

REPORT ON LEWISTOWN FIRE TRAINING MEETING

IN ACCORDANCE WITH

HOUSE RESOLUTION 97 - PRINTER'S NO. 1351

SEPTEMBER 26, 1973

COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HONORABLE GUY A. KISTLER, CHAIRMAN

*Guy A. Kistler*  
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## Report on Lewistown Fire Training Meeting

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Dr. John W. Struck, Director of the Bureau of Vocational Education, chaired a meeting of the Fire Service Training Advisory Committee at the Firemen's Training School in Lewistown. Dr. Struck key-noted the purpose of the meeting as a discussion of "directions of fire-training in Pennsylvania and utilization of resources." His hope was that such meaningful discussions would be a beginning toward a comprehensive 'master plan' for fire training in the Commonwealth.

Dr. Struck acknowledged the transferal (through Reorganization Plan I) of the Public Service Institute Board to the Department of Community Affairs with the "Fire Service Training Advisory Committee," and the Lewistown Training School remaining with the Bureau of Vocational Education in the Department of Education. He referred to the Committee as "ad hoc" and intimated its termination. Several members of the Committee expressed their displeasure because they had not met as a Committee in over two years. They were not even funded for their expenses for the Lewistown meeting. The downgrading of the importance of the "Fire Service Training Advisory Committee" in dealing with the fire problem, as expressed by Dr. Struck, Professor Bland and Mr. Arble, was diametrically opposed to the views of the majority of the Committee, Mr. Canterbury and Representatives Cessar, Hayes, Smith and Comer. In fact, Representative Cessar concluded the meeting by anticipating the utilization of the Committee for future meetings.

Mr. Canterbury, the Fire School's Supervisor, spoke of the changing role of the Lewistown school (from its beginning in 1955 to the present) emphasizing the building program, the increase in number of students and the increase in State funding. Mr. Canterbury felt that the school had been unable to keep up with fire service needs. In some cases, he cited the fact that students had better equipment at home than at the school; justifying his request for new equipment.

He also stressed in the changing picture at Lewistown that County fire schools (under P.S.I. direction) were now filling local needs in the fundamentals of fire-fighting (such as "hose lays" and "ladder raises") leaving the more technical and specialized courses (such as administrative courses, alarm systems and detector devices) to the Lewistown school. Mr. Canterbury felt that such fundamental principles, learned locally, could best be applied to more complex situations at Lewistown. His request was for a substantial increase in new instructors trained at Lewistown for field service.

Mr. James Long, Western Regional Director of Fire Training and Mr. Robert Miller, Eastern Regional Director, spoke of the 212 local level fire training programs at Lewistown available to the three thousand (3,000) Commonwealth fire departments

encompassing weekend or (1) week training sessions in 1972-73. County regional fire schools, and nursing home personnel availed themselves of 1,259 programs. The training involved no cost to local fire departments and produced a total of 29,801 graduates. Both directors expressed the view that their biggest problem in the field was getting the interest and approval of fire chiefs and finding training personnel to do the job. They also mentioned that there were six pilot programs utilizing vo-tech schools because of federal legislation authorizing use of these funds for fire training.

The directors suggested that their geographical territory be divided into four sections so that there would be four field directors rather than two. Unfortunately, Messrs. Grening, Foresman and Myers, fire training instructors at Lewistown, chose not to speak about their duties and curriculum deficiencies. They said they would comment later on in the meeting after they heard from the Advisory Committee. They never did!

Mr. Francis Bear, Advisory Committee member, and Deputy Chief of the Bureau of Fire in Allentown, praised the field instructors performance, mentioning that 60% of field programs were run by the instructors at no cost to the Commonwealth.

Mr. James Baird, Jr., Committee member and legislative representative of the "Firemen's Legislative Federation of Penna.," wrote to the State Government Committee Chairman criticizing fire service training in the Commonwealth, both at the fire school and at the local level. Mr. Baird spoke for H.B. 300, P.N. 335 (now in Local Government Committee) which would provide for the establishment of four new regional fire training schools to be located at State Colleges in Bloomsburg, California, Edinboro and West Chester in addition to the Lewistown school operated by the Department of Education.

\*It should be noted that Lewistown's operating budget is \$167,000 annually with the original cost of facilities constructed between 1953 and 1955 at \$800,000. Since then a \$300,000 service building and \$200,000 auditorium were added. Estimated replacement value of equipment located at the school is approximately \$100,000.

There were many questions raised as to whether four new training schools would duplicate facilities at Lewistown, thereby increasing costs; whether the sites picked (with structures periodically set on fire) would be acceptable as to zoning controls, local pollution standards and those qualities usually associated with college communities; and whether the locations designated would be the most accessible to students.

With regard to the latter question, Director Miller suggested that placement of the four training schools in Luzerne, Erie, Montgomery and Butler counties would make them more accessible than the locations in H.B. 300.

Mr. Arble, a fire protection engineer with "PENN TAP", and field instructor of fire training for P.S.I., who stressed the need for up to date data on fire protection and

prevention before solutions could be achieved, stressed that no where in Pennsylvania was there a roster of the approximately 2,900 volunteer fire departments and twenty-four paid fire departments. He also pointed out the lack of data on the number of fires in Pennsylvania in a given year. He mentioned that paid firemen (except where fire incidence was high) could be considered as wasting taxpayers' money since they spent only 5% of their time fighting fires. Mr. Arble emphasized that the quality of the volunteer firemen was superb and that their public image was improving. He also found that over all building codes to prevent fires were well enforced locally. He reported a lack of interest in fire training in some independent fire departments and suggested that fire chiefs be exposed to advanced training at Lewistown and then train their own people locally. He suggested computer aided and visual aids instruction for those fire chiefs who cannot read or write; otherwise, modern technology would be lost on them. There was quite a bit of discussion on such 'illiterate' fire chiefs and much disagreement between the Department of Education and "Penn State men" and the Advisory Committee and Legislators as to exactly how illiterate these fire chiefs were; or even if they were! No data was given to prove such an allegation!

Since Mr. Arble represented the "Pennsylvania Technical Assistance Program" (administered by Penn State with partial support from the Pa. Department of Commerce) which links all areas of technical knowledge into a non-duplicating information network available to any governmental organization, he suggested that PENN TAP could fill the "fire data gap."

\*Dr. Carl Lindsay has submitted a proposal to the State Government Committee Chairman for an inventory on fire suppression resources, fire incidence and fire loss in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Herbert McAnulty, Advisory Committee member suggested that Lewistown fire school be the 'nucleus' for four regional training schools which in turn would be a 'hub' for vo-tech and community colleges in each area.

Mr. George Prince, Advisory Committee member, requested that volunteer fire training be made available to all fire services, both unifying and coordinating them, through basic minimum standards available at accessible locations. Since most fire-service men do not have the money or time (even if motivated) to attend Lewistown classes, he felt Lewistown could serve as a central source of information for fire chiefs. He also felt that there was an urgent need for fire protection service in industry, and a need for education for the public.

Mr. Robert Stackhouse, Advisory Committee member, spoke out against regional schools. He felt the installation at Lewistown was sufficient; but, wanted additional traveling instructors, with the State paying all traveling expenses. He preferred the volunteer fire

system without Federal regulations but with some State regulations for fire officers. He suggested improving the "fire image" by eliminating the "bar route" (heavy social drinking) in the fire services. He didn't say how! He did feel that a "top-notch Fire Commissioner" with highest credentials should be recruited at a high salary to co-ordinate the fire-services, and that state funding should be extended in fire-training. He didn't say how much!

Mr. Baird then suggested that H.B. 1051, P.N. 1256 (sponsored by Rep. Wright in our State Government Committee) be passed to create an independent State Fire Safety Commission to adopt and have sole jurisdiction over all fire and safety codes with enforcement powers (excepting arson investigations of the Pa. State Police Fire Marshall Division.) The bill would have the Governor appoint a Fire Safety Commissioner, for a five year term, from a list of five qualified applicants submitted by the Commission. The Commissioner would have to have ten years' experience as a fire-safety engineer, or its equivalent, to qualify.

This concept appeared to correlate with Mr. Stackhouse's idea of a recruited top-notch fire Commissioner.

Mr. George Stewart, Advisory Committee member, who is also a fire chief spoke of elevating the importance of the fire-service in the community; and placing all fire service problems under a separate Administration in the Commonwealth. He believed fire-training should be divided into the following categories:

1. On site (fire station) training which would involve basic fire-fighting fundamentals.
2. Four regional schools in addition to Lewistown in which volunteers could be exposed to smoke, heat and fire beyond the use of tools.
3. Lewistown, where fire officers could be trained in depth to bring knowledge back to their fire departments.
4. Courses in technology (leading to a degree) offered at Lewistown and the four regional schools in cooperation with state universities.

Mr. William Furguson, Advisory Committee member, and Chairman of the "Pa. State Firemen Training Committee" agreed with Chief Stewart requesting that "up to date" equipment be brought to Lewistown. He thought it imperative that the Advisory Board be continued. He resented the fact that there had been no board meetings in the last two years.

Mr. Ferguson felt that there ought to be a strongly staffed administration in Harrisburg headed by a Fire Commissioner to over see the whole fire-service.

He disagreed with Chief Stewart on the need for four regional schools. He felt that all training ought to emanate from Lewistown through four regional directors rather than two; and upgrade the quality and tools of the directors.

Dr. Richard E. Bland, Chairman of President Nixon's National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control and a professor at Penn State, pointed out the lack of fire data on the national level and also on the State level. He commented on Captain Oliver Smith, State Police Fire Marshall's, statement that the only figures he had are those reported to him by fire chiefs requesting arson investigations (120 arrests a year with forty men in the field) and these were exclusive of Philadelphia and Allegheny Counties. He agreed with Capt. Smith's suggestions for emphasis upon preventing fires through books, movies, T.V. programs and seminars held at educational centers.

Dr. Bland, in his national report, pointed out that where national statistics were meager, the toll of 12,000 lives lost and \$11 billion wasted necessitated Federal involvement to overcome the indifference of Americans to fire safety. However, his commission felt that fire prevention and control should remain primarily local responsibilities with the Federal Government lending technical and educational assistance to State and local governments, collecting and analyzing fire information, regulating flammability materials, conducting research and development and providing adequate fire protection when it is beyond a community's means. The commission recommended the creation of a United States Fire Administration in the Department of Housing and Urban Development to supplement all programs of research and action (not supplant them). The U. S. Fire Administration would develop a comprehensive national fire data system to establish priorities for action; would assist in the interchange of information; would provide bloc grants to states so that local governments may develop comprehensive fire protection plans, improve fire fighting equipment and upgrade fire service education; would establish a National Fire Academy for advanced education of fire service officers and assistance to State and local training programs; and would make a major effort to educate Americans in fire safety.

The Minority Report of the Commission disagreed with the majority, not in substance, but in the size of the budget expended; and with the order of priorities.

\*The question arises that if there were to be bloc grants given to states for local government use there would have to be a state agency to administer them, and some criteria for distribution.

Dr. Bland appeared to emphasize local control of the fire problems without a strong state involvement and strong Federal regulations.

\*Dr. Bland and Mr. Arble, in my opinion, monopolized the most speaking time at the meeting and contributed the least in concrete suggestions.

What he emphasized at the Federal level he appeared to negate at the State level. I don't think his thinking has sufficiently crystallized at this point.

He suggested that the Legislature come up with some "model master plan" which could be used as an example federally, since he believed Pennsylvania's problems are a micro-cosm of the Nation's. He felt that each community should set its own standards for fire service. Dr. Bland felt that the efficiency of a fire department was proportionate to how many fires were fought. He felt that training should be commensurate with community service needed and that some of the field curriculum was not essential and that some equipment overwhelmed the fire departments not needing them. He also felt that some courses in the field were boring and failed to motivate students. Dr. Bland felt that any State funding of local fire schools should be matched by local-level revenue sharing, as motivation.

The contributions of Rep. Comer, Mr. Frascella, Rep. Smith and Mrs. Tully were of interest; but, Rep. Samuel Hayes asked several pertinent questions of Dr. Bland, Mr. Arble and Mr. Baird concerning their requests for Commonwealth funding.

He simply wanted to know, from these gentlemen, what funds were needed; how many field training schools would be needed; how should they be staffed, and what equipment would be necessary.

Mr. Hayes received no answers to his questions--because the gentlemen simply did not know!

Mr. Hayes, felt that had the State Government Committee Chairman been at the meeting that these questions (essential to any investigative legislative body) would have been asked by the Chairman.

Rep. Cessar, who chaired the afternoon session of the meeting, ended the questioning. He expressed the hope that the fire training problem could be defined properly for the General Assembly and that the installation at Lewistown could serve as a model for advanced fire training for the Nation.

Representative Cessar concluded the session with the anticipation of meeting the Fire Service Training Advisory Committee at a future time and thanked them for their hospitality.

\*It appeared to me that the need for more fire resources, fire loss and fire incidence data in Pennsylvania is urgently needed before comprehensive solutions to Pennsylvania's fire

problem can be achieved.

Specifically, much more information must be afforded to the State Government Committee before any system of fireman's training could be designed under the Department of Education and legislative recommendations made to the House of Representatives.

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House Committee on State Government