

# News Release



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News Release: 2022-17

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services Releases Investigation from Line of Duty Death**

*External Safety Review Panel's After-Action Report and Improvement Plan Includes Examination of Performance Under Stress*

(Frederick, August 26, 2022) – On August 11, 2021, The Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services suffered an immeasurable loss with the Line of Duty Death of Battalion Chief Joshua Laird while operating on a 2-alarm house fire on Ball Road in Urbana. Since that day, just over a year ago, the County Executive, Chief Laird's family, and the entire Frederick County Fire/Rescue Service have committed themselves to honoring Josh's memory by ensuring that lasting and meaningful change is implemented into the fire service.

"The tragic loss of our hero, husband, father, and friend will not be forgotten. It is every intention of every member of the Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services and this County to highlight the difference Josh made and will continue to make for the betterment of the fire service", said Frederick County Fire Chief, Tom Coe.

"My husband loved being a Firefighter, he lived a life of service both at work and at home. I know that everyone who was present on the scene last August gave 110%", Battalion Chief Laird's wife, Sara Laird, stated. "Based on this report and the ATF report nothing would have changed the tragic outcome other than the failure of the Corrugated Stainless-Steel Tubing (CSST) under lightning strike conditions. I hope that the legacy of my husband's death will be to increase awareness of the dangers of CSST and lightning so that no other family has to live through this nightmare."

In the days following the incident, the Division established an External Safety Review Panel (ESRP) in order to conduct a thorough, transparent, and unbiased review of the events from that evening. The Panel, comprised of regional fire service experts, compiled this comprehensive report with a culmination of thousands of hours of work, interviews with 61 interviews, 27 referenced sources, and review of hundreds of Division policies.

The Division believes that it is imperative to share the contents of this report so fire departments across the nation can learn from this experiences and evaluate their own practices, policies, and procedures so that the necessary changes can be made to ensure this never happens again. “The conversations will be difficult, and the solutions may be complex, but we have to be willing to evolve our system in order to protect the life of every single firefighter in our system”, said Chief Coe, “The release of this After-Action Report isn’t as much closure as it is a beginning”. We have already begun making strides towards effecting change with the application for a FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant to provide additional staffing on our fire apparatus.

“This investigation report is published with the common goal of preventing future tragedy. IAFF Local 3666 will continue to work with DFRS to improve safety for the residents we serve and for our firefighters; the report's recommendations provide us with the roadmap to make those improvements.” said Stephen Jones, President of the Career Frederick County Career Firefighters Association, IAFF Local 3666. The Division in its entirety is committed to keeping the legacy of Chief Laird at the forefront of change.

“On behalf of The Frederick County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association and its 25 member companies we continue to mourn the loss of Battalion Chief Joshua Laird”, said President, James May. “We look forward to working with the Division of Fire and Rescue Service in honoring Battalion Chief Laird through evaluation and implementation of recommendations contained in this report.”

Unlike most After Action Reports, the report of the August 11, 2021, house fire on Ball Road not only examines the actions and decisions made on the scene that day, but also highlights the framework from which firefighters nationwide tend to perform. It includes a section dedicated to Human Performance Under Stress and optimizing performance in a stressful environment. The ESRP wanted to shine light on the human element by identifying how the fire service’s culture and resistance to change could eventually open the door for a catastrophic event. Additionally, it looks at the critical and often misunderstood ways in which stress and emotions affect human behavior, decision making, and performance.

A copy of the report can be found here: [After Action Report Battalion Chief Joshua Laird](#)

For further information contact Sarah Campbell at 443-277-5409 or via e-mail at [scampbell@frederickcountymd.gov](mailto:scampbell@frederickcountymd.gov).

#### *About DFRS*

*The Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services (DFRS) provides critical life safety services to citizens and visitors of Frederick County. DFRS employs 516 uniformed personnel, 16 civilian*

*personnel and partners with hundreds of volunteer responders to serve the nearly 260,000 citizens of Frederick County that reside over the 664 square miles of jurisdiction. Division Director and Fire Chief Tom Coe oversees three branches: Emergency Services, Administrative Services, and Volunteer Services. Frederick County is home to 25 independent volunteer fire, rescue and EMS corporations, who comprise the Frederick County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association. Career personnel are represented by the International Association of Fire Fighters Local #3666. The Division works with both associations to ensure that the combination fire/rescue system of career and volunteer responders continue the long history of high quality and professional service to Frederick County.*

*The men and women of DFRS are held to the highest standard of moral and ethical character and work to protect your life and property professionally, enthusiastically, and to their utmost ability.*