

Virginia Fire Services Board

Live Fire Training Policy Subcommittee

November 12, 2025

Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

10:30 AM

MINUTES

A meeting of the Live Fire Training Policy Subcommittee was held virtually on Microsoft Teams. The meeting was called to order by Subcommittee Chair Steven Sites, and a quorum was present.

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Steven Sites, Chair – Virginia Municipal League
Keith Johnson – Virginia Fire Chiefs’ Association
JM Snell II – Virginia Board of Housing and Community Development

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Brad Creasy, Executive Director
Nicholas Nanna, Deputy Director
Theresa Hunter, Chief Administrative Officer
Michael Parris, Deputy Chief of Training and Operations
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager
Greg Cavalli, Policy Analyst
Zeina Altaha, Grants Program Manager
Deshaun Steele, Grants Analyst

GUESTS PRESENT

| | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Bill Glover | Jeff Bailey | Michael Matthews | Lee Williams | Larry Gwaltney |
| John Flynn | John Butler | Kevin Moran | James Eicholz | Jody Quesenberry |
| Adam Still | Chris Kordek | Jeremy Beaumont | Roger LeBoeuf | Adam Holloway |
| Kenneth Sloneker | | | | |

CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

None reported

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COMMENTS FROM THE SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR

Chair Sites wanted to emphasize that guests will be restricted to five minutes for questions. There will be time designated for general public comments. Outside of that time, guest comments should be directed to the chair and not to other members of the audience.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Sites opened the floor for general public comments. John Butler reiterated his comment from the previous meeting that most damage to the concrete comes from the fire itself, when the walls are subjected to temperatures over 350 degrees, and that refractory tile is generally not necessary to protect those walls. Other materials can also protect concrete walls at a lower cost. This would be a more affordable option. Mike Matthews asked to see the agenda. Bill Glover stated that proceeding with recommendation 3 would remove the request from Matthews to add linings to interior walls, as the decision under recommendation 3 would fall to the engineer hired by the authority having jurisdiction. He asked if that engineer would then continue to be required to adhere to the prototype drawing.

CONSENT AGENDA

The item on the consent agenda was the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting. Chair Sites introduced a motion to table the approval of the minutes until the subcommittee's next meeting in December.

Motion: To postpone approval of November 6, 2025, Minutes until the next meeting

Motion: Sites **Second:** Johnson

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Approval of the minutes has been postponed until the next meeting

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a. Review of the Thermal Linings Workgroup Report

Chair Sites asked if anyone had not seen the report from the previous meeting. Lee Williams asked if a copy of the report could be emailed to him. Board Clerk Willett will send the report to Williams, Larry Gwaltney, and Jody Quesenberry. Chair Sites then provided a brief review of the information discussed in the workgroup meetings. Keith Johnson stated that this committee is not to make decisions on whether to require thermal linings, as he believes that is a decision engineers should make. He noted again that there is a difference of opinion on interpretations of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards 1402 and 1403. Johnson stated that this group was convened to do two things. One is to ensure that inspections, both annual and 5-

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year, are completed. The second is ensuring live structures are safe for Firefighter I/II training. He also stated, regarding Butler's point, that he does not know of any other recommended material but refractory tiles. In response to Johnson, Matthews said the thermal linings do not have to be refractory. There are numerous methods of thermal linings that will comply with NFPA 1402. He also said the 5-year reports are more than a structural review as there is much more involved.

JM Snell said that policy requires compliance with NFPA 1402 and 1403 both for funding as well as training purposes. He does not agree that recommendation 3 makes recommendation 2 unnecessary. Johnson said the retroactive requirement is difficult and not common in the building code. Buildings are built under one set of requirements. When the requirements change, altering a building to comply with new requirements is going to be expensive. Many localities will have difficulty funding these changes.

Chair Sites believes the policy is not clearly defined for when requirements transition between the application for the grant and the compliance with the terms of the grant once construction has started. He suggests following the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) approach used with their Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG), where there is a 48-month monitoring period. He maintains that VDFP should not hire engineers to do 5-year inspections but rather provide a list of qualified inspectors to localities. He believes recommendation 3 should be adopted. Snell asked for clarification of what AFG is, and that he does not agree with the retroactivity part of the policy. He said that recommendation 1 is a policy change that the Board should consider. Regarding retroactivity, Chair Sites said responsibility would no longer be the Board's after two years under this proposal. Retroactivity would rather be a consideration for VDFP as it concerns maintaining accreditation for Firefighter I and II training.

Chief Michael Parris said training must be accredited. The Board leadership and agency leadership changes periodically, so the policy needs to be well established with clear responsibilities. Some burn buildings are approaching 40 years in age and will likely need upgrades. Snell asked Parris who certified VDFP to certify localities. Parris says the agency adheres to NFPA standards as required by the third-party accreditation groups, the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) and The Pro Board. Snell asked if they would give guidance on this. Parris said they provide oversight, but methods of compliance are the decision of individual training agencies.

Matthews mentions again that there is no path from reference in the building code that leads to NFPA 1402.

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Williams said he has used these buildings for over 40 years with Chesterfield and Blackstone. His first point was that the NFPA 1402 committee members are not in agreement. He added that repairs are needed for many buildings, and he asked not to put this on hold while debate over linings continues. Williams said that VDFP funding will likely be needed to make the proposed changes as thermal linings are expensive. Regarding policy, he said that many small jurisdictions cannot afford to conduct 5-year inspections themselves, and that the policy needs to be flexible to meet needs of varying localities. He stated having certified facilities for Firefighter I and II training is very important.

Roger LeBoeuf, an engineer specializing in fire training structures who also sits on the NFPA 1402 committee, spoke next. He said the purpose of NFPA 1402 was to ensure firefighter safety in these structures. The committee debated retroactivity and concluded that items critical for safety should be applied to all buildings. That is why it was made retroactive. LeBoeuf discussed the definition of structural walls and the damage fires cause to masonry. Johnson and LeBoeuf discussed the level of thermal linings installed in burn buildings being built in the state today.

LeBoeuf said he does not know of any other state but Virginia that is considering requiring thermal linings on non-load bearing structural components. Snell asked LeBoeuf about the thermal lining requirement in Virginia prior to it becoming a requirement from NFPA in 2019. LeBoeuf said that, dating back to at least 2009, all burn room walls required linings under the VDFP standard. Snell and LeBoeuf discussed the definitions of structural elements versus structural walls.

Johnson reiterated that the main issue is that there is a difference of opinion between professional engineers, and fire officials are not equipped to make decisions on which is correct.

Chair Sites thinks problem may not be the retroactivity, rather, how it is applied.

Glover said he's been pushing VDFP to stop requiring linings on walls. He asked if it is smart to line these walls because it changes the environment in the building, referencing a Fairfax accident where the lining system radiated the heat back at the firefighter in the burn room. He discussed various styles of buildings for fire training.

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Chair Sites made a motion to recess for lunch.

Motion: To recess for lunch

Motion: Sites **Second:** Snell

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: The meeting recessed until 1:30 PM

Regarding the second recommendation, Chair Sites would revise it to direct VDFP to continue to retain two engineering firms, with the 5-year inspections being equally divided between the two firms. When there is a disagreement between the local engineer and the VDFP-retained engineer, the other VDFP engineer would then render a third opinion. Johnson agrees. He said that depending on recommendation 3 this would probably only apply with new construction. Snell said he had no problem with recommendation 2, finding it to be a commonsense approach to a conflict of professional opinion. Chair Sites again said that the 5-year inspection would still be required even if VDFP is not conducting the inspections themselves. The responsibility will fall on the locality instead.

Matthews wanted to clarify that the highest invoice for any 5-year inspection is \$12,420 for Virginia Beach, not the higher numbers mentioned earlier in the conversation. He cited a prototype two class B structure in Chilhowie and a prototype one Class A structure in Fauquier County as good examples of two facilities meeting requirements with minimal maintenance costs.

Johnson proposes modifications to recommendation 2. Chair Sites asked for clarification that this would not address the 5-year inspection and Johnson agreed.

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Motion: To adopt Keith Johnson's modifications to recommendation 2 from the Thermal Linings Workgroup Report. The Virginia Fire Services Board shall establish a procedure that outlines a process for when the locality's contracted professional engineer and the VDFP's primary contracted engineer disagree on a component of NFPA 1402 or 1403 with regards to the approval of engineering/architect plans for the construction, renovation/addition, or additional repairs of live fire training structures. This process shall include a third-party independent engineer contracted by the VDFP to render an opinion. This opinion should be made available to VDFP staff and the Live Fire Training Structure Committee.

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Snell

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: The modifications were adopted

Johnson next presented modifications to recommendation 3. Chair Sites said he was unsure where this recommendation belonged. Board Clerk Willett asked Johnson if his intention was that all the language in recommendation 3's bullet points be included in the text policy, as there is an executive order directing the reduction of word counts in regulatory documents.

Snell talked about the time periods for inspections and whether they needed to be included in the written policy. He suggested the language Johnson included does not need to be in the policy, but to include references to the NFPA standards instead. VDFP Chief of Administration Theresa Hunter said there is an inspection checklist on the agency website and suggested including this information to avoid increasing the length of the policy. Johnson replied that removing the language "5-year inspection" could suggest to localities that only annual inspections are now required. Board Clerk Willett said that NFPA 1402 already lays out the timeline of inspections. The recommendation could require localities to conduct inspections and report the inspections to the agency based on the provisions of NFPA 1402.

Jeff Bailey asked what would occur if the locality's contracted engineer said they do not need linings in the entire structure, but the agency's contracted engineer said that they do. Johnson answered that the policy states that non-load bearing walls need to have thermal lining.

Chair Sites and Johnson discussed whether the group would get to recommendation 4, regarding policy, today and decided that it would not.

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Kenneth Sloneker said that he believes there are good reasons for NFPA 1402 to be retroactive, and that he does not believe that many buildings in use in Virginia would be affected. Johnson disagreed with that statement.

Board Clerk Willett presented amended language for recommendation 3 noted in the motion below.

Motion: To adopt the modifications to recommendation 3. The Virginia Fire Services Board, working with the Department of Fire Programs, should cease providing a registered design professional to conduct structural inspections. Each locality shall inspect their live fire training structure in accordance with NFPA 1402 and 1403, and a copy of the inspection report shall be submitted to the Virginia Department of Fire Programs noting its compliance with NFPA 1402 and 1403, as well as applicable building standards. Buildings not in compliance should not receive funds from the Virginia Fire Services Board or be certified for training. Johnson moved to accept these modifications.

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Snell

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: The modifications were adopted

Johnson talked about the items in the grant policy, specifically item 42, and asked if it would be prudent to ask the subject matter experts their opinions on the grant policy. Board Clerk Willett replied that the Board's motion was to limit the discussion and the authority of the subcommittee to reviewing the recommendations from the workgroup report. Chair Sites added that he believes that more testimony would be needed to address wider policy discussions, which the Board can consider at its December meeting. He would like to know more of the background of why Virginia's standard goes beyond what the national standards are.

Matthews said that Billy Shelton and Michael Reilly would likely have knowledge to share on that topic.

Johnson noted that localities which do not apply for grant funding do not have to submit to VDFP oversight. Chair Sites pointed out such buildings would still need to comply with NFPA 1402 and 1403 in order to remain accredited to provide Firefighter I/II training.

Butler stated that the purpose of NFPA 1403 is to protect firefighters and would caution that protection of buildings should not be a primary consideration. He suggested that the NFPA standards have been written in part by people who have a business interest in what the standards

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say. He believes training can be safely conducted in buildings with no thermal lining if done properly. Parris stated that the highest standards of firefighter safety are always at the forefront of training in Virginia. Johnson added that he has read the report on the Fairfax County training incident where there was a significant burn injury and that there have been comments in these meetings that thermal linings may have contributed. He said he is not qualified to determine the accuracy of the comment but that it represents something that should be discussed. Sloneker said that his degree is in thermal science, and he would be willing to provide information on the subject, as he maintains that saying thermal tiles contribute to increased temperatures in burn rooms is not accurate.

Board Clerk Willett stated that the next meeting of the subcommittee is scheduled for December 3 at 9:30 AM. However, he added that the next VSFB meeting would be in Glen Allen the prior day, December 2, and the agenda may depend on the actions of the Board in that meeting. Chair Sites said that the Live Fire Training Structure Committee could decide that the December 3 meeting was not needed but it remains scheduled for now.

NEW BUSINESS

ADJOURNMENT

Clerk of the Committee
Spencer Willett

Minutes completed by Greg Cavalli

Documents related to this meeting of the Virginia Fire Services Board may be requested by contacting the Government Affairs Division by emailing PolicyOffice@vdfp.virginia.gov