

Fire in the Sky

aircoalition.org

September 16th - 18th

In association with the Houston Fire Department

**Strategy and Tactics for
Low Rise, Mid Rise, High
Rise and Big Box**



**FIREFIGHTER
AIR COALITION**



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY 1 TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

8:00 AM

INTRODUCTION & PLEDGE

HOSTS Mike Gagliano
Steve Sanguedolce



High Rise Ops – Keep it Simple, Part 1

»»» **Dave McGrail** : *Denver Fire Department (ret.)*

BREAK & VENDOR SHOWCASE



High Rise Ops - Overwhelm the Enemy, Part 2

»»» **Dave McGrail** : *Denver Fire Department (ret.)*

LUNCH



Lost, Disoriented & Out of Air - Air Management
in Large Structures

»»» **Mike Gagliano** : *Seattle Fire Department (ret.)*

»»» **Eric Abbt** : *Houston Fire Department*

BREAK & VENDOR SHOWCASE



Protecting Vertical Cities: The first (5) minutes

»»» **Jimmy Davis** : *Chicago Fire Department*

CLOSING REMARKS

Meet the instructors, Q & A, and book signings.

DAY 2 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

8:00 AM

INTRODUCTION & PLEDGE

HOSTS Mike Gagliano
Steve Sanguedolce



When Size Matters: Navigating the Challenges of the Big Box

»»» **Kris Blume** : *Meridian Idaho Fire Department*

BREAK & VENDOR SHOWCASE



High-rise Firefighting

»»» **Brent Brooks** : *Toronto Fire Services*

LUNCH



Commanding the Commercial Fireground

»»» **Aaron Heller** : *Hamilton New Jersey Fire Department*

BREAK & VENDOR SHOWCASE



Low and Mid-Rise Building Construction: Recipe for Disaster

»»» **Daniel DeYear** : *Dallas Fire Department (ret.)*

CLOSING REMARKS

Meet the instructors, Q & A, and book signings.

DAY 3 THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

8:00 AM

INTRODUCTION & PLEDGE

HOSTS Mike Gagliano
Steve Sanguedolce



Lessons Learned from Extreme Fire Events, Part 1

»»» **John Norman** : *New York Fire Department*

BREAK



Lessons Learned from Extreme Fire Events, Part 2

»»» **John Norman** : *New York Fire Department*

LUNCH



Response Challenges: Super Block Hospital Complex

»»» **Jack Murphy** : *Bergen County Fire Service*

BREAK



Bigger Buildings Present Bigger Challenges

»»» **Robert (RJ) James** : *Frederick County Maryland Fire Department*

CLOSING REMARKS

Meet the instructors, Q & A, and book signings.

Fire in the sky

MEET THE INSTRUCTORS



Dave McGrail : Denver Fire Department (ret.)

BIO Dave McGrail is a 41-year fire service veteran, having served with the Aurora, CO Fire Department from 1982 - 1987, and the Denver Fire Department (DFD) from 1987 - 2023. Dave was assigned to some of the busiest fire companies and fire districts within the DFD. From Nozzleman to Incident Commander, Dave responded to and operated at thousands of fires and emergency incidents, including high-rise fires, plane crashes, technical rescues, and all of the other daily incidents that occur in a big city. Dave retired from the DFD in 2023, but continues to provide educational programs and hands on training to firefighters all across the American Fire Service, and Internationally. Dave is the author of the popular text book “Firefighting Operations in High-Rise and Standpipe Equipped Buildings”, published by Pennwell, Fire Engineering Books, 2007. Dave has earned several College Degrees, including two Associate of Applied Science Degrees in Fire Science Technology, two Bachelor of Science Degrees, one in Human Resource Management, and one in Fire Service / Public Administration. **(retired)**

COURSE: High Rise Ops – Keep it Simple, Part 1

This training program will highlight the essential components of a successful High-Rise Operation. The theme for this class is to “keep it simple”, and understand that we really already know what we need to do operationally, and what equipment is necessary. Fire service over analysis is leading too many of us to paralysis.

COURSE: High Rise Ops - Overwhelm the Enemy, Part 2

This training program will help fire departments that respond to, and operate in high-rise and low-rise standpipe equipped buildings develop, implement, and utilize proven operating procedures for this low frequency high-risk standpipe operation. Further, they must establish an ongoing and continuous program of hands-on training focusing on engine company standpipe operations, with an emphasis on— “Overwhelming the Enemy”.



Mike Gagliano : Seattle Fire Department (ret.)

BIO Mike Gagliano has over 33 years of fire, crash, and rescue experience with the Seattle Fire Department and the United States Air Force. He teaches nationwide on Fireground Tactics/Decision-Making, Air Management, Leadership, and Company Officer Development and currently serves as the president of the Firefighter Air Coalition (aircoalition.org). Captain Gagliano has authored numerous fire service articles and co-authored the bestselling books Air Management for the Fire Service and Challenges of the Firefighter Marriage. He is a member of the Fire Engineering/FDIC Advisory Board and the Emeritus Board of the Firefighter Safety Research Institute. **(retired)**

COURSE: Lost, Disoriented & Out of Air - Air Management in Large Structures

Smoke kills. There is no way to understate the devastating effects of smoke on emergency operations. This is especially true for fires in large structures such as high rise, mid-rise, and big box. This class takes an in depth look at how smoke impacts firefighters and fireground operations in the world of big buildings. District Chief Eric Abbt will walk thru his Mayday in a high rise on March 2007 and provide some of the most compelling insights ever recorded on what “out of air” truly looks like. Attendees will take a unique look into what happened and what can be learned from his near fatal incident.



Eric Abbt : Houston Fire Department

BIO J. Eric Abbt is a District Chief at Fire Station 28-B, one of Houston’s busiest stations. Eric is a 40-year student of fire and safety operations, a 30-year veteran of HFD, and a Sum Cum Laude graduate at Columbia Southern University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Fire Science. Chief Abbt holds a Master’s Certification from TCFP for Firefighter and Instructor, as well as numerous fire and rescue certifications and memberships in Fire and Safety organizations throughout the US and Canada. Chief Abbt serves as Director 5 of the COA and was appointed as Chairman of the Advisory Committee and the Health & Safety Committee.

COURSE: Lost, Disoriented & Out of Air - Air Management in Large Structures

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Jimmy Davis : Chicago Fire Department

BIO JAMES “Jimmy” DAVIS is a captain and 30-year veteran of the Chicago (IL) Fire Department assigned to Engine Co. 43 serving Logan Square. He teaches regularly at the Chicago Fire Department R.J. Quinn Fire Academy on a variety of subjects, including the department’s high-rise and standpipe programs. He instructs and lectures both nationally and internationally on many subjects relating to mid-to high-rise firefighting strategies and life-safety concerns in tall buildings. He is a (FSRI-UL) technical panel member for the Study of Fire Dynamics and Firefighting Tactics in Multi-Story Residential Structures.

COURSE: Protecting Vertical Cities: The first (5) minutes

High-rise fires pose some of the most complex challenges for firefighters, requiring critical decisions and actions within the first five minutes—a brief window to apply essential tactics. This program explores a systematic, highly effective response model and highlights the risks of delayed or ineffective interventions. It aims to deepen understanding of the operational vulnerabilities unique to high-rise incidents, where every action must be timely and precise. The course also offers key insights into the vertical challenges these events present and emphasizes the importance of coordinated, value-based responses to achieve the best possible outcomes.

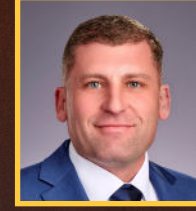


Brent Brooks : Toronto Fire Services

BIO Brent Brooks is an Acting District Chief with 30 years of service. His firefighting career began at Pearson International Airport and Bombardier Aerospace, and he is a retired member of the Canadian Armed Forces reserves. With 18 years in the High-Rise Unit, he has advanced operations through research, training, and improved incident management. Brent has toured 36 of the world’s tallest buildings and is a published author, FDIC instructor, and panelist on Fire Engineering’s Hump Day Hang Out. He has spoken internationally, serves on several fire safety boards, and has supported over 100 fire departments worldwide. Brent is dedicated to improving firefighter safety and occupant survival in high-rise incidents.

COURSE: High-rise Firefighting

This presentation updates the fire service on the equipment and tactics for firefighting in high-rise buildings. As cities worldwide experience a surge in high-rise construction—encompassing mixed-use, podium-based towers, and timber-frame structures—we urgently need to revise our tactics and training methods. We will demonstrate the ergonomics in managing the big line and outline deployment models as part of a strategic plan to combat fires in underground parking areas. Cities face a growing number of challenges, from catastrophic failures and exterior cladding fires to issues with ventilation, search, evacuation, and the rising threat of electric vehicle fires. Together, we can navigate plans designed to address these critical concerns.



Kris Blume : Meridian Idaho Fire Department

BIO Kristopher T. Blume is the fire chief of the Meridian, ID, Fire Department and has more than 25 years of fire service experience. A frequent contributing author, Blume is also the Fire Engineering author of the book, Carry the Fire. Blume is a graduate of the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) program and is an instructor at the National Fire Academy. As a student of the fire service, he is focused on values-driven, mission-focused leadership for the profession.

COURSE: When Size Matters: Navigating the Challenges of the Big Box

This class will focus on the unique strategic and tactical demands of fires in large commercial structures. This course equips firefighters and command staff with practical tools for size-up, risk assessment, and operational planning in big-box environments. Topics include fire behavior in open spaces, ventilation challenges, collapse risks, and resource management. Through real-world case studies and proven strategies, attendees will leave better prepared to safely and effectively manage the complexities of the big-box fireground.



Aaron Heller : Hamilton New Jersey Fire Department

BIO Aaron Heller began his fire service career in 1984 and recently retired as Deputy Chief of the Hamilton NJ Fire Department, where he led the Training Division. He previously served as Fire Chief of Hamilton Township Fire District #9 and is a NJ Level 2 instructor and fire official. A past chief and current member of the New Egypt Volunteer Fire Company, he also chaired the Plumsted Township Board of Fire Commissioners. Heller is a senior instructor with the Mercer County Fire Academy and has presented at numerous training events across the U.S. and internationally. He’s been published in Fire Engineering, Fire & Rescue Magazine, and other outlets, and formerly co-hosted Fire Engineering’s Humpday Hangout. A founding member of the Jersey F.O.O.L.S., he holds a B.S. in Fire Science from Columbia Southern University and is the owner of On Scene Training Associates, LLC.

COURSE: Commanding the Commercial Fireground

This seminar is a combination of interactive Powerpoint, videos, and case studies. The types of commercial fires predominately covered in this program include, big box stores, strip malls, warehouses, taxpayers, mom and pop shops, and parking structures. We will discuss the challenges of commanding these fires and provide street-proven methods for both experienced and newer fire officers. We look at these challenges from the perspective of both the incident commander and the company officer. With the rise in lithium-ion battery fires, the effects of micro-mobility devices, e-bike shops, and e-lawn equipment shops have been added to this course. Finally, I will share training considerations and drill ideas. The target audience for this workshop includes all fire officers from the company level to the chief of department.



Daniel DeYear : Dallas Fire Department (ret.)

BIO Daniel is originally from The Bronx in New York City and began his fire service career in the Northeast over 45 years ago. He previously worked for the Carrollton Fire Department for nearly 10 years, serving in several capacities, including Training Chief. He then served as an International Fire Marshal and Ambassador for the American Fire Service for the U.S. Department of State, Foreign Building Operations, where he traveled to more than 35 countries, providing fire and life safety to United States embassies and consulates around the world. (retired)

COURSE: Low and Mid-Rise Building Construction: Recipe for Disaster

Low and mid-rise construction used to be confined to urban environments, yet today we are seeing these buildings being erected in nearly every community. This program will look at the design challenges that can disorient first arriving companies. Unique building construction, fire code requirements, accessibility, and life safety difficulties will be explored. Students at all ranks and responsibilities on the fire ground will delve into the unique fire ground hurdles such as accurate size-up, forcible entry, search, fire dynamics and safe and successful fire attack, will all be covered.

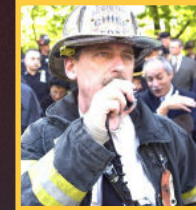


Jack Murphy : Bergen County Fire Service

BIO Jack is a retired Fire Marshal and former Deputy Chief with the Leonia Fire Department, who also served 15 years as Countywide Deputy Fire Coordinator for Bergen County. He is past chair of the Fire/Life Safety Directors Association of Greater New York and an adjunct professor at John Jay College's Fire Science Institute. Jack serves on several NFPA committees, including the High-Rise Building Safety Advisory Board, 1660, 1082, and 2800, and represents the NFFF Strategy-5 Codes and Standards group. A contributing editor for Fire Engineering Magazine, he has authored many fire service articles and the Handbook for Firefighter I and II chapter on Pre-Incident Planning. He co-authored High-Rise Buildings: Understanding the Vertical Challenges and Bridging the Gap - Fire Safety and Green Buildings. He received the 2012 Fire Engineering Tom Brennan Lifetime Achievement Award.

COURSE: Response Challenges: Super Block Hospital Complex

A tall standalone building poses a vertical challenge for any fire department—but that challenge grows significantly in a "Super Block" high-rise complex spanning several city blocks with interconnecting buildings and below-grade tunnels. Similarly, a high-rise medical facility may be a single structure with basic fire barriers or a vast complex built as a Super Block. This course helps firefighters recognize major building components, medical systems, patient areas, and horizontal evacuation needs, along with the unique construction and response challenges. Adopting a "Know before you Go" mindset is essential to reducing risk for firefighters and occupants.



John Norman : New York Fire Department

BIO John Norman is a veteran of over 55 years in the fire service, with a wide range of experience. He has fought fires in rural, suburban and urban settings. John retired in 2007 as the Deputy Assistant Chief for Special Operations for the FDNY. He is the author of the "Fire Officers Handbook of Tactics" and its study guide, and "Fire Department Special Operations" and his newest book "Working with Giants" all published by Fire Engineering Books and Videos. He can be contacted at www.chiefnorman.com.

COURSE: Lessons Learned from Extreme Fire Events, Part 1 & 2

The class involves a number of case histories of previous firefighter fatalities that have proven themselves to be a repetitive cause of fatalities nationwide. This class focuses heavily on the changes occurring in today's modern fire environment. It includes tactics that have been developed on fire control and operations in small, medium and large structures based on the studies that Underwriters Laboratories and NIST have conducted in conjunction with the FDNY, Chicago FD and others.



Robert (RJ) James : Frederick County Maryland Fire Department

BIO Robert James (RJ) is a 24- year veteran of the fire service. He started as a volunteer firefighter with the Cromwell Volunteer Fire Department in Cromwell, Connecticut. Robert relocated to Maryland and joined the Rockville Volunteer Fire Department in Montgomery County Maryland. He is currently employed with the Frederick County Fire Department, where he is a Lieutenant assigned to Engine Company 1 in Frederick's westside portion of the city. Robert has received numerous citations and awards from the Rockville Volunteer Fire Department, Frederick County Fire Rescue and the state of Maryland. RJ has served as a lead instructor for many fire department trainings and works as an instructor with Frederick Fire Department's Training Academy and is the founder of Capitol Fire Training LLC. He has written articles for many fire service publications and has taught on many national fire service platforms.

COURSE: Bigger Buildings Present Bigger Challenges

When it comes to forcible entry tactics into commercial buildings, we have to remember we are dealing with much different challenges than residential structures. Our tool selection may not vary much, however our ability to use such tools in different environments will. Challenges like fortified doors, bigger overhead doors, and the biggest challenge...dealing with these doors at height, are all things that we will discuss during this interactive presentation.

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