

**Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission Meeting  
June Meeting Minutes  
June 10, 2021**

**Commission Members Present:**

Chad Major	Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana
Butch Browning	State Fire Marshal
Louis Romero	Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana
Bryan Adams	Governor's Appointee
Ken Himel	Louisiana Fire Chief's Association
Brian Lindberg	Louisiana State Firemen's Association
Russell Di Salvo	Louisiana Fire Chief's Association

**Attendees Present via Zoom:**

Karen St. Germain	Governor's Appointee
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**Commission Members Absent:**

Matt Lee	Chancellor's Designee from LSU
Brandon Davis	Governor's Appointee
William Parker	Louisiana State Firemen's Association

**In Attendance:**

Ken Fowler	FETI
Cheri Mullenix	FETI
Dan Wallis	SFM
Nicholas Heinen	SFM
Ashley Rodrigue	SFM
Russell Snover	SFM
Michael Kimble	Baton Rouge Fire
Lee Cahanin	Opelousas Fire
Gene Sweet	Caddo Fire
Kerry Lyles	Caddo Fire
Dan Cutten	Caddo Fire
Jeff Akes	Caddo Fire
Robert Taggart	Shreveport Fire
Charles Pinkston	Shreveport Fire
Gina Danos	Montegut Fire
Chad Roberson	St. George Fire
Matt Ard	St. George Fire
Katie Battaglia	SFM
Traci Travis	SFM
Chris Mickal	New Orleans Fire
Timothy Crockett	West Baton Rouge
Darren Ramirez	Plaquemine
Mike Lambert	Sorrento
Chuck Albert	St. George Fire
Raymond Ledoux	Churchpoint VFD

Robert "Bobby" Black	Past President LFCA
Joe Hamner	England Arrpark
Thomas Arnold	Cullen Fire
Burnell Hill, Jr.	Maringouin Fire
Toby Henry	Montegut Fire
Stanley Washington	Maringouin Fire
Jude Landry	Little Caillou
Mike Delaune	Bayou Cane Fire
April Ward	Catile Fire
Dwayne Elliot	Bossier City Fire
Steve Pennell	Bossier City Fire
Rodney Pilgrim	South Bossier City Fire
Chris Womack	Ruston Fire
Stacy Madden	Bossier City Fire
Austin Porche	Central Fire
TK Devall	FETI
Mark Waniewski	PMI
Patrice Carpenter	Ascension Parish Fire
Joseph Lewis	Iowa Fire
Bobby Guilbeau	Evangeline
Byron Johnson	Rapides
Adam Schmitt	Bayou Cane Fire
Brian Boudreaux	Bayou Cane Fire
Kenny Hill	Bayou Cane Fire
Christine Earnheart	FETI
Ted Demornelle	Ville Platte
Chris Harrison	Ville Platte
Matthew Rabalais	St. Landry
Jack Barber	M & M Protection

**QUORUM PRESENT**

The Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission was called to order by Mr. Chad Major. Invocation was performed. Pledge was performed as well. Mr. Major called the roll and announced that a quorum was present. The meeting began.

Motion was made by Mr. Browning to approve the May 13 minutes for the regular commission meeting and Mr. Himel seconded the motion. No abstentions or objections were voiced.

**MOTION PASSED.**

**Chief's Report**

Mr. Fowler presented the report. He stated that he did not have much new information to bring to the table but there were a few things he wanted to discuss. He started by discussing the year-end numbers. Of course, Covid had slowed everything way down, but it was only about 35% less in class delivery. Zoom classes did help with the low contact hours and that program was still popular and continuing to be used largely. They were looking at cutting down on the amount of Zoom classes available, but still offering it as an option. He also suggested that they put out a survey to see if they wanted to continue

with these types of classes and see it was still felt to be beneficial. The 40-hour classes were still holding steady and were actually picking up some. He did anticipate that the fall numbers were going to look much better now that the Covid situation was more under control.

They were moving forward still with the Live Fire Training Instructor class and the Fire Officer 4 class as well.

This concluded the presentation of the chief's report.

#### **Financial Report**

Ms. Ramezan presented the report. She stated that the April and May balance sheets were included in the commission packets. There were no abnormal expenses. Since the last report, some of the projects that they had been working on were completed and were reflected on the balance sheets. They were in the middle of the fiscal year closeout which would be complete on June 30. Mr. Major asked if anything had happened with the accounts receivable position. Ms. Ramezan stated that they could not move forward with hiring someone until the department transition took place.

This concluded the presentation of the financial report.

Mr. Adams wanted to note in the minutes that he was offended that the LSU representative or the Director had chosen not to be a part of the meeting. He felt that someone in leadership outside of the individuals that had chosen to be there at the meeting should have been there. His feelings were that Ms. Thackaberry, Mr. Trahan, or Mr. Donahue should have been there to answer questions.

#### **Old Business**

Mr. Major opened the floor for the presentation of old business.

He began with discussion of the rebranding of the LSU FETI. It was originally slated to be completed by July 1, but there were some things that had occurred to delay that. He opted to read Ms. Thackaberry's last email. The email stated that it was going to take quite a bit longer than originally anticipated particularly relating to the facility and land. In the interim, they would need to continue operations more traditionally. The team was working on a comprehensive plan associated with the project charter and updates to the project charter. Once it was in place and the contract signed, then they could begin an operational transition. Until then, current team would need to be kept in place and the fire marshal would need to hold off meeting with the team and being at the FETI location. The email directed to Mr. Wallis that she would be in touch with more details and until details were worked out, she desired for the activities of the state fire marshal relating to the potential transition occur at the office of state fire marshal and not at FETI. Once they were able to get more fully synced on the path forward, they could re-position that and have the transition activities begin to occur once again at FETI. This concluded the reading of the email from the Ms. Thackaberry.

Mr. Major stated that Mr. Wallis and Mr. Schultz were both there and it would be appropriate for them both to report on the findings regarding the transition. Mr. Wallis reported on his findings. He was not sure where the issue had actually begun but it could possibly have been when they started asking site specific safety questions. Their team was a compilation of the best of the best. He felt that if you were going to make a purchase of any kind then you investigated everything about it so that you could make an informed decision which is where they were in this process. They had wanted to bring an informed decision back to the commission. Through that process they had recognized some safety and

environmental concerns. It could have been some confusion on the different standards out there. He knew there were different standards for municipal and industrial side. However, the only reference they had was to recognize the NFPA standards. Mr. Wallis stated that he had tasked Mr. Schultz since he had a background in fire service leadership on the training side to evaluate every prop, most of the line of fire exercise, policy and procedures as well as the grounds itself. He stated further that at this point, he had no animosity. When they received the email (which one was not specifically stated), the team immediately packed up and left.

They were trying to maintain some semblance of professionalism. So, when asked to either engage or disengage, then disengagement was the route they were going to take. He wanted to give the floor to Mr. Schultz to review the systematic approach they used to evaluate the site and to also review some of the high-level findings that had been discovered. Mr. Browning wanted to clarify that he was told that LSU had their own firefighting standards independently from NFPA. Mr. Wallis confirmed that when they were evaluating the structural elements of industrial props, they were advised that the industrial engineering section had approved all of it. So, they had requested some stamp plans or some sort of certification so they could use as a guide. They also requested the number of hours the props had been used and the intervals in which the props had been evaluated by a third party. These requests were based on standards. The documentation had not been received yet. There had been no reason given why the documentation had not been provided and Mr. Wallis stated that he had not asked.

Mr. Adams asked if the commission had taken a vote on assigning Mr. Wallis to be at the Fire School. It was confirmed that this had occurred. Mr. Adams felt this being the case that it should be put in the form of a motion that Mr. Wallis should show up there Monday and sit on the conference room as he had been doing. He did not feel that they could force them to vacate the premises. Mr. Romero expressed his frustration about entities dictating to the commission what was going to happen. He felt that the commission should be in charge of their own decisions. Mr. Browning was not bothered by Ms. Thackaberry's email simply because he had been in contact with some of her bosses and he was aware of what they were doing. He added that he was taken back by the abrasiveness of blockading the work that the assigned team along with Mr. Wallis had been trying to do. He also stated that in the last 6-8 months he had learned more about FETI than he had known in the last 11 years. Mr. Wallis and his team had discovered different things that the commission should have been made aware of such as the status of the props and the purchase of equipment that was not NFPA approved. He had some huge concerns with their training facility on Nicholson Drive. He wasn't sure if he wanted to be responsible for it being used until safety concerns were evaluated. He felt they would get some clarification within the next week. Mr. Major and Mr. Browning had received information from LSU officials that there would be meetings over the next week.

The floor was turned back over to Mr. Wallis and Mr. Schultz. Mr. Wallis stated that Mr. Schultz had created the site assessment plan and had shared it with LSU within their team. He was not sure if it had made it to the commission members, but they did have copies available. Mr. Schultz reviewed the findings. Copies of the findings were provided to the commission. Documentation was one of the main issues. There was some discussion regarding the hydrostatic testing on the SCBA cylinders. There was documentation stating that the cylinders were 5-year cylinders. On the industrial side, the cylinders took a lot more wear and tear, so they had routinely been replacing them at the 5-year mark instead of testing them every 3 years according to Mr. Fowler. He stated as well that on the municipal side, 95% of the cylinders had been purchased off of a grant and were less than 5 years old. He did say that there were some Scott cylinders that did need to be hydrostatically tested and some had gone out already.

Over the past few weeks, they had been sending some out to a third-party vendor to get the testing done. Mr. Lindberg asked if the harnesses, etc. were tested as well. Mr. Fowler answered that that type of testing was done internally as part of the flowsheet mechanism. Mr. Schultz reiterated that the testing of all kinds could be being done but there was not a concerted effort to document all the SCBA activities. Mr. Lindberg asked who was overseeing the current maintenance. Mr. Fowler stated that it fell under Ms. Ramezan's area as the associate director. Mr. Adams asked about the cost effectiveness of replacing the cylinders as opposed to testing them. It was stated that testing was about \$50 and cylinder replacement was around \$800. Mr. Fowler stated that he was not as familiar with the industrial side, and he could not answer to whether or not the cylinders could be tested or would actually need to be replaced. They did not have documentation on the industrial training props.

Mr. Schultz stated there were also flooring issues at the training facility. It was spongy and Mr. Wallis could attest to that because his foot went through the floor. They were working on a corrective action plan for that. Mr. Romero asked if there were recruits going in there and was the floor considered to be structurally sound. Mr. Schultz answered that they were currently using the building. Mr. Fowler attested that it was sound, and he had just gotten a copy of the corrective measure and offered copies to the commission members. There was a bad spot which was over the catwalk area before entering the burn room. They had placed a sheet of steel over it to cover it up currently and they had WHP, the company that had built the MODX for them coming out the second or third week in July to repair. He did not personally believe at this time there was any risk of liability based on their standards. At the time of the report, there was a bad spot in the floor which had already been identified this year in their 5-year inspection. The floor had progressively been getting worse. However, all that being said, there was a corrective plan in motion for this issue. Mr. Schultz did suggest that the buildings be structurally inspected. Also, they had not been able to locate engineering inspections for the industrial props.

There was more discussion regarding various items that they were unable to locate inspections, environmental reviews, etc. The policy and plans for the live fire training had not been provided. They were also working on getting a certification on each of the instructors to conduct live fire training. Mr. Fowler added that because there had not been anyone who held that certification, there had been no live fire classes held. Mr. Browning asked if there were any fire departments in the state that could provide that training. Mr. Schultz stated that Slidell Fire had been through training with the International Fire Service Association. He wasn't sure if they could provide the training, but he knew they had been through it. He also addressed PPE being out of date and severely soiled. They could not find a cleaning or an inspection program or policy on site. At the end of the report, a summary was given including getting an assessment done and increasing the safety profile for the facility, props and gear.

The commission members expressed feelings of disappointment and frustration regarding findings discovered in only a two day walk through. Mr. Adams asked Mr. Wallis what would his plan be if he was in charge of the facility currently. Mr. Wallis stated that he would cease operations until they were back in compliance with testing and documentation. It would need to be determined what the acceptable standard was for this facility and compare to what was being followed right now and of course, if what was acceptable superseded the national minimum then so be it. But as of today, they did not have any of that information in their hands to make that determination. This was all pertaining to the Nicholson Drive facility only. The regional program had not been addressed.

Mr. Wallis did not understand the comments made by Ms. Thackaberry regarding the confusion of the staff. He and the transition team had put in many hours of research to find out the required information

and no one had been confused. They were not trying to be accusatory or lay blame on anyone. They were just taking the facts as they knew them.

Mr. Romero asked if they had any liability for the recruit academy proceeding right now. Mr. Wallis didn't feel that they did because the props in question weren't being used. Mr. Fowler clarified that currently the recruits were not in the multi-story building doing heavy burning and when they would need to be there, mechanisms were set in place to utilize that were certified and appropriate. He gave several examples of different props that he had pulled from different locations. So, they were doing what they needed to do to ensure that the operation continued but by the safest means. Mr. Major asked for clarification on what was meant by saying they should shut down operations because he did not want anyone confused that they were going to be sitting at home for a month or longer with no pay. Mr. Wallis stated that the immediate concerns for the props in question were paramount and also, they had conducted extensive conversation with their partners locally to see what could be solved.

Mr. Adams asked if the mobile props being used had been inspected and if so when did that happen. Mr. Fowler stated that they had been inspected by their own internal maintenance staff. They did not have an outside company that came in. They had a rotation schedule where they moved between each region to keep inspections current. Mr. Romero asked if these personnel were certified to be conducting these inspections. Mr. Fowler stated that he could not answer to that question, but manufacturer guidelines were being followed. The props were mostly purchased with grants, so some items were under warranty and if the repair was covered under the warranty, then the third-party was called in. Mr. Major asked if there were any other questions regarding the report from Mr. Wallis and Mr. Schultz.

There was a question from Zoom regarding the background and qualifications of Mr. Schultz. Mr. Schultz stated that he had been in the fire service for 30 years. He had served in multiple positions in the fire service and had experience with props of all kinds. He was familiar with daily inspections. He was not familiar with the industrial side. His experience was on the municipal side. Mr. Wallis and he both clarified that neither of them was claiming to be qualified to be the last word on the approval and inspection on the props and training facility which is why when they compared the equipment and training facility to the NFPA standards and noticed the discrepancies, they had suggested that the third-party inspection company be brought in to clear everything up. Mr. Major asked if there were any other questions. None were voiced. Mr. Major stated that they were still under old business and any motions could now be made.

Motion was made by Mr. Adams that Mr. Wallis and his team show up at FETI and continue with the mission that they were sent there to complete which was to report on things happening within FETI and report back to the commission and Mr. Romero seconded the motion. Discussion was opened.

Mr. Major did not agree with putting Mr. Wallis and Mr. Schultz in that awkward position. He felt that they should meet with leadership at LSU and work out the situation. He did not feel that was fair to put them in the middle. He suggested that maybe they could make a motion that commission members get with the leadership of LSU and clear the air and the way for them to return peacefully.

Mr. Adams stated that he would withdraw his motion. He felt he had gotten his point across.

Motion was made by Mr. Himel to set in motion the conversation between the commission chairman and the appropriate LSU leadership to clear the path for Mr. Wallis and his team to return and resume their work and Mr. Romero seconded the motion. No objections or abstentions were noted.

**MOTION PASSED.**

Mr. DiSalvo asked if the requests for information or documentation were simply not present or was it simply that they did not want to provide it. Mr. Wallis stated that everything that had been requested was done so by email. Most everything had been provided to them, but some had not.

Mr. Lindberg asked for clarification on if Mr. Wallis had moved into Sasha's office as discussed. Mr. Wallis replied that this did not happen. When asked if he was meeting with Sasha often, Mr. Wallis replied that he has not. Mr. Wallis stated that he is now dealing with Mr. Trahan.

Mr. Romero asked for a copy of the legislation which created the commission and defined the commission's job responsibilities and duties. Mr. Himel stated that he would email it out to the commission on Monday.

Mr. Major and Mr. Browning both felt they were headed in the right direction but now they just had to deal with the politics of the situation.

This concluded the presentation of old business.

**Chairman's Report**

This report was not addressed.

**New Business**

Mr. Browning gave a review on the update to the installation of the road from Ben Hur. The railroad had said if they closed one railroad crossing then they had to open another. The project was set to be \$1.5 million dollars. Currently, FETI did not have the money at this point to put towards this project and the project was on LSU at this time as well. Mr. Major thanked Mr. Browning for the update.

Mr. Major asked if there was any other new business to address. None was voiced.

The next meeting date was set to be held in conjunction with the next LSFA conference on July 21, 22 or 23 tentatively. Date, time and room would be determined, and everyone would be notified.

Motion to adjourn was entertained by Mr. Major. Motion was made by Mr. Himel to adjourn the meeting and it was seconded. No objections were voiced.

Meeting was adjourned.

  
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Approved by: Chad Major

  
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Date: