

Brian C. Kokkila

Senate and House – Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee Hearing
Testimony – SB 792/HB843

1 August 2023

Good Morning - I am an Assistant Chief of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire and the Task Force Leader for Pennsylvania Urban Search & Rescue – Strike Team 1. I am a founding member of the team, and a dedicated public servant with 28 years of experience.

Our team was formed 20 years ago after the tragic events of 9/11. Then Governor Schweiker, commissioned a study to evaluate the Commonwealths preparedness, with a specific focus on Urban Search & Rescue.

The Governor lived through the management of terrorism impacting Western Pennsylvania. He learned quickly that the only asset at his disposal deployed to New York City and the World Trade Center.

The Governor's committee recommended a second urban search and rescue task force be established to enhance response capability for Pennsylvania.

While a version of the recommendation was implemented, the teams that resulted have not been financially supported or sustained.

When our team was conceived Pennsylvania Task Force 1 – a Federal US&R Team, was based more centrally, in Harrisburg.

More than a decade ago PA TF1 moved East to Philadelphia and this move widened the gap of timely, crucial rescue services for the Western and Central Commonwealth.

Now mind you, this is no attack on Philadelphia, nor the dedicated responders of the East, this is simply a recognition of the fundamental gap that exists for the protection of all Pennsylvanians.

This Bi-Partisan Legislation in both the Senate and House ensures that the Western frontier is protected with an appropriately funded, properly equipped, adequately trained and mission ready team to guard against the impacts of natural and man-made disasters.

This initiative enhances the Commonwealth response system and provides timely and appropriate response, by highly skilled rescuers, to resolve and care for the victims of complex disasters.

The funding mechanisms that keep our team alive, are rapidly drying up.

The initial Commonwealth grant funding has started us on a path to achieving the desired end state, as agreed upon by Director Padfield – a Type III Urban Search & Rescue Task Force with a Type I equipment cache.

Without the dedicated line-item budget, that this initiative brings, we will be unfunded, unsupported, unstaffed, and unprepared.

Local jurisdictions currently bear the liability for the sustainment of our personnel.

Local funds should not be burdened with supporting this vital resource.

This is a Commonwealth issue, that requires dedicated funding, and demands devoted support for the responders who are prepared to meet these challenges.

In a state with a \$47 BILLION dollar budget, solving this problem is not excessively complicated, the costs to close this gap – is **2 hundredths of a percent (0.02%)**.

I have dedicated the last 20 years of my life to this purpose and to the men and women who provide the citizens of the Commonwealth, a prepared and mission focused team.

We have been relentless in our quest to provide them the right training, the right equipment, and the right responder protections. Senate Bill 792 and House Bill 843 – do just this.

In our profession, it is our sworn responsibility to prepare for the unknown.

The increase in disasters such as the Fern Hollow Bridge collapse, the City of Washington apartment building collapse and the multiple train derailments are examples of disasters that require highly skilled resources that are beyond the scope of local emergency response capabilities.

The rise in disasters including floods, tornados and failing infrastructure requires an enhancement of special response teams to manage the impacts.

We thank this joint Committee, Senators Robinson and Costa, Representatives Miller and Mihalek, and all the Co-Sponsors of both bills, for recognizing the gap that exists, and committing to provide protections for all citizens of the Commonwealth.

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that this is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability in the organization's operations.

Furthermore, it highlights the need for regular audits and reviews to identify any discrepancies or areas for improvement. This process should be conducted in a systematic and thorough manner to ensure the integrity of the data.

In addition, the document stresses the importance of maintaining up-to-date financial statements and reports. These documents provide a clear overview of the organization's financial health and performance.

It also notes that proper record-keeping is crucial for compliance with various regulatory requirements and industry standards. Failure to maintain accurate records can result in legal penalties and reputational damage.

Moreover, the document mentions that well-maintained records can be invaluable for decision-making and strategic planning. They provide a historical perspective on the organization's performance and help identify trends and patterns.

Finally, it concludes by stating that maintaining accurate records is a fundamental responsibility of any organization. It is a key factor in ensuring long-term success and sustainability.

The second part of the document focuses on the importance of effective communication and collaboration within the organization. It discusses how clear communication can lead to better understanding and alignment of goals and objectives.

It also emphasizes the need for open and honest communication, where team members feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns. This fosters a culture of transparency and trust.

Furthermore, the document highlights the importance of active listening and empathy in communication. Understanding the perspectives and needs of others is essential for building strong relationships and resolving conflicts.

It also notes that effective communication is crucial for project management and team coordination. Clear communication ensures that everyone is on the same page and working towards the same goals.

Finally, the document concludes by stating that effective communication and collaboration are essential for the success of any organization. They are the foundation of a high-performing team.

The third part of the document discusses the importance of continuous learning and professional development. It emphasizes that in a rapidly changing world, it is essential for individuals to stay updated with the latest trends and technologies.

It also highlights the benefits of investing in education and training, which can lead to increased productivity, innovation, and career advancement. Organizations should encourage their employees to pursue learning opportunities.

Furthermore, the document mentions that continuous learning is essential for personal growth and self-improvement. It allows individuals to develop new skills and expand their knowledge base.

Finally, it concludes by stating that continuous learning and professional development are key factors in achieving long-term success and fulfillment in one's career.

I would also like to specifically thank the dedicated staff – who masterfully managed the complicated development of this proposed legislation and helped to bring us all together for this important hearing.

I look forward to answering your questions.

BRIAN C. KOKKILA, E.F.O, C.T.O.

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PROFESIONAL PROFILE

An accomplished leader, who develops teams, enhances programs and delivers impactful and effective results for the ultimate success of fire, rescue and emergency management.

EXPERIENCE

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| October 2018
to Present | Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire
<i>Assistant Chief – Operations</i> | Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish strategic vision and direction of Bureau resources.• Lead the planning for and deployment of resources.• Evaluate, develop and execute procedures and guidelines to enhance Bureau operations• Design and administer operational exercises to evaluate performance.• Develop, organize and lead responses to complex, dynamic and critical events.• Function as Operations Section Chief, Safety Officer and Incident Commander.• Develop capacity, addressing threats, hazards and opportunities to support City operations.• Fleet management and design of reliable vehicles.• Lead the modernization of Pittsburgh's Hazardous Materials Response Team. | |
| January 2002
to Present | Pennsylvania Urban Search and Rescue
<i>Task Force leader</i> | Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish strategic vision and direction of specialized response asset.• Broker legislative initiatives for Commonwealth support for the In-State US&R system• Evaluate, develop curriculum and deliver team training and organized exercises.• Design and administer operational exercises to evaluate team performance.• Develop and direct multi-year grant cycle budgets to support operations and training.• Formulate policy to guide team direction and balance.• Operation Section Chief on a successful 9.5-hour structural collapse rescue. | |
| January 2002
to Present | Pennsylvania State Fire Academy
<i>Instructor</i> | Lewistown, Pennsylvania |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver programs including Command, Fire Operations, Survival, Safety, and Technical Rescue Programs. | |
| January 2003
to Present | Specialized Professional Services Incorporated
<i>Instructor/Consultant</i> | Washington, Pennsylvania |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and deliver customized educational and evaluation programs for industrial clients including Hazardous Materials, Confined Space, Technical Rescue Programs and Fire Suppression.• Perform technical process hazard evaluation including fire protection systems evaluation.• Respond to industrial and transportation emergencies and develop tailored strategies to meet customer requirements. | |

EDUCATION

- Executive Fire Officer Program, National Fire Academy (Emmitsburg, Maryland).
- Bachelor of Science in Fire Science and Administration to include certificates in Emergency Management and Occupational Safety and Health; Waldorf College (Forest City, Iowa) Summa Cum Laude
- Applied Science, Fire Science Administration; Community College of Allegheny County (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), Dean's List

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS

- Credentialed Chief Fire Officer & Chief Training Officer - Center for Public Safety Excellence
- Peer Evaluator – Center for Public Safety Excellence – CTO/FO
- Certified Fire Officer IV
- Certified Fire Instructor III
- Certified Fire Inspector II
- Certified Incident Safety Officer & Health and Safety Officer
- Certified Structural Collapse, Vehicle/Machinery, Confined Space, Surface Water, Trench, and Rope Technician
- FEMA Certified Collapse Technician/Technical Search Specialist/Task Force Leader
- Certified Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator Pumper, Aerial and Mobile Water Supply
- Pennsylvania Department of Health, Emergency Medical Technician Paramedic
- Certified Hazardous Materials Technician, Incident Safety Officer & Incident Commander
- FEMA - All Hazards Incident Management Team

PUBLICATIONS

Kokkila, B C. (2016). *Position description development: Pennsylvania Urban Search and Rescue Strike Team 1*. National Fire Academy; Emmitsburg, MD.

Kokkila, B C. (2017). *Developing Flash Flood Awareness Program Objectives for the City of Pittsburgh*. National Fire Academy; Emmitsburg, MD.

Kokkila, B C. (2018). *Unmanned Aerial Vehicle validity in Urban Search and Rescue Operations*. National Fire Academy; Emmitsburg, MD.

Kokkila, B C. (2019, March). Anatomy of a Collapse. *Fire Engineering*, 172(3), 87-100

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Member, Keystone Chapter of Fire Service Instructors
- Member, International Association of Arson Investigators
- Member, Pennsylvania Association of Arson Investigators
- Member, Fire Department Safety Officers Association
- Member, International Association of Fire Chiefs
- Member – IAFC – US&R Committee
- Member – PSFA – 1006 Certification Committee

HONORS

- Medal of Gallantry – Peters Township Fire Department
- Certificate of Appreciation – Pennsylvania Association of Arson Investigators
- Award of Merit – Peters Township
- Certificate of Appreciation – United States Department of Homeland Security
- Certificate of Achievement and Distinguished Service – Pennsylvania Counterterrorism Task Force – Region 13