



# Status of the Firefighter Suicide Collection and Reporting Program

*August 3, 2022*

Fiscal Year 2022 Report to Congress



**Homeland  
Security**

*United States Fire Administration*

# Message from the U.S. Fire Administrator

August 3, 2022

The following report, “Status of the Firefighter Suicide Collection and Reporting Program,” has been prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The document is a follow-up to the initial report to Congress compiled pursuant to direction in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260).



This report includes a status on the tasks and documents completed or currently being developed by the United States Fire Administration (USFA) in its effort to stand up a competent and compliant firefighter suicide data collection and report program.

Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Chairwoman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann  
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Chris Murphy  
Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

For questions regarding this report, please contact the FEMA Congressional Affairs Division at (202) 646-4500.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lori Moore-Merrell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lori Moore-Merrell, DrPH, MPH  
U.S. Fire Administration

# Executive Summary

In response to the Joint Explanatory Statement that accompanies the FY 2021 DHS Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260), USFA provided an initial congressional report on November 30, 2021, fulfilling the requirement to collect and maintain data concerning suicide rates of firefighters who are exposed repeatedly to certain types of trauma and to report on firefighter suicides.

Currently, the existing USFA On-Duty Firefighter Fatality Program, which began in 1976, only captures and reports on firefighter fatalities, including suicides, that are identified as having occurred while on duty. To meet the congressional requirement, USFA will expand its existing on-duty firefighter fatality database to allow for the information collection of all firefighter suicides, including those that occurred while off-duty.

To set up a competent and legally compliant firefighter suicide collection and reporting program, USFA has determined that multiple tasks must be completed (including legal requirements) before the expanded database is developed and information collection begins.

As of April 1, 2022, the following tasks have been completed:

1. *“Firefighter Suicide Data Collection and Reporting Implementation Plan”* (internal document to USFA)
2. Analysis to determine the most efficient method to build firefighter suicide database
3. *“Needs/Requirements of Firefighter Suicide Database”* (database schema internal to USFA)

As of April 1, 2022, the following tasks currently are in development or are in progress:

1. Privacy Threshold Analyses as required by the DHS Privacy Office
2. Privacy Impact Assessment as required by the DHS Privacy Office
3. Paperwork Reduction Act clearance from the Office of Management and Budget
4. Collaboration with the FEMA Grant Programs Directorate (GPD)

USFA will continue executing incomplete tasks outlined above. As progress occurs on these items, other work necessary to stand up the firefighter suicide data collection and reporting program will begin. Other necessary work includes outreach to the fire service national organizations; to state, local, tribal, and territorial fire departments; and to other stakeholders to announce and market the program, as well as collaboration with FEMA GPD to include a grant application requirement to report firefighter suicides to USFA.



# Firefighter Suicide Collection and Reporting Program

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# I. Legislative Language

The Joint Explanatory Statement that accompanies the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260) includes the following requirement:

There is currently no national data concerning suicide rates of firefighters who are repeatedly exposed to trauma that impacts their mental health and wellness. USFA is directed to collect and maintain such data and report on firefighter suicides. USFA shall update the Committees on the status of fulfilling this requirement within 90 days of the date of enactment of this Act. The report shall include an assessment of FEMA’s ability to require reporting of firefighter suicide data in applications for Assistance to Firefighter Grants and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grants.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, the Joint Explanatory Statement for FY 2022 states:

*United States Fire Administration (USFA).* — Within 30 days of the date of enactment of this Act, the USFA shall submit to the Committees the status report on its efforts to collect data on firefighter suicide as required in the fiscal year 2021 Joint Explanatory Statement.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 166 Cong. Rec. H8312, H8479 (Dec. 21, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> 168 Cong. Rec. H2409 (Mar. 9, 2022).

## II. Background

The existing USFA On-Duty Firefighter Fatality Program, which began in 1976, only captures and reports on firefighter fatalities, including suicides, that are identified as having occurred while on duty. To meet the congressional requirement, USFA plans to expand its existing on-duty firefighter fatality database to allow for the information collection of all firefighter suicides, including those that occurred while off-duty.

To set up a competent and legally compliant firefighter suicide collection and reporting program, USFA has determined that multiple tasks must be completed (including legal requirements) before the expanded database is developed and data collection begins.

### III. Analysis/Discussion

As of April 1, 2022, USFA is working on or has completed the following tasks related to standing up its firefighter suicide collection and reporting effort:

1. USFA's "Firefighter Suicide Data Collection and Reporting Implementation Plan" - This completed document (internal to USFA) lays out a plan on how USFA will collect, verify, store, and report on firefighter suicide data. It also discusses how USFA will conduct outreach to the fire service and other stakeholders, making them aware of this effort and asking them to report data on firefighter suicides when they occur. In addition, the document discusses potential partnerships with other organizations and establishes a draft timeline of the effort.
2. Analysis of How to Build the Firefighter Suicide Database - The USFA Web-Farm team that built and currently maintains USFA's existing on-duty firefighter fatality database collaborated with the subject matter expert team to determine whether it would be more efficient to build the firefighter suicide database from scratch or to expand the existing on-duty firefighter fatality database. As a result of the discussions and subsequent analyses, the USFA Web-Farm Team determined it best to expand the existing database, to include data elements related to firefighter suicide.
3. "Needs/Requirements of Firefighter Suicide Database" (database schema) - At the request of USFA's Web-Farm team, this completed database schema lists all data elements intended for collection by USFA to gather information on firefighter suicides. This database schema also establishes how data elements will relate to each other for analysis and reporting. Each data element includes a description of how the information should be answered or an actual list of valid answers from which persons making the report will choose.
4. Privacy Threshold Analyses (PTA) - As required by the DHS Privacy Office, two PTAs were completed (one specific to the database and one specific to the collection form). These PTA questionnaires are used to determine if a system contains personally identifiable information, whether a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) is required, whether a System of Records Notice is required, and if any other privacy requirements apply to the information system. Both PTAs were submitted to and approved by the DHS Privacy Office in 2021. However, because USFA expanded its database schema in early 2022 to include additional data elements, both PTAs will need to be updated and resubmitted to the DHS Privacy Office for reapproval.
5. PIA - Based on information presented in the PTAs, the DHS Privacy Office determined that it was necessary for USFA to complete a PIA. The PIA is an in-depth document intended to: 1) ensure conformance with applicable legal, regulatory, and policy requirements for privacy; 2) determine the risks and effects; and 3) evaluate protections and alternate processes to mitigate privacy

risk. USFA has begun work on the PIA and plans to submit it to the DHS Privacy Office by August 1, 2022.

6. Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) requirements - Because the firefighter suicide collection effort will gather the same information from 10 or more people/entities, USFA is required to obtain a PRA clearance for the firefighter suicide collection effort. USFA is working with FEMA Records Management to understand what will be needed to obtain a successful PRA clearance and to begin addressing this requirement.

7. Resource Requirements - The FY 2021 DHS Appropriations Act directs USFA to collect firefighter suicide data. FEMA is evaluating resource requirements and options for collecting and maintaining this data effectively.

8. FEMA Grant Programs - As stated in the initial report to Congress (November 1, 2021), the FEMA Grant Programs Directorate (GPD) reviewed the feasibility of adding requirements for grant applicants to submit firefighter suicide data to USFA within their grant applications. After determining that there was minimal effort to incorporate the change, GPD plans to add this requirement to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant/Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grants guidance. However, given the legal requirements for data collection, including this information in the grant guidance must be deferred until such requirements are met and development of the expanded data system has progressed.



## IV. Conclusion

USFA will continue executing all incomplete tasks as outlined. As progress continues on these items, other work necessary to stand up the firefighter suicide data collection and reporting program will advance.

## V. Appendix – List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FY	Fiscal Year
GPD	Grant Programs Directorate
PIA	Privacy Impact Assessment
PRA	Paperwork Reduction Act
PTA	Privacy Threshold Analysis
USFA	United States Fire Administration