter to Brass:
Better Conversations with Real
Purpose**

Chief Gene Landers



Recruitment and retention are not failing because people “don’t want to serve anymore.” They are failing because we stopped having honest conversations with purpose—about expectations, culture, leadership, and humanity.

This course cuts through excuses, generational blame, and surface-level fixes. Participants will

examine why departments lose good people, why others never walk through the door, and what actually changes when organizations choose clarity, inclusion, accountability, and communication over silence and tradition alone.

Departments will explore how internal behavior shapes external reputation, why recruitment begins long before a social media post is ever made, and how retention is built through trust, opportunity, ownership, and meaningful leadership.

This is not a class about making flyers or improving Facebook engagement. This is a class about people.

10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Exhibit Hall opens (includes Lunch)

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Reception in Exhibit Hall

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2026

7:00 am – 2:00 pm

Registration

8:00 am – 11:30 am

Morning Educational Sessions

• **Chiefs’ Issues: Leading Through Tragedy: Preparing Your Fire Department for the Unexpected**

BJ Jungmann, Fire Chief & Neal Dwyer, Assistant Chief, Burnsville

This leadership course draws on the lessons learned from the tragedy of February 18, 2024, where the city of Burnsville lost the lives of a

firefighter/paramedic and two police officers in the line of duty, and another officer was injured. The class is designed to equip fire chiefs and emergency service leaders with the knowledge and strategies needed to prepare their organizations for the possibility of a similar tragedy.

Participants will explore critical preparedness measures, including building resilience, communication protocols, interdepartmental coordination, and support systems for personnel and families affected by loss or injury. The course emphasizes proactive planning to strengthen organizational cohesion and community trust during times of crisis. Leaders will leave with actionable steps to foster a culture of preparedness, care, and leadership that can guide their teams through the most challenging moments with strength and compassion.

• **EMS: Inside the Office of EMS**

Dylan Ferguson, Director, Office of Emergency Medical Services

This three-hour session provides fire and EMS leaders with an inside look at the Minnesota Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS). Participants will learn about OEMS responsibilities, recent initiatives, the State EMS Strategic Plan, regulatory and investigative processes, EMS credentialing requirements, and common compliance issues. Through practical examples and lessons learned from enforcement trends, attendees will gain valuable insight into working effectively with OEMS while supporting compliant, high-quality EMS operations.

• **Hot Topics: National Fire Protection Association – A Peek Behind the Curtain**

Meredith Hawes, NFPA, Regional Director

For nearly 130 years, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has led efforts to reduce death, injury, and property loss from fire, electrical, and related hazards through the development of more than 300 codes and standards used worldwide. This session provides an overview of NFPA’s standards development process, opportunities for involvement, and the ongoing Consolidation Project—streamlining over 100 Emergency Response and Responder Safety standards, including the integration of key firefighter PPE requirements into NFPA 1970 and the continued evolution of apparatus safety requirements within NFPA 1901, Standard for Automotive Fire Apparatus. Participants will also experience a live demonstration of NFPA LiNK®, NFPA’s digital platform providing instant access to codes, legacy editions, expert commentary, and collaborative tools designed to help professionals work smarter and enhance life safety outcomes.

• **Lessons Learned**

The workshop will be a classroom setting typically addressing special incidents that have happened over the past year in Minnesota and the lessons learned from these events from the responders of these incidents.

• **MnFIRE NEXT: Firefighter Focused, Updates and Adventures**

Statewide Firefighter Health & Wellness Update. This class will concentrate on the MnFIRE Mission of safeguarding Minnesota’s Firefighters. While the mission remains unchanged, data supports MnFIRE’s progress. This session will explore the organization’s current state, recent research findings, and new services. Participants

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SCHEDULE & SESSION DESCRIPTIONS *CONTINUED*

Friday, October 16, 2026 continued

will gain insights into the comprehensive range of services offered and learn how to access them.

- **Professional Development: Privileged Service, Honored Trust, and Pledged Accountability**

Daniel E. DeYear, Deputy Chief (Ret.), Dallas

This presentation reinforces the core values that define the fire service—trust, accountability, and service. Firefighters rely on one another in high-stakes environments where integrity, teamwork, and dedication can mean the difference between success and failure. Through discussion, real-world scenarios, and reflection, participants will explore how these principles strengthen crew cohesion, enhance safety, and uphold the public's confidence in the fire department.

By the end of this course, firefighters will be able to:

- Build and maintain trust
 - Own accountability
 - Embody a spirit of service
- **Safety: Electric Vehicle Emergencies: Building Confidence Through Knowledge and Experience**

Aaron Sour, PhD, Greg Downer & Jesse Ruhmann

As electric vehicles continue to become more prevalent on our roadways, first responders must be prepared to safely and effectively manage incidents involving these evolving vehicle systems. This interactive session provides attendees with a practical foundation in electric vehicle technology, fire service response considerations, and operational tactics for EV-related emergencies.

Drawing on Vehicle Response Training's research-based curriculum, real-world incident analysis, and extensive experience educating emergency responders, participants will gain a deeper understanding of EV construction, battery systems, hazards, and response priorities. Through hands-on interaction with an electric vehicle and its components, attendees will have the opportunity to examine critical vehicle systems firsthand and connect classroom concepts to real-world applications.

Whether responding to collisions, fires, or other vehicle emergencies, attendees will leave with greater confidence, enhanced situational awareness, and actionable knowledge to improve responder safety and operational decision-making when encountering electric vehicles.

- **State Fire Marshal: Current MN OSHA and Your Fire Department**

Hear from experts from MN OSHA, and other organizations, and have opportunities to ask questions about your compliance topics. OSHA has provided support to fire departments in Minnesota since the inception of the 1980 Fire Brigade Standard. The State Fire Marshal (SFM), Minnesota Fire Chiefs Association (MSFCA), Minnesota State Fire Department Association (MSFDA), MN OSHA, Minnesota Association of Townships, MPFF, and League of Minnesota Cities, have joined forces to break down barriers for fire department compliance. We will examine requirements, discuss tools that are available to assist fire

departments, best practices, and identify support opportunities. This course is for individuals who are responsible for fire department safety and regulations. Additionally, training officers that are responsible for developing training programs targeting state and federal compliance with training competencies in accordance with MN Statute.

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Lunch

12:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Afternoon Educational Sessions

- **Chiefs' Issues: Sharpening the Tools in Your Leadership Toolbox**
Ron Hultgren, PhD & Mike Dobesh

This session will provide an overview of leadership tools for every leader. While leadership theories are abundant, there are few practical takeaways. This session will discuss theory and provide insight into tangible practices that leaders can implement.

Regardless of your current stage in your leadership journey, you will gain new insights. Even the most experienced leaders may feel stuck at times, and this session will highlight sharpening those tools to overcome those challenges.

- **Emergency Management: Utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Emergency Planning and Leadership**
Greg Hayes

Building upon the foundational concepts introduced in the 2025 Emergency Planning class at the Chief Conference, this advanced course at the Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Conference is designed for emergency service leaders prepared to operationalize Artificial Intelligence (AI) in real-world settings. Participants will explore practical, field-tested applications of AI that enhance situational awareness, improve decision-making speed, and strengthen leadership effectiveness during high-risk, high-consequence incidents.

This follow-up session moves beyond theory and focuses on implementation. Attendees will engage in scenario-based exercises that integrate AI tools into incident action planning, resource allocation, and multi-agency coordination. Emphasis will be placed on leveraging AI for predictive analytics, real-time data synthesis, and crisis communication—while maintaining command presence, accountability, and ethical decision-making.

Participants will leave with actionable strategies, templates, and tools to begin implementing AI within their departments, along with a clearer understanding of how to lead confidently at the intersection of technology and emergency response.

- **Hot Topics: National Fire Protection Association – A Peek Behind the Curtain**
Meredith Hawes

Repeat of the morning educational session.

- **Lessons Learned**

Repeat of the morning educational session.

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SCHEDULE & SESSION DESCRIPTIONS *CONTINUED*

Friday, October 16, 2026 continued

- **Professional Development: Privileged Service, Honored Trust, and Pledged Accountability**

Daniel E. DeYear, Deputy Chief (Ret.), Dallas

Repeat of the morning educational session.

- **Public Education: Fire and Life Safety Education: Tips, Tools, and Thinking Outside the Box**

Lisa George, Sugar RX/ SmARt Kids AR & Kellie Murphy-Ringate, Excelsior Fire District

Add more tools to your fire and life safety educational toolbox with no extra cost to the fire department. There is no complicated technology, expensive props, or endless fundraising required. Learn how to use the resources your fire department already has, such as firefighter gear and apparatus to reinforce fire and life safety messages.

Fire and Life Safety Open House, how to start planning your fire departments first or enhance what is already in place. Students will get tips on promotions, organization, logistics, resources, and much more.

How to get back into the schools or into more classrooms. Fire departments that have not been able to get back into the schools after 2020 or want to teach more students or grades in the schools will be given tips and strategies and how to get the fire departments boot back in the door.

A demonstration on how to use the FREE SmARt Kids AR Experience that is at your fingertips to use during your fire departments open house, community events, MN Night to Unite, Truck or Treat events, or anytime you are teaching. The creator of SmARt Kids AR will also give firefighters tips and tools to create and manage social media.

Networking and sharing ideas will be a welcomed component in the session.

Lesson plans, curriculums, handouts, template letters, checklists, and other resources will be made available to students.

- **Safety: Electric Vehicle Emergencies: Building Confidence Through Knowledge and Experience**

Aaron Sour, PhD, Greg Downer & Jesse Ruhmann

Repeat of the morning educational session.

- **State Fire Marshal: Modernizing Fire Incident Reporting: NERIS Functionality**

Craig Milani, Fire Technology & Analytics Administrator; Joel Paylor, Fire Incident Reporting Program Manager; Angela Contreras, Deputy State Fire Marshal Supervisor - Data and Education

Minnesota has been utilizing the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) for nearly a year now. New modules, new fields, and new terms continue to be developed. Course content will include the most recent updates with NERIS, fire incident reporting requirements, and utilize scenarios for hands-on practice with the NERIS incident report. The course will also give an overview on how fire incident reporting is important for your community risk reduction plan.

This course is for individuals who complete fire incident reports in accordance with MN Statute, training officers who can teach other department staff how to complete fire incident reports, and fire officers and chiefs who want to learn more about how NERIS impacts their department.

5:30 pm – 6:00 pm

Memorial Service

6:00 pm – 6:30 pm

Social

6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Awards Banquet

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2026

8:00 am – 10:00 am



Lead the Culture or Inherit It: What Fire Service Culture Protects, Tolerates, and Passes Down

Chief Chris Armstrong, Founder, The Thinking Chief Leadership Group, LLC

Every department has a culture. The question isn't whether it's being built — it's whether anyone is building it on purpose.

Fire service organizations are constantly teaching — through who gets protected, who gets corrected, what gets tolerated, and what gets passed down. Most of that teaching happens without anyone writing it down, scheduling it, or even noticing it. The kitchen table teaches. The double standard teaches. The leader who looks away teaches. And what the department learns becomes the culture that the next generation of leaders will either inherit or change.

In this 2-hour interactive session, Chief Chris Armstrong examines the specific mechanisms that create, sustain, and spread culture in fire service organizations — and gives leaders at every rank a framework for understanding what their department is actually learning, and what they personally are teaching.

Attendees Will Leave With:

- An understanding of why every department is already teaching — whether it intends to or not
- Tools to identify the unspoken rulebook operating in their organization
- A clear picture of why toxic high performers cause more cultural damage than weak ones
- The ability to distinguish between a disciplined room and a scared room
- A framework for recognizing how silence functions as a culture signal at every rank
- Practical language for naming and interrupting culture drift before it becomes the new normal
- A personal reckoning with the lessons they are currently teaching — and whether those lessons are intentional

This session is built for leaders at all ranks. The conversation is direct, the examples are drawn from real fire service organizations, and the work is designed to stay with attendees long after the conference ends.



2026 Annual Conference Registration Form

Only one (1) registration per form. Duplicate the form as needed for additional registrations.

You can also register online at www.msfcfa.org/page/annual-conference

ATTENDEE INFO

Full Name: _____ Title: _____

Department/Organization: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

REGISTRATION

MSFCA Conference Registration	Before Sept. 1 st	After Sept. 1 st
Member Full Conference Registration	☐ \$325	☐ \$350
Non-Member Full Conference Registration	☐ \$400	☐ \$425
Awards Banquet Ticket (Full conference registration receive 1 complimentary ticket)	☐ \$40	
Partners Program	☐ \$55/person	

First time attending the MSFCA Annual Conference? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Total

\$

PAYMENT

PAY BY CHECK: Make checks payable and return with form to: MSFCA 6737 W. Washington St., Suite 4270, Milwaukee, WI 53214.

PAY BY CREDIT CARD: To pay by credit card call the MSFCA Office at 800-743-0911 to pay over the phone.

Credit card information sent by email will not be accepted.

ATTENDEE EVENTS

Annual Conference Events

Please check all that you plan to attend:

- ☐ **Welcome Reception**
Wednesday, 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
- ☐ **Welcome & Opening Symposium**
Thursday, 8:30 am – 10:00 am
- ☐ **Lunch Inside Vendor Show**
Thursday, 11:30 am – 12:30 pm
- ☐ **Reception in Exhibit Hall**
Thursday, 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm
- ☐ **Lunch**
Friday, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- ☐ **Memorial Service**
Friday, 5:30 pm – 6:00 pm
- ☐ **Social**
Friday, 6:00 pm – 6:30 pm
- ☐ **Awards Banquet**
Friday, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm
- ☐ **Closing Symposium**
Saturday, 8:00 am – 10:00 am

Friday Educational Sessions

(Please select choice #1 and #2 for each, both AM and PM sessions)

Time	#	Title
AM Sessions 8:00 am – 11:30 am		Chiefs' Issues: Leading Through Tragedy: Preparing Your Fire Department for the Unexpected
		EMS: Inside the Office of EMS
		Hot Topics: National Fire Protection Association – A Peek Behind the Curtain
		Lessons Learned
		MnFIRE NEXT: Firefighter Focused, Updates and Adventures
		Professional Development: Privileged Service, Honored Trust, and Pledged Accountability
		Safety: Electric Vehicle Emergencies: Building Confidence Through Knowledge and Experience
		State Fire Marshal: Current MM OSHA and Your Fire Department
PM Sessions 12:30 pm – 4:00 pm		Chiefs' Issues: Sharpening the Tools in Your Leadership Toolbox
		Emergency Management: Utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Emergency Planning and Leadership
		Hot Topics: National Fire Protection Association – A Peek Behind the Curtain
		Lessons Learned
		Professional Development: Privileged Service, Honored Trust, and Pledged Accountability
		Public Education: Fire and Life Safety Education: Tips, Tools, and Thinking Outside the Box
		Safety: Electric Vehicle Emergencies: Building Confidence Through Knowledge and Experience
		State Fire Marshal: Modernizing Fire Incident Reporting: NERIS Functionality