



Volunteer & Combination Officers Section of The International Association of Fire Chiefs

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VCOS Announces National Summit on Volunteerism

August 28, 2010... The Volunteer & Combination Officers Section (VCOS) of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) is proud to announce their first National Summit: "The Heartbeat of America: Preserving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service," to be held March 17-19, 2011 at the Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill hotel in Washington, D.C.

This three-day summit will feature a series of highly-regarded speakers from government, policy and fire and emergency service arenas. Participants will address issues and concerns about volunteerism which are critical to the emergency response community as well as to the fabric of our nation as a whole. While drawing on the knowledge and experience of volunteer leaders, the summit will also reach out to emerging leaders whose input is critical for shaping the future.

In 2004, the VCOS published the first of five industry-changing "ribbon" reports, "The Blue Ribbon Report: A Call to Action—Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service." Since its release, that document has served as a blueprint for improving the volunteer fire service that is so essential to our nation, but too often finds itself underfunded and ill-equipped. This summit will bring that report to life and revitalize the effort to improve the "volunteer emergency services," inclusive of volunteer, on-call and part-time personnel.

"Hosting a national summit has been a long-term vision of the VCOS leadership for many years, and that vision is now becoming a reality," says Chief Timothy S. Wall, VCOS chair. "The ultimate goal of the summit is to examine the critical challenges that are faced by fire departments staffed by volunteer, on-call or part-time firefighters and help develop a long-term strategic plan to carry the volunteer fire service into the future and solidify its status."

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, volunteer firefighters save the United States \$37 billion each year, as they donate their time and their expertise to protect lives and property. Unfortunately, external forces - such as dwindling "spare" time, poor economic conditions, and increasing difficulty in making the long-term commitment to required training, etc. - have all conspired to tax these volunteers beyond their ability to keep up and are now stressing the communities that rely on them from coast to coast.

Even though 73 percent of all U.S. fire departments are still fully volunteer, and 93 percent rely on some volunteer members, the overall number of volunteer firefighters has declined by 10 percent since the 1980s, according to the United States Fire Administration.

"Volunteering with your local fire department is a long-standing tradition that makes our country truly great," Chief Wall said. "But today that tradition is at risk as communities grow larger and citizens demand additional services. The individuals who volunteer struggle to manage their time while keeping a reasonable balance with all the other factors that make up their daily lives."

For more information about the Summit, look to the [VCOS website](#) where we will be posting information in the near future.