



Virginia Fire Services Board Fire and EMS Study Manual

**An informative guide for Fire and EMS Studies conducted
by the Virginia Fire Services Board pursuant to § 9.1-
203.4**

Prepared by the
Virginia Fire Services Board
Virginia Department of Fire Programs

Fire and EMS Study Manual

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Fire and EMS Study Overview

The Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB) is a policy board appointed by the Governor of Virginia consisting of 15 members. The duties of the VFSB are outlined in *Code of Virginia* § 9.1-203. One of the duties outlined in § 9.1-203 states the board can “provide technical assistance and advice to local fire departments, other fire services organizations, and local governments through Fire and Emergency Medical Services studies done in conjunction with the Department of Fire Programs.” Studies include representatives from the Office of Emergency Medical Services at the Department of Health (OEMS), the Department of Fire Programs (VDFP), the VFSB, and when applicable the Department of Forestry (DOF).

The VFSB has been conducting studies of fire and EMS systems free of charge for over thirty years. Each study results in a report that offers an unbiased look at a locality's fire and EMS system. Studies could consist of a preliminary review of documents, site visits with local departments and government entities, a public hearing, and a presentation of the finished report to the local government body. In an effort to produce an accurate and thorough study, the VFSB limits the number of Type I studies it completes in 18 months to four. The number of Type II reviews is determined by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs with consultation from the board. This number can be increased by the VFSB in the event of an emergency. Studies shall not be construed as legal advice to a locality or department.

The goal of a fire and EMS Study or review is to provide guidance for localities to promote safety and risk reduction in their community.

Role of VFSB

The Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB) has a statutory role of providing these studies/reviews in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The VFSB is the primary sponsor of fire and EMS studies/reviews and it is under their authority that the process exists. The VFSB shall, through the Department of Fire Programs, receive applications, review applications, and select localities for studies/reviews during each application period. The VFSB shall also oversee the process and make necessary changes to the Fire and EMS Study Manual. All VFSB members shall participate in one or more fire and EMS studies/reviews when available.

The VFSB Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee shall be the entity that accepts applications and recommends approval to the VFSB. This committee shall oversee the



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process and review draft studies prior to the VFSB. The Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee shall select a Fire and EMS Study Coordinator from the VFSB to work with each locality and the Department of Fire Programs, as deemed appropriate by the Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee Chair.

The VFSB Fire and EMS Study Coordinator should be a VFSB member with relevant fire service experience that serves as a liaison with the Department of Fire Programs and the locality that the study/review is being completed in.

The coordinator shall:

- Report to the Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee updates on ongoing studies/reviews
- Communicate with VDFP staff regarding the scheduling of studies/reviews and collection of documents
- Communicate with the locality, in consultation with VDFP staff, on the progress of the studies/reviews
- Assist the Vice Chair of the VFSB with selecting members to participate in studies/reviews

Role of VDFP, DOF, and OEMS

The Virginia Department of Fire Programs, Department of Forestry, and Office of Emergency Medical Services provide technical assistance and support to the Virginia Fire Services Board.

VDFP:

The Department of Fire Programs provides technical assistance as a part of the study team and provides logistical support. VDFP staff serving on Type I studies include the Government Affairs Manager and the Community Risk Reduction Coordinator. The Vice Chair of the VFSB or the Executive Director of VDFP may also add additional staff members, when required. These staff members will provide comments/recommendations for the report.

The VDFP Community Risk Reduction Coordinator will primarily complete the Type II reviews with the assistance of a VFSB member.

VDFP will also serve as the primary contact point for localities applying for a study/review and will retain records of fire and EMS studies/reviews. VDFP will also provide logistical support to include drafting schedules, providing documentation, and securing lodging. The final report will be drafted by VDFP staff in consultation with the



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study team. These duties primarily fall to the Government Affairs Manager or their designee.

DOF:

The Department of Forestry will provide a local forester or other qualified member of their staff to assist the VFSB with Type I studies when requested. A DOF representative is not necessarily required for each study. The Fire and EMS Study Coordinator should use discretion based on the request of the locality regarding whether a DOF representative is needed. The DOF representative will be a member of the study team. DOF per diem is billed to DOF, while lodging is provided by the Department of Fire Programs.

OEMS:

The Office of Emergency Medical Services will provide a qualified member of their staff to assist the VFSB with Type I studies or by request for Type II reviews. The representative should be well versed in EMS regulations, EMS systems, and best practices in EMS. The Office of EMS representatives will be members of the study team and offer comments/recommendations to be included in the report. OEMS per diem is billed to OEMS, while lodging is provided by the Department of Fire Programs.

Fire and EMS Study Types

Type I Study: A Type I study is a full-length study requested by the locality's governing body to be completed by the Virginia Fire Services Board under *Code of Virginia* § 9.1-203. Only four (4) Type I studies will be completed every 18 months. A Type I study consists of 2-3 VFSB members, VDFP staff, OEMS Staff, and DOF staff. These studies consist of a preliminary review of information, site visits by study team members, and a comprehensive report on fire and EMS in a locality. These studies could take 3-4 months to be completed and should be requested when significant issues need to be addressed. Type I studies must be requested during the application period. The VFSB reserves the right to determine if requests are approved as a Type I study. Type I study requests can be recommended by the VFSB as a Type II review.

Type II Review: A Type II review is an abbreviated study that is requested by the locality's governing body that does not involve significant issues and is meant as a review of fire and EMS practices in the locality. There is no limitation on Type II reviews completed each year. These reviews primarily consist of a community risk assessment completed by the locality with the assistance of the VDFP Community Risk Reduction Coordinator and a member of the VFSB. The length of these reviews varies



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by request. The Vice Chair of the VFSB reserves the right to determine if requests are accepted in consultation with the Community Risk Reduction Coordinator. A member of the Department of Health's Office of Emergency Medical Services can also participate depending on the needs of the locality.

Type I Fire and EMS Study

A Type I fire and EMS study consists of four (4) components that include:

1. Pre-Site Documentation Review
2. On-Site Visit
3. Post Visit Review
4. Final Presentation

Pre-Site Documentation Review: The study team will request documentation, such as standard operating procedures, apparatus lists, the fire and EMS budget and other information from the locality. The Department of Fire Programs will work with the locality to schedule the on-site visit and related public hearing.

On-Site Visit: The on-site visit consists of meetings with each of the fire and EMS components in the locality. For example, if a county has five fire companies and two rescue squads, the study team will meet with each independently. The study team also meets with the chief executive of the locality, any other public safety entity, and fire/rescue associations if they exist. An important component of the on-site visit is the public hearing. The public hearing should be publicly communicated via local media, posted on the locality website, and communicated through other means by the locality. This event allows study team members to hear public input regarding the study. The locality is responsible for providing a location and notice of this hearing.

Post-Visit Review: The study team members will provide their observations and recommendations to VDFP staff for inclusion in the report. Study team members may request additional information from the locality during this time. The report will be drafted by VDFP staff. A draft of the report will be provided to the locality for technical review only.

Final Presentation Review: After approval of the draft by the VFSB, the Fire and EMS Study Coordinator or designee will present the findings of the report to the locality's governing body at a public meeting.

The Type I study team consists of 2-3 members of the Virginia Fire Services Board, a staff member of the Office of EMS, two staff members of the Department of Fire



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Programs, and if needed, a staff member of the Department of Forestry. These numbers can be altered at the direction of the Vice Chair of the VFSB.

Type II Fire and EMS Review

A Type II fire and EMS review could consist of, but is not limited to, the following components as determined by the locality, the VFSB, and the Coordinator of Community Risk Reduction. Type II reviews are more flexible by design to give the locality more tailored technical advice regarding fire and EMS.

1. **Documentation Review:** A basic review of documentation such as Standard Operating Procedures/Guidelines, memoranda of understanding, mutual aid agreements, fiscal information, call volume, response districts, etc.
2. **Completing a Community Risk Assessment:** An effort to identify and prioritize local risks, develop and execute action plans and evaluate process outcomes.
3. **Virtual or In Person Meeting:** Meeting with local fire and EMS stakeholders or locality representatives to determine issues and make recommendations specific to the localities request.

Application Period

The Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB) accepts applications for Type I studies and Type II studies year-round. Only *one* Type I study shall be approved per meeting of the Virginia Fire Services Board. Documents listed under "Required Documents" are required to be submitted to be considered.

All requests for a study must be submitted to the Government Affairs Division of VDFP at least two weeks prior to a scheduled VFSB meeting.

Type I applications will be reviewed by the VFSB at their next regularly scheduled meeting. Regular meetings of the VFSB occur in February, June, September, and December. Type II applications will be sent to the Vice Chair of the VFSB and the VDFP Coordinator of Community Risk Reduction for review. Selections for Type I studies will be made by the VFSB and communicated to applicants at least one week after a regularly scheduled meeting.

Once notification is made that a study has been accepted, the locality and VFSB will schedule a site visit for Type I visits and Type II visits if required. The locality is



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responsible for providing a schedule of meetings during the site visit and providing transportation. Studies must be completed within 18 months of approval by the VFSB.

Selection Criteria

The Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB) strives to provide the best recommendations to localities regarding their fire and EMS system. The VFSB consists of members appointed by the Governor of Virginia who are not compensated and often hold positions in various parts of the state. In order to be good stewards of state resources and cognizant of the demanding work posed by completing a Type I study, the VFSB limits how many Type I studies are completed every 18 months to four, with the possibility of adding additional studies in an emergency situation.

The VFSB will review all required documents submitted by a locality and will make and impartial and unbiased decision during each application period. If a locality is not chosen for a Type I study, they may choose to submit an application again during following application period or elect for a Type II review. Localities are invited to attend the Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee meeting at which their application will be considered to provide comment. The VFSB considers the following when selecting a locality for a fire and EMS study:

- Financial Need
- Recent fire and EMS studies
- Private studies/reports related to fire/EMS
- The localities reasoning for requesting a study
- Major incidents/issues related to fire/EMS

Required Documents

Required documents for localities to submit before the close of an application period include the following:

1. Scope of Study Agreement
2. Self-Assessment Questionnaire
 - a. Any documents listed by the applicant in this questionnaire should also be submitted if available
3. Request Letter
 - a. A request letter must provide detailed reasoning on why the locality is requesting a study and must state which type of study/review the locality is requesting (Type I or II).
 - b. A request letter must be on locality letterhead and signed by the City Manager, Town Manager, or County Administrator.



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Review

This document was last reviewed and adopted by the Virginia Fire Services Board on June 6th, 2025.

Certification:

We the undersigned as Chairman of the Virginia Fire Services Board and Executive Director of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs jointly adopt the foregoing manual which supersedes all prior Policies/Policy Statements effective as of June 6, 2025.

	
Keith Johnson Chair Virginia Fire Services Board	L. Brad Creasy Executive Director Virginia Department of Fire Programs

