



Albany County Sheriff's Office Critical Incident Emergency Management Unit

July 2026

Critical Incident/Emergency Management Unit News Letter

If you have an article about your department such as a specialty you have that you would like included in the Newsletter please send it in to the Fire Coordinator's office



Office of Emergency
Management

P.O. Box A
58 Verda Ave.
Clarksville, NY
12041

Ph: (518) 720-8025
Fax: (518) 720-8031

Summer Firefighter 1 Blended learning Class

In this issue:

Training stipends
Firefighter 1
Trench Rescue
Training Stipends
Training



Albany County Sheriff's Office

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NYS training Stipend Program

This program was created to assist with retention and recruitment. It's success will be measured by the numbers claiming stipends and our recruitment and retention numbers so please encourage your members to attend these classes and submit for the stipend payments.

The NYS training stipend program has been modified to add additional classes that are now eligible for stipends:

- Firefighter Survival: Self Rescue -\$250
- Firefighter Assist and Rescue team (FAST) - \$350
- Rapid Intervention Crew (RIC) - \$350
- Fire and Emergency Services Instructor—\$500
- Fire Officer 2—\$500
- Firefighter2 full class or modular series -\$500
- Fire Officer 1 w/FSTFAC -\$1,000
- Fire Officer 1—Supervising Fire Officer module series—\$1,000

These are in addition to BEFO, IFO and Wildland Fire suppression that previously had stipends.

All stipends are retroactive to August 31, 2023. For additional information please see

<https://www.dhSES.ny.gov/new-york-state-volunteer-firefighter-stipend-program>

If you have any other questions please contact the Fire Coordinator's office.

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Summer Firefighter 1 Blended Learning class at Colonie MTB



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Trench Rescue Drill at Watervliet Arsenal



We would like to Thank the Watervliet Arsenal for the use of their facility for this drill.

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'The Bench' Offers More than Seating for Struggling Orlando, FL, Responders

Retired Orlando firefighters, familiar with the mental toll the job brings, remind colleagues no one walks or sits alone.

July 2, 2026 Scott Maxwell Orlando Sentinel

At first glance, the bench near Lake Baldwin looks like nothing special. Just a resting place beneath a moss-draped tree.

But a closer look reveals that this seat for two in Orlando Veterans' Memorial Park was put there as a lifeline.

A plaque reads in part: "Find safety, hope and help here. No one walks alone."

The bench was placed there by retired Orlando firefighters who have seen too many of their fellow first responders struggle with the after-effects of serving in often-traumatic jobs.

"Normal people see death a time or two in their lives," said Joe McCluan. "That's 8 a.m. on Monday for us. We can see it multiple times a day."

McCluan, a retired district chief, still remembers all too vividly some of his most traumatic calls. Like the time he arrived on the scene of a car crash to find the victim still screaming inside. He helped cut her out, but she still passed away.

To this day, McCluan can still smell the radiator fluid and diesel fuel that leaked from her car.

McCluan says he was able to move forward. But not all of his colleagues did. Two took their own lives in the past decade.

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After the second one did just two years ago — a young, likable firefighter in his early 30s — McCluan and his buddy, retired firefighter Chris DeMaagd, decided they needed to do something.

So last year, they debuted “The Bench 988” where firefighters can help each other. Sometimes at the bench. Sometimes on weekly walks. Sometimes by connecting them with trained professionals.

After a suicide, DeMaagd said that friends and loved ones are often plagued by three questions:

“Why?”

“What if ...?”

And “Why didn’t they ...?”

The Bench attempts to address the “What if ... “

What if people who’ve been through similar experiences were there — whenever needed — to talk with fellow first responders struggling with personal issues or who maybe just need an ear to bend?

They will meet anyone at the bench who calls or contacts them. (The best way for non-emergencies is to send an email to support@bench988.com) And the two also take weekly walks with other retired firefighters at 9 a.m. every Tuesday morning, starting at the Lake Baldwin dog park. Anyone can join them.

This past Tuesday, after a steamy sunrise brought the lake to life, I joined a group of five firefighters for a couple laps around the lake. Over the course of five, sweaty miles, they talked about how some of the calls they get are from firefighters who just want to talk.

“It doesn’t have to be something heavy,” said McCluan.

DeMaagd said he once did three laps around the lake with a young man who just needed a sympathetic ear. “We walked seven miles, and I probably said two words,” he said. “I just listened.”

And McCluan said he once spent four hours at the bench with someone who told him that he typed the text message and let it sit in his phone for a while before finally mustering the courage to click send. “I told him I’m so glad you did.”



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Neither McCluan nor DeMaagd is a mental health professional. They don't try to be. If someone's in crisis, they connect them with a trained professional.

And the national 988 suicide and crisis hotline — which is staffed 24/7 by trained counselors — is such a critical part of the mission that the number is part of their organization's name and written on the bench.

“Our goal is: How do we make you safe for the next five minutes? And then the next five hours. And then the next five days,” DeMaagd said.

Another crucial goal to let first responders know it's OK to ask for help. Both men said that in their early years in the profession, they heard all kinds of “tough guy” advice that, in hindsight, was pretty terrible.

“One of the things I used to hear was: Some people are broken. Try not to be one of those people,” DeMaagd said. “That was just sort of the mentality in fire.”

That's why other local groups that specialize in mental health say The Bench 988 is such a valuable resource — because first responders are more likely to reach out to fellow first responders “who get it.”

Those are the words of Deborah Beidel, who runs one of the most pioneering PTSD clinics in America, [UCF RESTORES](#). Beidel's clinic at the state's largest university has helped scores of veterans, law enforcement officers and first responders who encountered trauma. But the clinic can't help those who don't first ask for it.

“We need every tool in the toolbox to facilitate a first responder's ability to get the support that they need,” she said. “And the bench is one very valuable tool.”

Right now, the bench is mostly a grassroots effort of local firefighters supporting each other. But they're in the process of trying to become a formal nonprofit and working with firefighters in other parts of Central Florida to set up programs as well. Ultimately, they'd like to see benches all across America.

McCluan said he just wants every firefighter to know: “You're not walking through life alone. There is someone out there who will sit on the bench with you.”



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Chiefs Against Virtually Everything: Escaping the CAVE mentality

When protecting the familiar becomes more important than improving the organization

May 11, 2026 10:43 AM •

Fire Chief Brian Schaeffer



If you're a fire chief, you've definitely seen it. And if we're honest with ourselves, we have probably, at one time or another, embodied it.



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A new idea gets raised. It is not reckless, unserious or even really unsupported. It may even solve a problem the organization has complained about for years. But before the conversation can mature, the resistance starts. You immediately hear phrases like, "That won't work here." "We tried that once." "Our people aren't ready." "That may be fine for a big city department, but not us."

That mindset deserves a name. I call it CAVE: Chiefs Against Virtually Everything.

CAVE is not about prudence. It is not about thoughtful skepticism or deliberation. Good chiefs should test ideas, ask hard questions, and protect their people from fads dressed up as strategy. CAVE is actually something far different. CAVE is a leadership posture rooted in comfort, habit, fear of criticism, and attachment to the familiar. It is what happens when the preservation of the current state quietly becomes more important than improving the organization. That posture does not just slow progress; it halts it. Over time, it can hold an organization back to the point that the cost becomes cultural, operational and moral. Research on organizational learning, psychological safety and decision-making under risk helps explain why this happens and why it matters. (**Edmondson, 1999; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; March, 1991**).

Risk avoidance vs. risk management

In our industry, **risk is a complicated word**. For emergency scenes, we teach risk management. We talk about disciplined aggression, survivability profiling and matching action to conditions. But in administrative leadership, many chiefs drift into something else entirely: risk avoidance. They stop distinguishing between a reckless decision and a calculated one. They treat political discomfort as operational danger. They confuse criticism with utter failure. And because the fire service is full of tradition, identity and strong internal norms, that tendency can morph into culture. So while, firefighters pride themselves on adapting to chaos on the fireground, many resist change back at the station — a pattern shaped by identifiable barriers and facilitators, not just personality flaws or generational complaints.



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One reason chiefs fall into a CAVE mentality is that, put simply, leaders are human, and humans are not wired to evaluate risk cleanly. Prospect theory tells us that people weigh potential losses more heavily than equivalent gains (**Kahneman & Tversky, 1979**). In plain language, the pain of what might go wrong often feels stronger than the value of what might go right. That matters in the chief's office. The possible downside of trying something new is vivid: a labor grievance, a city manager's criticism, a bumpy rollout, an ugly post on social media, a budget hearing that turns into a roast — those are all real. The upside can be slower and less dramatic: better readiness, a healthier culture, better deployment, fewer preventable calls, stronger succession, smarter use of money. When chiefs are overfocused on visible short-term losses, they become biased toward preserving what already exists, even when the current model is underperforming.

James March's work on exploration and exploitation is useful here. Healthy organizations can actually do both. They exploit what they know works, but they also explore new possibilities. Departments need proven tactics, standard operating guidelines, training discipline and repeatable systems. But if all a chief does is exploit old certainties, the organization gradually loses its capacity to adapt. It becomes efficient at yesterday's vision. It gets better and better at protecting a model that no longer fits the environment.

This is one of the quiet dangers of recurring senior leadership without either an external influence (i.e., education or challenging assignments that get leaders outside of their norms) or a leader from the outside that is brought in to take the risks and move forward. The longer a chief has been successful in one way, the more tempting it is to assume that method is *the* method. March warned organizations about overinvesting in the familiar at the expense of exploration. That warning should hit home for the fire service. Our hazards are changing. Our workforce is changing. Our communities are changing. Our chiefs cannot lead as if none of that is true.

CAVE in CRR

CAVE shows up in community risk reduction, too. A department will say that it believes in the 5 Es of CRR — Education, Engineering, Enforcement,

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Economic Incentive and Emergency Response — but its entire internal identity still connects to emergency response. The department waits for calls, then congratulates itself for being busy. Meanwhile, data shows a call slate of repeat lift assists, recurring nuisance properties, predictable cooking fires and chronic false alarms, often in neighborhoods with disproportionate risk. The opportunity is sitting there in plain view, but the department will not invest because prevention feels less immediate and sometimes less comfortable than sending big red trucks. We perpetuate this model, even as the U.S. Fire Administration and the NFPA frame CRR as a proactive, data-informed process for identifying and mitigating hazards before they escalate into incidents (**USFA, 2018**).

My own anecdotal evidence suggests that many chiefs still view CRR as a side program rather than a department philosophy. They will assign a CRR division or organizational section — a move that sounds good but actually limits progress before it starts. The CRR focus should be woven throughout the organization, not separated as something “different.” But, that resistance to changing our legacy is classic CAVE behavior: not openly opposing innovation but starving it of leadership.

Resistance to technology and deployment change

I have also seen CAVE in technology and deployment decisions. A department stays with paper-heavy processes, resists analytics or avoids changing station response models because the current system is familiar. Another department refuses to revisit run cards, specialty team alignment, or dispatch integration because someone fears the conversation more than the inefficiency. In another case, a chief rejects a pilot program before it starts because “the troops will hate it,” even though no one has actually tested that assumption.

Organizational risk aversion can delay or prevent innovation, and it shows something more profound: Leaders are not trapped. Even in risk-averse environments, agencies can work around those constraints by using deliberate strategies. In other words, the presence of risk does not excuse paralysis. Leadership still matters.



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When culture shuts down candor

Another place CAVE thrives is organizational culture. A chief says they want honest feedback, then punishes candor. They say problem-solvers are wanted, then label people as difficult when they raise uncomfortable truths. The chief says they want innovation, then requires every idea to survive a gauntlet of informal vetoes from those most invested in the status quo.

Amy Edmondson's work on **psychological safety** is directly relevant here. Teams learn when people feel safe enough to ask questions, raise concerns, discuss errors and challenge assumptions. When leaders are authoritarian, punitive or defensive, people stop taking interpersonal risks. They withhold ideas. They stay quiet about weak points. They protect themselves. In a fire department, that does not just hurt morale, it ruins learning, succession and operational resilience. Some chiefs think they are protecting order when they shut down dissent. What they are really doing is teaching the organization to stay shut up until problems become expensive.

Reputation protection vs. real leadership

One of the most damaging forms of CAVE is what I would call reputation protection masquerading as stewardship. This is when a chief will not move because they are overly concerned with being blamed if a change does not go perfectly. So the organization remains stuck with outdated practices that everyone privately knows need to change. I would argue this is where leadership becomes moral, not just managerial. Chiefs do not get paid to preserve their own comfort. They get paid to improve the organization, reduce risk to the community and prepare the department for conditions that are coming, not conditions that used to exist.

Research on threat rigidity is instructive here. Under threat, organizations often narrow information processing and tighten control, reverting to familiar responses even when those responses no longer fit the moment. That pattern may feel safe to the leader, but it often makes the organization less adaptive when adaptation is exactly what is needed (**Staw et al., 1981**).



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Disciplined courage: The path forward

To be clear, the answer is not reckless change. The answer is disciplined and pragmatic courage. Chiefs should pilot under clear parameters before scaling. They should communicate everywhere before mandating. They should involve labor, develop metrics, define success and create room for adjustment. Rapid, poorly managed change can create confusion and backlash. That is real, and we have all been there. But that reality cannot become an excuse for endless delay. Good chiefs do not change things just to look innovative. They change what needs to be changed, for the right reasons, with enough humility to listen and enough backbone to keep going when the first reaction is resistance.

The hardest truth in this conversation is that CAVE rarely announces itself. It often sounds responsible, rooted in experience. It can sound cautious, even politically savvy. That is why it is dangerous. It can hide within reasonable-sounding phrases while preserving mediocrity. It can convince a chief that delay is wisdom, that control is strength and that avoidance is stewardship.

It is not.

The fire service does not need more chiefs who are against virtually everything. We need chiefs who can tell the difference between reckless risk and necessary change. We need chiefs who can hold onto what is timeless without becoming captive to what is familiar. We need chiefs who are willing to ask a hard question in the mirror: *Am I protecting the organization or am I protecting my own comfort inside it?* That question matters because the greatest risk for many departments is not moving too fast. It is that they will stand still while the world around them keeps moving.

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2027 LONG ISLAND METRO FIRE/EMS EXPO



FEBRUARY 4-7, 2027

NASSAU COLISEUM • UNIONDALE, NY

The **New York State Association of Fire Chiefs** and the **Islip Town Fire/EMS Museum Educational Center** partner to deliver this annual emergency services exposition and educational event on Long Island. In addition to vendors, the event includes seminars, Hands-On Training, accredited codes and EMS programs, and activities for junior firefighters. It benefits the [association](#) and the [museum](#), supporting their shared mission to serve the fire and emergency medical services personnel of Long Island and New York state.

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Be sure to visit the NYS DHSES OFPC website for additional public education resources!

<https://www.dhses.ny.gov/general-public-resources>

**ALBANY COUNTY FIRE TRAINING SCHEDULE #8-2026
revised is attached.**

There is now a link on our website with instructions on how to get an LMS sign-on ID . We recommend that all new members should register as soon as they join so they have access to training opportunities.



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ALBANY COUNTY FIRE TRAINING SCHEDULE #8 revised 2026

Pre-Registration Required: Students may register by clicking on the Learning Management System link on the NYS OPFC Home Page ([NYS Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services - OFPC](#))

Registration opens 45 days before the first class

COURSE	LOCATION	DATE	INSTRUCTOR	PREREQUISITES
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Please Note that a training authorization letter is now required for all courses offered by the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control

Firefighter I Combined Basic Exterior Firefighting Operations & SCBA Interior Firefighting Operations- Firefighter I – Blended Learning (Internet Based Course) Firefighter Survival: Self Rescue: <u>Certification included in training program</u> <u>(Additional Dates to be added for training)</u> Three-week program: Monday - Friday 8:00-1700 July 6 th -10 th July 13 th – 17 th July 20 th – 24 th	June 2nd Orientation 1830-2130 Colonie MTB Note: Chief Officer from student's department must attend orientation. Instructor: Paiko New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend BEFO \$750 SCBA-IFO \$1250 FFS: Self Rescue \$250 IN PROGRESS	Completion of Approved CPR Course, physically capable of wearing an SCBA and Training Authorization Letter. Student must have access to a computer with high-speed internet. ICS100, ICS700, Home Skills – Due Date will be announced at orientation First Aid /CPR- Due Date will be announced at orientation <u>\$40 enrollment fee</u> required at orientation for blended learning program
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Apparatus Aerial Operator	Guilderland FD	July 7, 9, 16, 21,23, 28, 30, August 4, 6, 13 1830-2130	Paiko	BEFO or Equivalent
Hazardous Materials First Responder Operations NEW TO SCHEDULE	Rensselaerville	July 27, 29, August 3, 5 1800-2200	Neidnig	None Note: Class is a prerequisite for attending Fire Police Course
Rescue Technician Basic	East Berne	July 27, 29, August 3, 5, 15, 22 Weeknights 1830-2130 Saturdays: 0830-1430	Clawson	None
Firefighter 2 Module 2 Risk Reduction	Slingerlands	August 18, 19, 20 1830-2130	M. DeGroff	Firefighter I r Equivalent New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$500 Available for completion of all Fire Fighter II modules
Firefighter 2 - Module 4 IMAT	Slingerlands	September 1, 2, 3 1830-2130	M. DeGroff	Firefighter I or Equivalent New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$500 Available for completion of all Fire Fighter II modules
IMAT Subject matter based on Chapter 5 of NFPA 1001, Standard for Firefighting Professional Qualifications. Educational Topics include investigation, maintenance, assisting technical rescue. Skills training include documenting evidence of fire origin and cause, inspecting and maintaining tools and equipment and assisting technical rescue operations.				
Fire Officer 1 Module Series: Firefighter Health & Safety	Slingerlands Location Change	September 8, 10, 15, 17 1830-2130	S. DeGroff	BEFO or Equivalent

				New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$1000 Available for completion of all Fire Office I modules
Firefighter 2 Module 1A - Crew Leadership w/Structural Live Fire	Elsmere/ Colonie & Guilderland Towers	September 10, 15, 17, 19, 21, 24 1830-2130 9/19: 0800-1500	M. DeGroff	Firefighter I or Equivalent New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$500 Available for completion of all Fire Fighter II modules
Apparatus Aerial Operator	Fuller Road	September 10, 15, 22, 24 October 3, 17, 24 Weeknights 1830-2130 Saturdays 0800-1400	C. VanBuskirk	BEFO or Equivalent
Apparatus Operator-Pump	North Bethlehem	September 14, 28, October 5, 12, 19, 24, 26 Weeknights 1830-2130 Saturday 0800-1400	S. DeGroff	BEFO or Equivalent
Fire and Emergency Service Instructor I (2019 Ed.)	Saratoga Public Safety Building - 6010 County Farm Road, Ballston Spa	September 18th thru 20th and 26th thru 27th 8am - 5pm	OFPC	All registrations are done through our learning management system which can be found at: https://lmsportal-dhSES.ny.gov/ New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$500
Fire Officer 1 Module Series: Leadership & Supervision NEW TO SCHEDULE	Slingerlands	September 29, October 1, 3, 6 Weeknights 1930-2130 Saturday 0800-1400	S. DeGroff	BEFO or Equivalent New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$1000 Available for completion of all Fire Office I modules
Firefighter 2 Module 3- Foam & Flammable Gas	Elsmere/ Colonie MTB	September 29, 30, October 1 1830-2130	M. DeGroff	Firefighter I or Equivalent

				New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$500 Available for completion of all Fire Fighter II modules
Fire and Emergency Service Instructor I (2019 Ed.)	Harriman Campus - 1220 Washington Ave, Albany	October 16th thru 20th 8am - 5pm	OFPC	All registrations are done through our learning management system which can be found at: https://lmsportal-dhSES.ny.gov/ New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$500
Fire Officer II (NFPA 1021- 2020 Ed)	Harriman Campus - 1220 Washington Ave, Albany	October 19th thru 23rd 8am - 5pm	OFPC	Officer I Nat Cert: FFII Nat Cert and Inst I Nat Cert and FOI course completion OR; FFI course completion and FFII course completion and Inst I course completion All registrations are done through our learning management system which can be found at: https://lmsportal-dhSES.ny.gov/ New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$500 Available for completion of all Fire Officer II modules
Principals of Instruction	Shaker Road	October 22, 29, November 5, 12, 18 1830-2130	Clawson	None
Fire Officer 1 Module Series: Fireground Strategies and Tactics for First Arriving Companies	Slingerlands Location Change	October 27, 29, November 5 1830-2130 November 7: 0800-1400	S. DeGroff	BEFO or Equivalent New York's Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend \$1000 Available for completion of all Fire Office I modules
Water Supply Operations	North Bethlehem	November 2, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19, 21 Weeknights 1830-2130 Saturdays 0800-1400	S. DeGroff	Scene Support Operations/Basic Exterior Firefighter Operations or Equivalent

**Unless changed by instructor or noted above:
All evening classes will be held from 19:00-22:00 hours.**

**All Saturday and Sunday classes will be held from 09:00-12:00
hours and 13:00-16:00 hours**



Fire Coordinator Gerald Paris

