

VDFP DISPATCH

THIS MONTH AT VDFP

PUBLISHED FOR AND ABOUT VDFP's EMPLOYEES

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SFMO Wraps 2025 July 4 Fireworks Inspection Season

Over the course of six days, the State Fire Marshal's Office inspected 36 fireworks shows across the Commonwealth — ensuring each display was safe, code-compliant, and ready to light up the skies for Virginia communities this Fourth of July.

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Staff Spotlight: Deputy State Fire Marshal, Andy Utt

This month, we're happy to spotlight Andy Utt, a dedicated member of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs' State Fire Marshal's Office whose career reflects a deep commitment to public safety, professional development, and community education...

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Enhancing public safety throughout the Commonwealth

Community Risk Reduction

Training

Virginia Fire Marshal Academy

State Fire Marshal's Office

SFMO Wraps 2025 July 4 Fireworks Inspection Season

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Each year, the Fourth of July brings family, fun, and fireworks across the Commonwealth — and for the Virginia Department of Fire Programs' State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO), it also brings a major logistical operation focused on public safety. During the week leading up to Independence Day 2025, SFMO deputies conducted inspections at 36 firework shows across Virginia in just six days. The concentrated schedule required meticulous planning, quick coordination, and a strong presence on the ground to ensure that each event met the requirements of the Statewide Fire Prevention Code.

How It Works

The inspection process begins long before the first firework is launched. When a locality falls under SFMO jurisdiction—meaning it does not have its own certified fire official — event organizers must submit a detailed application outlining the location, type of product used, proof of insurance, a licensed pyrotechnician, and a site map with proper fallout zones. Each application is reviewed in-house to verify compliance before a deputy is assigned to cover the event. On the day of the show, SFMO deputies arrive early to inspect the pyrotechnic setup. They verify that the fireworks on-site match the approved product, check that racks are stable and secured, confirm that fallout zones are clear, and observe safe handling procedures throughout the setup process.

“Our focus isn’t just on numbers—it’s on making sure that what’s being used matches the approved safety guidelines,” said Assistant State Fire Marshal of Special Operations, Troy Bower. “If a show is approved for a three-inch shell, for example, we’re there to ensure that six-inch shells aren’t being used in its place.”

After setup, deputies remain on-site to witness the show and ensure a safe execution. Once the show concludes without incident, their role is complete—but their presence plays a vital role in ensuring public safety at these highly attended events.

A Team Effort

With more than three dozen shows compressed into a short window, SFMO staff had boots on the ground in jurisdictions across the Commonwealth—from rural counties to densely attended waterfront displays.

“The SFMO plays a critical role in fireworks displays in front of an audience. The SFMO also has a Deputy at each show to make sure that all the racks are in functioning order, the product is correct, and the fallout area is sufficient. At the end of the day the SFMO wants the same thing that the Sponsor wants, for everyone to have a safe and happy event and to protect the Commonwealth and everyone in it.” said Troy Bower

Looking Ahead

Thanks to strong coordination, preparation, and field execution, the 2025 fireworks season concluded without major incident. As always, the State Fire Marshal’s Office remains committed to ensuring that public displays of fireworks are not only dazzling, but also safe, legal, and code-compliant for communities across Virginia.



Staff Spotlight: Deputy State Fire Marshal - Andy Utt

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From Fire & EMS to the State Fire Marshal's Office Andy began his public safety career in the early 2000s in fire and EMS, steadily progressing through both fields. As his training advanced, he developed a strong interest in fire inspection and investigation—ultimately leading him to the State Fire Marshal's Office. He first joined VDFP as an adjunct instructor around 2015 and transitioned to a full-time position in 2023.

Protecting Communities Through Prevention

In his most recent role, Andy conducted state-mandated inspections and enforced the Statewide Fire Prevention Code in jurisdictions without a designated fire official. His day-to-day work took him to hospitals, daycares, nursing homes, and other public spaces—ensuring compliance and promoting safety.

“The most rewarding part of the job is educating the public,” he said. “Most of the time, if someone isn’t compliant, it’s because they simply don’t know. It’s rewarding to work with them, provide guidance, and help them meet the code.”

Looking Ahead: A New Opportunity

As of this month, Andy has been promoted to Deputy State Fire Marshal III and is stepping into a new chapter—joining the Special Operations side of the State Fire Marshal's Office. While the transition is still fresh, he's eager to take on this new challenge and continue serving Virginia in a broader capacity.

Please join us in congratulating Andy Utt on his recent promotion and thanking him for his continued dedication to the mission of VDFP.



VDFP Adjunct Spotlight: Allen Carwile

Battalion Chief – Lynchburg Fire Department. 33 years in the fire service.

Tell me about your role as an adjunct instructor and what types of courses you teach?

I am part of the HTR instructor cadre for VDFP. I instruct courses in rope rescue, tower rescue, confined space rescue, vehicle rescue, and surface and swift water rescue. I enjoy travelling around the state to help instruct these courses with the other great instructors we have in the program.

How long have you been an instructor with VDFP?

I started instructing for VDFP in 2008 for the HTR program.

Can you describe your teaching style?

My teaching style is very interactive. I like to engage with the students and try to encourage their learning and growth in the subject we are covering. I like to show the students how to do it and then let the students do it for themselves. I always try to motivate the students to continue to learn and practice the new skills learned to become more proficient in what they do, both for successful outcomes and their own safety. I do also like to have fun when I teach. Nothing seems to be worse than a very rigid class where there is no fun. Students seem to be more receptive to learning when they are having a good time while learning.

What are the most rewarding aspects about instructing?

It is rewarding to see the students learn the skills you are teaching and have them be able to use those skills in “real world” scenarios. It is rewarding to see the student “get it” and begin to understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. But the most rewarding aspect about instructing, especially for these rescue courses, is knowing that if the student continues their learning path and practicing the skills and techniques that are taught to them, someday that student may impact the lives of the citizens they serve in their communities by using those skills for a successful rescue.

What has been the best place you have visited or been on vacation?

My wife Mary and I love to cruise. We love going to any of the Caribbean Islands. The best place we have cruised to so far that I liked the most is the island of Saint Kitts in the West Indies. We had a wonderful time there visiting some of the historic sites and local areas of interest.

If you had to travel anywhere in the world, where would it be?

There are lots of places left on my bucket list of destinations to visit, like the Mediterranean, Ireland, New Zealand and Australia, but probably the oddest place would have to be Antarctica. For some reason, I would just like to be able to tell people that I have been there. I know it would be a once in a lifetime experience that not many people would be able to say they have had.





IT Corner

As we continue navigating a fast-paced digital landscape, the importance of a strong IT foundation has never been more vital to our success. Whether you're working from the office, on the road, or remotely, technology is the backbone of our daily operations — and our job in IT is to keep that backbone secure, resilient, and always improving.

Here are a few important updates and reminders to keep you connected and protected:

Cybersecurity: It Starts with You

Cyber threats don't always come with blinking lights or warning sirens — they often arrive in the form of a convincing email or a suspicious link.

Please remember:

Think Before You Click: If an email or attachment seems off, don't open it. When in doubt, report the message using the tools in Outlook.

Autosave & Backups: Your Safety Net

Summer brings heat, and sometimes, unfortunately, power outages or brownouts. Ensure you have autosave turned on in your Microsoft and cloud-based applications. When unexpected disruptions hit, you'll be glad your last 30 minutes of work didn't vanish into the void. Autosave should be on by default in your Microsoft applications.

Behind the Scenes

Our IT team is working hard on:

Upgrading network infrastructure to improve speed and reliability.

Evaluating new tools to enhance productivity and simplify workflows

Remember, the IT Staff is here to assist in your IT issues and needs and are reachable at itsupport@vdfp.virginia.gov. The VITA help desk is also available to assist, you can call them at 866-637-8482 or email at vccc@vita.virginia.gov

Robert Steele

VDFP IT Manager | Deputy ISO

Update - COVA HealthAware – Premium Rewards Health Assessment NEW Instructions effective July 1, 2025

There is a new process to complete a COVA HealthAware health assessment effective 07/01/2025. To comply with the premium reward requirements employees should follow the steps below to complete their health assessment. Also, employees can access the COVA HealthAware Health Assessment Navigation Guide for the MyActiveHealth Mobile App and the Aetna Member Website for step-by-step instructions of how to access and complete their health assessment.

Accessing from your Aetna Member Website:

- Log in to your Aetna Member Website on www.aetna.com.
- Scroll down until you see “Member Resources” on the right side of the page and click on “Aetna Health Your Way” in this section
- First time logging in:
 - Enter your information when prompted and accept the Terms and Conditions.
 - You will be automatically prompted to begin your health assessment. Click on “Update my Health Assessment” to begin your assessment.
- After the first time logging in:
 - Click “My Profile”.
 - Click on your “MyHealth100 Score” next to your profile picture.
 - Scroll down and click on the “Health Assessment” button.

Accessing from your MyActiveHealth mobile app (see below for links to download the app).

Please note: Due to existing security controls, access to the Google Play Store and Apple Store is restricted on state work phones unless an approved exception is in place. Please encourage members to register using their personal smart phones.

- Log in to the MyActiveHealth mobile app.
- First time logging in:
 - Enter your information when prompted and accept the Terms and Conditions.
 - You will be automatically prompted to begin your health assessment. Click on “Update my Health Assessment” to begin your assessment.
- After the first time logging in:
 - Tap on the “Profile” tab.
 - Tap on your “MyHealth100 Score” next to your profile picture.
 - Scroll down and click on the “Health Assessment” button.

Apple App Store: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/myactivehealth-wellness/id6502790784>

Google Play Store: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.myactivehealth.wellbeing>

Please contact your Benefits Administrator, Sharon Williams, if you have any questions at 804-584-3332 or at sharon.williams@dhrm.virginia.gov.



Contact your local DC Plans Education Specialist*

As your local DC Plans Education Specialist, Steve is dedicated to helping you with ongoing access and support for your Virginia Retirement System Defined Contribution Plan.

Contact Steve today to discuss your retirement planning needs, including:

- Assistance with online access
- DC plan overview and updates
- Enrollment assistance
- Investment option questions
- Retirement account consolidation
- Plan resources and tools
- Access to Be Ready Financial Planning Services**
- Financial wellness education
- One-on-one meetings, virtually or in person



**Steve McGregor CRPS®,
CRC® Central Region**

Contact Information -
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*Information from registered Plan Service Representatives is for educational purposes only and is not legal, tax or investment advice. Local Plan Service Representatives are registered representatives of Voya Financial Advisors, Inc., member SIPC

**Financial Professionals are Investment Advisor Representatives and Registered Representatives of and offer securities and investment advisory services through Voya Financial Advisors, Inc. (member SIPC).

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