



BRIAN TAYLOR
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

September 10, 2025

FEMA Review Advisory Council
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Secretary Noem, Secretary Hegseth and Members of the FEMA Review Advisory Council:

On behalf of the North Carolina Office of the State Fire Marshal (NC OSFM) and the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM), I would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to President Trump, Homeland Secretary Noem and Defense Secretary Hegseth for their leadership in restructuring and strengthening Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The President's establishment of the FEMA Review Advisory Council earlier this year highlights how critical this moment is for our country. We are grateful for the Administration's commitment to ensuring FEMA is more effective, efficient, and resilient for the American people.

FEMA has long been viewed as a planning, mitigation, and recovery agency. Yet every disaster response begins with the U.S. Fire Service, which is uniquely positioned as the nation's frontline response and recovery element. From search and rescue, emergency medical response, fire suppression, and hazardous materials incidents to supporting communities in long-term recovery, the fire service is central to every phase of disaster operations.

Currently, there is no dedicated fire service voice on the FEMA Review Advisory Council. This leaves a significant gap in expertise and perspective, as firefighters not only provide the first line of defense but also carry the trust of local communities—trust that federal and even state agencies sometimes struggle to earn.

The U.S. Fire Service operates under the framework:

Local Fire Chief → State Fire Marshals → U.S. Fire Administrator

This framework ensures both accountability and coordination, which is why we believe the U.S. Fire Administrator position must report directly to the Homeland Security Secretary and sit in the Emergency Service Function (ESF4) for fire and emergency services.

OFFICE OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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The US Fire Administrator can bridge the operational realities of the fire service on the ground, as they are the first line of defense in all natural and man-made disasters.

Hurricane Helene made landfall in North Carolina on September 27, 2024, bringing catastrophic destruction to the western part of our state. Communities in the mountains—already challenging to serve because of their rugged terrain—were left isolated, cut off, and unprepared for the storm’s impact. Entire counties lost communication for weeks as flooding and landslides swept through the region. The devastation was overwhelming, with at least 108 lives lost and widespread destruction to homes, infrastructure, and critical community resources.

Thanks to President Trump’s quick action in requesting assistance from Elon Musk, Starlink systems were rapidly deployed. With the help of private partners such as U.S. Fire Pumps, Operation H.E.L.O., and Samaritan’s Purse, we delivered more than 500 Starlink units to remote areas. As State Fire Marshal, my priority was to restore fire departments to operational status as quickly as possible, since they serve as the central hub of every community. I personally flew helicopter missions for 11 straight days, delivering crucial supplies—including Starlinks, medical equipment, chainsaws, and generators—throughout the affected areas of Western North Carolina. I was honored to be the one to deliver the very first Starlink from Elon Musk to the Garren Creek Fire Department, which had tragically suffered the first line-of-duty death in this disaster.

This operation revealed three critical lessons:

1. Public-private partnerships save lives. Without private helicopters, Starlinks, and donated resources, communication would not have been restored.
2. Bureaucratic delays cost communities’ valuable time. In some areas, it took two weeks to restore water service, even though private partners were prepared to do so within 24 hours. Requests for a fire base camp to stage equipment and personnel were initially denied, forcing NC OSFM to coordinate independently through private support. As the State Fire Marshal, my role operates independently of the Governor and reports directly to the General Assembly. This structure allows me to cut through red tape and act quickly and efficiently when communities are in need.
3. Trust matters. FEMA representatives and outside Federal and State agencies faced resistance from residents who were reluctant to grant access to their properties. In contrast, citizens readily worked with firefighters—reinforcing the unique trust the fire service holds in communities nationwide.



Every state experiences disasters that test the limits of government resources. Whether wildfires, floods, hurricanes, or man-made incidents, the lesson is consistent: federal and state agencies cannot do it alone. Disasters require flexible collaboration, immediate action, and extensive public-private partnerships.

The U.S. Fire Service bridges the connections between every State, Federal and Private enterprise involved in disaster repose as fire departments are the first line of defense in in any disaster. Firefighters are already embedded in every community, already trusted, and already trained to coordinate across local, state, and national levels.

The work of the FEMA Review Advisory Council is critical to shaping FEMA's future. To succeed, FEMA must include the perspectives of the men and women who answer the call in every community when disaster strikes. Former FEMA Administrator Brock Long, a North Carolina resident, emphasized that FEMA and Emergency Management are not primarily response agencies. From our perspective, the U.S. Fire Service is the true front line of defense in every disaster, and it is essential that the U.S. Fire Administrator report directly to the Department of Homeland Security as the nation's Fire Chief.

I respectfully request the opportunity to participate in the September 22 meeting to represent the voice of the U.S. Fire Service and to be available to share lessons learned from North Carolina's experience with Hurricane Helene.

Thank you for your time, for your leadership, and for your commitment to advancing the safety and resilience of the American people.

Respectfully,

Brian Taylor

Brian Taylor
State Fire Marshal of North Carolina
Vice President, National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM)

ABOUT NASFM:

NASFM is a leading organization dedicated to advancing fire prevention, life safety, and emergency preparedness across the United States. Our association comprises senior fire officials from all 50 states and U.S. territories, each bringing an understanding of their community's unique fire-related challenges. Our efforts span several critical areas:

1. Fire Prevention, Codes, and Standards:

We collaborate with federal, state, and local governments, as well as private stakeholders, to develop and promote fire prevention codes and standards that reduce fire risks. This work ensures that practices remain current with technological advancements and best practices, helping to enhance community safety and reduce fire incidents.

2. Emergency Support Function 4 (ESF 4): Firefighting

Under ESF 4, NASFM coordinates state and local firefighting resources for incidents requiring federal support. We provide expertise, support, and guidance to facilitate organized responses to wildland and structural fires, coordinating with FEMA and the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA).

3. Emergency Support Function 9 (ESF 9): Search and Rescue

Our role involves supporting structural collapse responses, water rescues, and search and recovery operations. We work closely with state fire marshals to optimize resource allocation and enhance search and rescue capabilities across various scenarios.

4. Wildland Fire Response and Coordination:

Given the increasing threat of wildfires, NASFM partners with FEMA, USFA, the U.S. Forest Service, and state agencies to bolster wildland fire response. We help coordinate multi-state efforts to improve response times and protect communities from the devastating impacts of wildfires.

5. Data Collection and Analysis:

We prioritize fire data collection, utilizing systems like NFIRS to understand trends, identify improvement areas, and develop data-driven policies for fire safety and emergency preparedness.

6. Emergency Response and Preparedness Initiatives:

As state fire marshals, we oversee fire and rescue readiness within our states, providing guidance on response strategies, training, and public safety education to enhance community resilience.



7. Elevation of the U.S. Fire Administrator:

NASFM advocates for the elevation of the U.S. Fire Administrator's reporting structure to report directly to the Secretary of Homeland Security, ensuring higher visibility, strategic alignment, and accountability within national disaster and emergency response initiatives.

With this breadth of expertise, NASFM is well-positioned to offer valuable perspectives on potential leadership for FEMA and USFA. We are committed to ensuring that future agency leaders possess the operational experience, strategic vision, and collaborative spirit necessary to advance our national fire and emergency response objectives.



ABOUT BRIAN TAYLOR:

Brian Taylor – State Fire Marshal of North Carolina

Brian Taylor’s fire service journey began at just 16 years old as a Junior Firefighter with the Norwood Center Rural Volunteer Fire Department and a Fire Explorer with Post 17 at the Albemarle Fire Department. He continued his education at Stanly Community College before beginning his professional career in 1992 as a firefighter with the City of Albemarle, while also serving part-time with the Stanly County Fire Marshal’s Office as a Fire Inspector and Investigator.

In October 2000, Brian was promoted to Fire Marshal and Emergency Management Coordinator for the City of Albemarle. Over the course of his career, he has earned numerous fire and rescue certifications in North Carolina and completed advanced leadership programs through the National Fire Academy, UNC School of Government, and the UNC Charlotte Fire and Rescue Management Institute.

Today, Brian serves as North Carolina’s first independent State Fire Marshal, a position appointed by and reporting directly to the General Assembly. In this role, he oversees eight divisions within the Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) and serves as:

- Executive Director, NC Fire and Rescue Commission
- NC Fire Training Director, North American Fire Training Directors (NAFTD)
- Commissioner, State Emergency Response Commission (SERC)

On the national level, Brian is the Vice President of the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) and contributes to several national committees, ensuring that the voice of the fire service is heard in critical policy discussions.

Over the past year, Brian has traveled across the country—sharing lessons learned from Hurricane Helene, one of North Carolina’s most devastating disasters. His presentations have highlighted challenges such as communications breakdowns, isolated communities cut off from aid, the struggles responders face when federal and state processes delay action and how we must embrace the need for public-private partnerships. Most recently, he has spoken in Mississippi, Texas, Oklahoma and California, bringing firsthand insights into both the extraordinary dedication of first responders and the urgent need to improve disaster response systems nationwide.

Brian and his wife, Kathy, live in Albemarle, North Carolina. Together, they are proud parents of five children and grandparents to four.