

**PREPARE.
PREVENT.
PROTECT.™**



FIRST RESPONDER
Center for Excellence

Reducing Occupational Illness Injuries and Deaths

2024 Annual Report

Mission

The First Responder Center for Excellence is committed to promoting quality educational awareness and research to reduce physical, emotional and psychological health and wellness issues for first responders.



FIRST RESPONDER
Center for Excellence

Vision

The FRCE will deliver quality educational materials and factual research through a network of professionals who are committed to reducing first responder injuries and deaths through a common set of core values.



FEMA

FRCE programs are funded in whole or in part through an Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) – Fire Prevention and Safety Grants.



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BOARD



Ernest Mitchell, Jr.
Chairman of the Board

John Miclot
Secretary / Treasurer

Jeff Fackler

David Halfpenny



Barry D. Balliet

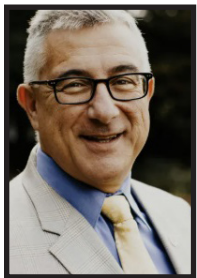


Joseph M. Jardin



Daniel L. Arnold

STAFF



Victor Stagnaro
CEO



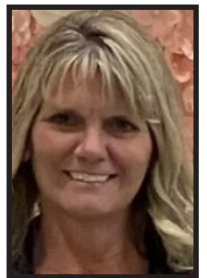
Charles Jaster
CFO



Nicole Prorock
CFO



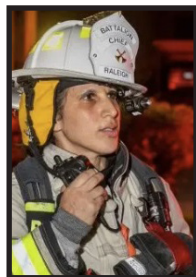
Frank Leeb
Managing Director



Lori Jacobs
Program Manager



Read more about our
Board and Staff!



Dena Ali
Behavioral Health
Program Manager



Patricia Doyle
Senior Accountant



Matthew Riback
Social Media
Specialist

Managing Director's Message

2024 marked a pivotal year for the First Responder Center for Excellence (FRCE), one defined by growth, progress, and a renewed focus on the well-being of those who serve. It was my honor to assume the role of Managing Director in February, a role I embrace after nearly 32 years with the FDNY. Together, we've worked to uphold FRCE's mission of advancing the health, wellness, and safety of firefighters and first responders through research, education, and training.

The year was characterized by both continuity and innovation. While supporting ongoing initiatives, we successfully completed several grant-funded programs and laid the groundwork for the next phase of growth. Recognizing the importance of sustainability, we welcomed talented individuals to the FRCE team

who share our passion and commitment. This ensures we are equipped to meet future challenges and opportunities.

The fire service is experiencing a profound transformation as health and wellness take their place alongside operational effectiveness. Firefighters excel in caring for others but often neglect their own well-being. Thankfully, the tide is turning with a growing recognition of the need to address these critical areas. I refer to these areas as the firefighter's "blind side"—issues that have historically remained on the back burner, including occupational cancer, mental health, PTSD, sleep, nutrition, and physical fitness. Thankfully, this year, we made significant strides in tackling these challenges.

This is a new era for fire service research, from fire behavior to occupational cancer and behaviors health. By building on what we can control today, we ensure that firefighting remains a profession that people aspire to join and where they can thrive in service and retirement.

At the FRCE, our mission will remain steadfast: advancing the health, wellness, and safety of firefighters and first responders through research, education, and training.

We are all in this together, and we are stronger together.



Frank Leeb
Managing Director

2024 Highlights

In-Person Training

26 Total In-Person Training Events

454 Total Participants

104 Total Fire Departments/Organizations Trained



Register for Training!

*“Safety is a byproduct of training.
Don't let anybody short change your training
as the cost is too high.
Online or in person - the FRCE has your back.
We are all in this together”*

- Frank Leeb, Managing Director

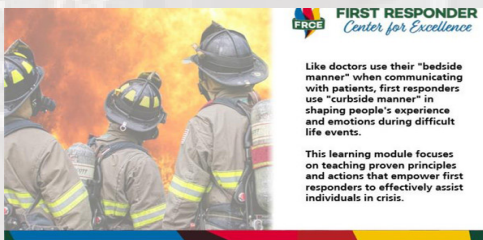
Learning Management System

Online Training

1376 Total Persons Trained

394 Total Fire Departments/Organizations Trained

43 Number of States Reached



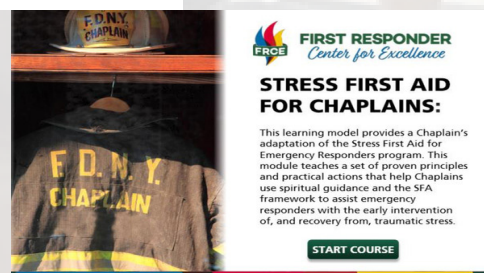
CURBSIDE MANNER:
Stress First Aid for the Street

START COURSE



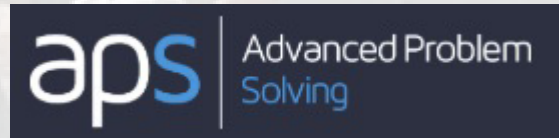
Strong, Safe, and Resilient:
An Update on Women's Health in the Fire Service

START COURSE

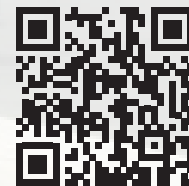


START COURSE

Launch of New LMS



In January 2024, FRCE partnered with Advanced Problem Solving (APS) for a Learning Management System (LMS) to broaden training opportunities for firefighters and other first responders, ensuring they have the tools they need to stay healthy, safe, and resilient.



Access the FRCE
Learning Management System

Events

Fire Service Occupational Cancer Alliance Meeting

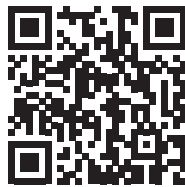
Since the first Occupational Cancer in the Fire Service Strategy Meeting in 2015, hosted by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, significant strides have been made to address fire service cancer risks. It brought together fire service organizations and researchers to review knowledge, develop strategies to reduce exposures, illnesses, deaths, and support those affected. They have continued meeting, refining strategies, and launching initiatives, including the 2024 meeting in Charlotte, where subgroups were formed to achieve specific goals and enhance their collaborative approach to protecting firefighter health.



Optimizing Performance & Occupational Health for Female Firefighters



FRCE offered three regional outreach programs for over seventy-five women who learned about injury prevention, sleep, fitness, recovery, nutrition, and more. Here's to improving performance and ensuring career longevity for female firefighters!



FRCE LMS -
Women's Health
Module



University of Pittsburgh / University of Iowa Partnerships



FRCE met with the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Iowa in with the aim to develop partnerships for health and wellness initiatives benefiting firefighters, paramedics, EMTs, dispatchers, and law enforcement personnel. Frank Leeb noted that "These partnerships are vital for harnessing a broad spectrum of expertise and resources. By collaborating with leading academic institutions, FRCE can access cutting-edge research, innovative solutions, and best practices that will enhance the health and wellness of first responders."

T r a i n i n g

Firemanship Conference

FRCE program manager Dena Ali presented at the Firemanship Conference in Aurora, Illinois. The conference had almost 2000 attendees from 45 states and 4 Canadian provinces.



Health and Wellness Seminars

Three of our health and wellness seminars had participants learn about sleep, stress management, mental health awareness, and reducing exposure to carcinogens. These skills will lead firefighters to a healthier lifestyle that will positively impact fellow first responders.



Water on the Fire Conference



Hosted in Pensacola Beach, FL, by County Fire Tactics, FRCE spotlighted the importance of health and wellness in firefighting by supporting and participating in the morning walk. Our 2-day Functional Fitness and Wellness Workshop. It is designed to help achieve peak operational performance on the fireground.



Events



Functional Fitness and Wellness Workshops

Nearly 200 firefighters participated in our functional fitness and wellness workshops in Arizona, California, Illinois and New York City. Participants learned about sleep and stress management, cardiorespiratory fitness, functional fitness, and nutrition. This leads to practical applications that will benefit the participant in developing healthier lifestyle habits.



Insurance Industry Round Table



FRCE hosted a roundtable discussion with key stakeholders and subject matter experts that focused on the well-being and safety of first responders with a goal of catalyzing change within the insurance industry to ensure firefighters receive the healthcare support they need.

Health Fair for Heroes

The Fox Chapel VFD hosted FRCE for presentations from staff and included complimentary health screenings provided by UPMC St. Margaret medical staff



Training

Science to the Station - USFA Summit

The symposium, powered by FRCE, at the US Fire Administrator's summit highlighted critical topics of organizational impact on mental health, cancer prevention, along with discussions on nutrition, sleep, and fitness which included a team walk around the National Fire Academy campus!



Brothers Helping Brothers

FRCE and Brothers Helping Brothers is a new strategic alliance dedicated to enhancing the health, wellness, and safety of firefighters across the U.S. This partnership combines the strengths of two leading organizations committed to supporting the fire service community. Together, we'll focus on advancing health and wellness initiatives,



FDNY Foundation Dinner

FRCE Staff attended the FDNY Foundation dinner which supports initiatives that are in alignment with the FRCE mission.

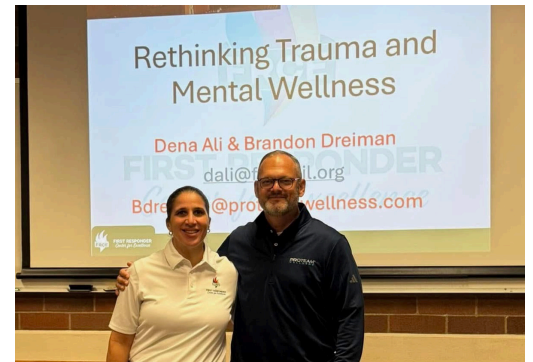


Events and Training

PNW Fire Conference



FRCE offered two comprehensive 8-hour workshops in Squamish, WA on trauma and mental wellness, addressing critical topics like suicide prevention, behavioral health enhancement, substance use disorder, mindfulness practices, sleep improvement, and leadership development.



Northern Virginia Fire and Rescue

At the Northern Virginia Fire and Rescue Leadership Development Institute, FRCE staff spoke about psychological safety, the role of learning organizations, and the significance of process accountability. The session included several meaningful conversations on the importance of speaking up, being candid, and cultivating awareness of our own biases.



Fire Rescue International



FRCE staffed a booth at Fire Rescue International, engaging with attendees delivering materials and sharing the FRCE message.

Fire Fusion

Managing Director Frank Leeb, had the honor of delivering the closing keynote at the FireFusion Conference in Charleston, SC. He also participated in a leadership roundtable alongside other distinguished fire service leaders.



Strategic Partnerships

Law Enforcement and First Responders Summit

Frank Leeb and Dena Ali took to the stage in St. Petersburg, FL to deliver the keynote on reducing suicide among first responders through upstream and environmental controls.



Movember / Stress First Aid



Although our successful 3-year partnership with Movember has ended the work continues through an online course on Enhanced Stress First Aid (SFA). This course is a valuable resource for supporting mental health in our firefighting and EMS communities



Access SFA!

National Firefighter Cancer Registry

FRCE is proud to partner with NFR to prioritize our long-term health, calling for regular screenings, better training, and a shift in culture. All firefighters, career, and volunteers - active or retired, can join the National Firefighter Registry for Cancer today.



**NATIONAL
FIREFIGHTER
REGISTRY**
for Cancer
Understanding & Reducing Cancer

Podcast Reachout

FRCE Staff Participate in Podcasts to deliver key FRCE messages to our target audiences. In 2024, this included the following podcasts who collaboratively support the FRCE mission.



Critical Conversations: Battling the Silent Enemy

Frank Leeb shares his expertise on leadership, firefighter cancer, and mental health, while also giving us a closer look at the prevention strategies and health initiatives transforming the fire service.

B Shifter Podcast

On the B Shifter podcast, our Managing Director, Frank Leeb discussed key topics impacting the fire service, including mental resilience, safety, and more.



Gettin' Salty

Frank Leeb's appearance on the Gettin' Salty Podcast shortly after his FDNY retirement, one of several times he has been featured, was truly unforgettable. With over three decades of service, his reflections on leadership, firefighter health, and safety, combined with the excitement of surprise guests, made for an entertaining and insightful episode.

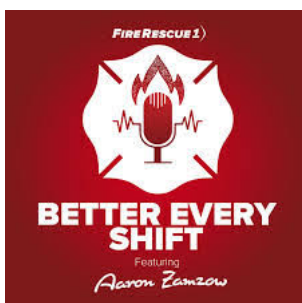
Leadership Conversations: Kitchen Table

Dena Ali discusses peer support, destigmatizing mental health and modeling vulnerability



Better Every Shift

The 100th episode of the Better Every Shift podcast is a milestone celebration! Hosts Aaron Zamzow and Janell Foskell are joined by Frank Leeb and several special guests for an engaging discussion. This episode was recorded live during the Brother Helping Brothers event in Ohio. Together, they explore key topics shaping the fire service, share invaluable insights, and reflect on the journey toward continuous improvement.



Ready Rebound

Frank Leeb, Chief Chuck Downey (FDNY), Battalion Chief Dena Ali, Aaron Zamzow, Megan Lautz, Katie Dennison, Dan Kerrigan, Kepra Jack, John Miclot and Dr. Anne Germain represent a powerhouse group on first responder health and wellness, covering a range of critical topics from physical health to mental health.





Advisory Committees

Behavioral Health

Derrick Edwards, PhD
Michelle Fayed
Anne Germain, PhD
Richard Gist, PhD
Frank Leto
Chief John Oates
Vickie Taylor, LCSW

Cancer

Alberto Juan Caban-Martinez,
DO, PhD, MPH, CPH
Deputy Chief Tim Cowan
Casey Grant,
PE, FSFPE
Jeff Hughes
Chief Ed Mann
Chief Brian McQueen

Cardiac

James Brothers,
MS, CRNP, CEMSO, CFO
Brittany Hollerbach, PhD
Sara Jahnke, PhD
Tiffany Lipsey,
M.Ed., ACSM
Kevin Quinn
Eddie Sell
Denise Smith, PhD

Firefighter Physicals

Kepra Jack, RN, BSN
Alisa Koval
Chief Todd LeDuc,
MS, CFO, FIFire
Chief John Sullivan
James Williams

Health and Wellness (Fitness)

Katie Dennison,
MS, TSAC-f
Chris Fleming,
LAT, ATC, AEMT
Dan Kerrigan
Fernando Montes
Kory Pearn
Ursula Ulery
Bert Vergara
Aaron Zamnow

Health and Wellness (Nutrition)

Rhonda Cohen
Megan Lautz,
MS, CSCS, TSAC-f
Chloe Schweinshaut
Jonathan Tate
Aaron Zamzow

Looking Ahead - 2025

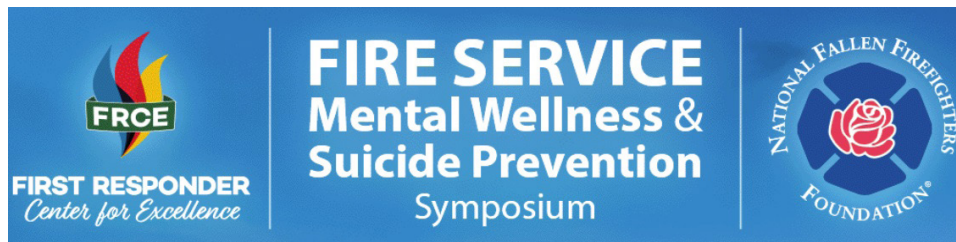
Fire Department Safety Officers Association Conference January 13-16, 2025

Bringing Safety to the Beach! This dynamic event kicks off with two days of Pre-Cons on Monday and Tuesday, followed by impactful classes and breakout sessions on Wednesday and Thursday. Keynote speakers include our very own FRCE staff Managing Director Chief Frank Leeb, Jeremy Donch, and Paul Darby.



Fire Service Mental Wellness and Suicide Prevention Symposium March 20-21, 2025

Join us in Nashville for the Fire Service Mental Wellness and Suicide Prevention Symposium — a groundbreaking event focused on mental wellness and suicide prevention in the fire service. Organized by FRCE and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF).



3rd Annual Science to the Station, powered by FRCE November 3-5, 2025

Join Us for the 3rd Annual Science to the Station, powered by the First Responder Center for Excellence, in Loveland, Colorado. This event brings together the dedicated community of scientists, healthcare providers, and fire service professionals. We are committed to sharing cutting-edge research and practical solutions to improve firefighters' and other first responders' safety, health, and well-being.

Leadership Transition

At the end of March, Ed Klima stepped down as the Managing Director of the First Responder Center for Excellence (FRCE) to take a position as the FIFA World Cup 2026 Director of Emergency Preparedness. Ed was brought on at the inception of the FRCE in 2016 to develop its foundational strategy and focus. During his time at the FRCE he successfully secured over \$8 million dollars in grant funding and was instrumental in shaping the FRCE's mission to advance health and wellness for first responders. Ed's commitment to first responder health and safety stemmed from his personal experience with a career-ending injury, which fueled his advocacy for wellness initiatives. We are grateful for Ed's vision and leadership, which set the foundation for FRCE's success.



Thank You Ed!

FRCE Awarded 2023 Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grant to Enhance First Responder Health and Safety Training

Crofton, MD – The First Responder Center for Excellence (FRCE) is proud to announce its selection as a recipient of the prestigious 2023 Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grant (EMW-2023-FP-00627). The goal of the FP&S Program is to enhance the safety of the public and firefighters with respect to fire and fire-related hazards by providing financial assistance for fire prevention programs and firefighter health and safety research and development. With this grant, FRCE will continue to elevate the health and wellness of firefighters, EMS personnel, and dispatchers through innovative training and education.



“FP&S funding is critical for the FRCE to deliver vital training programs that address the responder’s blind side—those health and safety risks that often go unnoticed,” said Chief Frank Leeb, Managing Director of FRCE. “By translating the latest research into practical training, we provide first responders with actionable intelligence on topics such as cancer prevention, mental resilience, cardiovascular health, and sleep management. These are essential areas that are too often overlooked but can profoundly impact long-term health and performance.”

With FP&S support, FRCE will launch several key initiatives in 2025:

1. Regional Health and Wellness Workshops

Building on the success of the 2023 Health and Wellness Symposium, FRCE will host a series of one-day regional seminars tailored to the unique needs of firefighters, EMS personnel, and dispatchers. These workshops will feature expert keynote speakers, focused sessions on prevention strategies, and actionable resources to promote holistic health and wellness across the first responder community.

2. Stress First Aid Train-the-Trainer Courses

To meet the growing demand for Stress First Aid (SFA) training, FRCE will expand its cadre of instructors nationwide. These sessions will equip trainers to deliver SFA courses that help first responders recognize and address stress reactions in themselves and their colleagues, mitigating the risk of long-term mental health issues.

3. Development of Online Resources in Key Health Areas

FRCE will collaborate with subject matter experts to create evidence-based, interactive online modules on the following critical topics:

- o **Cardiovascular Disease Prevention**
- o **Behavioral Health**
- o **Sleep Management**
- o **Diabetes Prevention**

These resources will empower first responders to adopt healthier lifestyles, manage stress, and improve their overall well-being.

4. Contamination Reduction Implementation Workshops

Recognizing the ongoing concern about cancer in the fire service, FRCE will host contamination reduction workshops at key conferences. These sessions will provide firefighters with strategies for reducing incidences of cancer in firefighters.

Participants will receive practical tools to implement these practices in their local departments.

“We are incredibly grateful for the continued support from the FP&S program, which allows us to deliver impactful training and resources to first responders nationwide,” said Chief Leeb. “These initiatives align with the strategic goals set out by the U.S. Fire Administrator at the 2023 Summit, helping us move towards a more unified and prepared fire service community.”

The FP&S-funded projects will serve as a “force multiplier,” ensuring that FRCE remains at the forefront of first responder health and safety training, while fostering a culture of preparedness and resilience within fire and EMS organizations. For more information about FRCE’s programs or upcoming workshops, please visit Firstrespondercenter.org or visit us on any of our social media channels.

About the First Responder Center for Excellence (FRCE)

The FRCE is dedicated to promoting the health, wellness, and safety of first responders. Through education, research, and training, FRCE provides fire, EMS, and other emergency personnel with the tools they need to lead healthier, more resilient lives. Learn more at Firstrespondercenter.org

About the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program

The Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grants are part of the Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) and support projects that enhance the safety of the public and firefighters from fire and related hazards. The primary goal is to reduce injury and prevent death among high-risk populations. Learn more at: <https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighters/safety-awards>



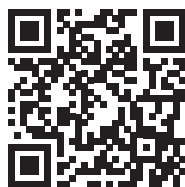
FEMA

FRCE programs are funded in whole or in part through an Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) – Fire Prevention and Safety Grants.



FIRST RESPONDER *Center for Excellence*

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