

Fire Marshal Paul Ritchie Dies in Crash

By Bob Sullivan
Office of the Sheriff
Cabell County, West Virginia

Paul C. Ritchie, Jr., an Assistant State Fire Marshal for the State of West Virginia, died on June 16, 2005 following a motorcycle accident in Proctorville, Ohio. With his passing, the law enforcement and firefighting communities in West Virginia suffered the loss of one of its most talented public servants.

Paul was not only known for his extensive expertise in fire investigation but also for his skills as a bomb technician. He lectured across the state and across the nation on explosives recognition and investigations. He served as part of the protection detail for our political leaders, including the President of the United States.

His involvement in high profile cases over the past ten years is well documented. However, even more than his technical knowledge, he was known for his sense of dedication to his family and his community.

If you looked only at his facial expressions, you would have missed his intelligence, his sense of humor, and his quiet, humble nature. He worked with passion; he worked long hours and touched everyone who ever met him.

Paul was undeniably one of the bravest men I ever knew. He was a man who voluntarily and proudly chose a life of duty, honor and danger over any other career path he could have taken. He knew full well that in his line of work the slightest mistake could have grave consequences. He graciously accepted the challenge.

He was a member of the West Virginia Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators, the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators, and the Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge #122.

He has served on the adjunct faculties of West Virginia University, Marshall University and the Regional Education Service Agency. He is a former Emergency Medical Technician, Paramedic and firefighter. He also served as Chief of the Barboursville Volunteer Fire Department for ten years. He was among only a select few of Certified Bomb Technicians in the state.

He dedicated countless hours of his personal time to the Forensic Science Program at Marshall University, where he not only lectured, but also mentored numerous students over the past years. The Paul C. Ritchie Award for Excellence is presented to a Forensic Science student each year in recognition of his contribution to that program.

His extensive study in the field of terrorism and potential threats against

the United States had him warning us of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida long before they became household names in this country. He began training first responders to be prepared for the inevitable attacks years in advance of the September 11, 2001 tragedies.

Paul was preceded in death by his parents, Paul Cyrus Ritchie, Sr., and Marguerite Pack Ritchie. Survivors include his wife, Patricia Ann Ashworth Ritchie; a daughter, Michelle Ann Haddox of Huntington; and grandchildren Theodore Prescott Haddox, IV, and Jacob Paul Ritchie Haddox.

His list of friends is literally endless. We may never know exactly why Paul Ritchie died when he did, but we know that he would not want any of us to be distracted by his passing. The thousands who turned out to mourn his death were part of a well deserved distraction.

We will continue to celebrate his life and tell stories about his antics for many years to come. He gave honor to our values. He was an outstanding fire marshal, a dedicated public servant, and a loving husband and father.

And, he was our friend. His absence will be felt for a long, long time.

US Fire Administration Releases Confined Structure Fires Reports

News Release Date: March 13, 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In 2002, there were approximately 52,000 confined structure fire incidents reported to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) according to two new reports issued today by the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Fire Administration (USFA).

Confined structure fires are small fire incidents that are limited in scope, are generally confined to noncombustible containers, rarely result in serious injury or large content losses, and are expected to have no accompanying property losses due to flame damage.

“This is the first time the U.S. Fire Administration has published a report on confined fires,” said Charlie Dickinson, Deputy United States Fire Administrator. “This report will aid the fire service and fire prevention communities in understanding the nature of such fires.”

The reports were developed by the National Fire Data Center, part of the U.S. Fire Administration, and are based on data from the 2002 NFIRS database. The *Confined Structure Fires* report examines the characteristics of small fires that occur in structures and that are contained or confined as recorded by fire department personnel using the NFIRS data collection report. The *Investigation of Confined Structure Fires* report is part of the USFA’s Topical Fire Research Series and summarizes the detailed analysis and findings of the full report.

Confined structure fires account for 37 percent of all reported structure fires and 38 percent of residential structure fires. More than half of all confined structure fires are confined cooking fires.

A copy of the full report, *Confined Structure Fires* can be downloaded from: <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/statistics/reports/pubs/confined-structure-fires.shtm>

A copy of the topical report, *Investigation of Confined Structure Fires*, can be downloaded from: <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/statistics/reports/pubs/tfrs.shtm>

USFA Arson Fire Statistics

- An estimated 36,500 intentionally set structure fires occurred in 2004.
- Intentionally set fires in structures resulted in 320 civilian deaths.
- Intentionally set structure fires also resulted in \$714,000,000 in property loss.

- 36,000 intentionally set vehicle fires occurred, an increase of 18.0% from a year ago, and caused \$165,000,000 in property damage, an increase of 25.0% from a year ago.

The following table shows the number of fires, deaths, and dollar loss due to intentionally set structure fires that occurred from 1995 to 2004. Note: Arson injury data is not reported to NFPA.

Year	Fires	Arson Fire Statistics	
		Deaths	Direct Dollar Loss In Millions
1995 ¹	90,500	740	\$1,647
1996	85,500	520	\$1,405
1997	78,500	445	\$1,309
1998	76,000	470	\$1,249
1999	72,000	370	\$1,281
2000	75,000	505	\$1,340
2001 ²	45,500	330	\$1,013
2001 ³	45,500	2,451	\$33,440
2002	44,500	350	\$919
2003	37,500	305	\$692
2004	36,500	320	\$714

¹ Includes 168 civilian deaths that occurred in the explosion and fire in the federal office building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995.

² Excludes the events of September 11, 2001.

³ These estimates reflect the number of deaths, injuries, and dollar loss directly related to the events of September 11, 2001.

Source: National Fire Protection Association Fire Loss in the U.S. During 2004 Abridged Report.

USFA State Fire Statistics

The fire problem varies from region to region in the United States. This often is a result of climate, poverty, education, demographics, and other causal factors. The following table shows each state's fire death rate per capita for 2003, the last year that final reports are available.

The national fire death rate in 2003 was 13.0 deaths per million population. States are listed by rate from highest to lowest. The higher death rates in 2003 were in Rhode Island, Mississippi, and Tennessee, followed by South Carolina, Alabama and West Virginia. West Virginia's rate was 24.9.

In 2003, 100 deaths resulted from the Station Night Club fire in West Warwick, Rhode Island thus impacting the fire death rate for that State. The states with the lowest rates were Colorado, Hawaii, and Wyoming.

West Virginia remains high in the fire death category. According to records compiled during the July 2005 – June 2005 fiscal year, the Fire Marshal's Office responded to 1,021 requests for investigations. There were 69 fatalities in 52 fires. Of those 52 fatal fires, 20 were ruled incendiary.

Experts Question Arson Convictions

This is the article that has been widely circulated around fire investigation circles this past month. It is the product of a recent effort by The Innocence Project. Fire Expert John Lentini paired with Attorney Barry Scheck in Texas as they reviewed the arson conviction of a Texas man. (AP) – We hear it after a smoky blaze that

destroys a house, or an all-night warehouse inferno: The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Now those investigations themselves are getting a hard look, including the case of a Texas man executed two years ago for a house fire that killed his three little girls. Fire experts say he was wrongfully convicted because junk science was accepted as expert testimony.

The implications go far beyond Texas. More than 5,000 people are imprisoned nationwide for arson, and at least some are likely to have been wrongfully convicted, said five experts who analyzed testimony in the Texas case. The experts included veteran arson investigators and people with backgrounds in science and engineering who have taught other investigators.

For more on this article, visit the CNN.com link listed below.

• <http://www.cnn.com/2006/LAW/05/07/arson.flawed.convictions.ap/index.html>

Fall Seminar Set

The Training and Education Committee has announced that the Annual Fall Seminar topic has been set and the arrangements are moving forward. The Fire and Arson Fatal Fire Scene Investigation program will be presented.

Based upon a request from a number of members we have secured the services of Joe "Jody" B. Cooper to present the instruction. The Chapter has entered into an agreement with the Fire Science Training Institute, a division of the Public Agency Training Council (PATC) and will co-sponsor the two-day seminar. Conditions of the agreement allow the Chapter to reduce the normal tuition by 50% in order to allow our members to attend at our normal seminar rate.

The seminar will be held on Thursday and Friday, September 21 – 22, 2006 at the Beckley Country Inn and Suites.

Jody Cooper is a 29 year veteran of Law Enforcement and the Fire Service. The last 26 years he has been involved in the Origin and Cause Investigation of Fires. Jody holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice and Accounting. He is a Certified Police Officer, Nationally Certified Fire Investigator, and a Certified Instructor in the field of Law Enforcement, Fire Investigation and Fire Suppression. Since 1978 Jody has conducted over 2600 Fire Scene Investigations and has

been qualified both in District and Federal Court as an Expert Witness. Cooper is the 2002 President of the International Association of Arson Investigators, Oklahoma Chapter.

The purpose of this course of training is to provide Fire Investigators, Law Enforcement Officers, Insurance Investigators, and Prosecutors with an in-depth course on the Investigation of Fire Fatalities.

A competent investigation of a fatal fire scene demands an understanding of basic procedures, and appreciation of the "why" of certain actions and close attention to detail in carrying them out. This two (2) day training deals with the considerations, guidelines, and procedures that will help avoid an oversight, insure thoroughness of the fatal fire investigation and to comply with requirements that may bear on the outcome of the investigation.

Recipient of John Janey Scholarship Announced

The West Virginia Chapter of the IAAI is pleased to announce the 2005-2006 recipient of the Janey Scholarship. Ms. Haley Lewis of Cross Lanes, West Virginia is a freshman in the Marshall University College of Science. She is a biological science major.

Nationwide Insurance Company and the West Virginia Chapter established the Janey Scholarship at Marshall University in 1990. It is named in honor of the Putnam County Deputy Sheriff who lost his life on August 19, 1989 while attempting to arrest an arson suspect. Since the inception of the John D. Janey Scholarship in 1990, the West Virginia Chapter has assisted 16 college students with their tuition expenses at Marshall University.