



2026 Georgia Fire Service Conference

August 24-29, 2026

Marriott - Augusta, GA

Conference Agenda



**All Fire Department events require armband;
Name badges required for conference events;**

MONDAY, AUGUST 24, 2026	
8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Pre-Conference Class: Essentials of Chaplaincy – Part 1 This is part one of a two-day class designed to help train new chaplains.
TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2026	
8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Pre-Conference Class: Essentials of Chaplaincy – Part 2 This is part two of a two-day class designed to help train new chaplains.
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	GMAG Meeting
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Unification Partners Meeting
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Conference Registration Opens
3:30 p.m.	GAFC / GSFA Joint Board Meeting
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2026	
8:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.	Welcome & Opening Remarks (Augusta Representative) Official Opening of Conference & Keynote Address: <i>Blake Stinnett</i> Blake Stinnett is the Founder and CEO of Next Rung, an organization dedicated to supporting first responders' mental health. Inspired by personal loss early in his fire service career, he shifted Next Rung's mission from apparel to advocacy and support. Blake is a firefighter with Greene County Fire in Georgia and also serves as a youth pastor. Through his work, he is committed to making a lasting impact in the lives of firefighters and first responders across the country.
9:45 a.m.	Break
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Rookie Year Membership <i>Joseph Davidson</i> Rookie Year Mentorship is designed as a two hour workshop to provide fire service members and leaders the knowledge and concepts to best set up our rookie/probationary members for success as we usher them into the modern fire service.
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Networking Lunch <i>STATE AGENCY UPDATES – 3 to 5 min</i>
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	GAFC Business Session
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	GSFA Business Session
3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.	BREAK
3:15 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.	Gear-Driven Heat Stress: New Insights from Continuous Temperature Monitoring <i>Dr. Maleah Winkler</i>

	<p>Firefighters face significant thermal and cardiovascular strain during training and emergency operations, much of which begins within minutes of donning personal protective equipment (PPE). This classroom session presents new research examining how PPE immediately changes the skin-core temperature gradient in firefighter recruits using continuous temperature monitoring tools. Attendees will learn how PPE influences heat storage, why core temperature often lags behind early danger signs, and how understanding these rapid physiological shifts can improve on-scene safety, rehab decision-making, and training practices. This session translates emerging scientific findings into practical strategies to protect firefighter health and enhance performance during live fire and high-stress environments.</p>
4:15 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.	<p>Navigating Organizational Change <i>Jeff Dean</i></p> <p>This session will discuss how change is inevitable and the pain it may inflict upon others. It is incumbent of leadership within the organization to be prepared to act and take the measures needed to be the "Change-agent" when no one likes change!</p>
5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.	<p>Exhibit Hall Opens / Opening Reception</p> <p>Take this opportunity to interact with vendors and other organizations that work with Georgia's fire service. Get a first-hand look at new equipment and learn how these companies are providing innovative solutions that could help your community.</p>
THURSDAY, AUGUST 27, 2026	
8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	<p>Deadweight in the Jumpseat <i>Corey Monroe</i></p> <p>This presentation confronts one of the most uncomfortable realities in emergency services: disengagement, complacency, and the silent normalization of underperformance within crews. Deadweight in the Jumpseat examines how burnout, unchecked habits, cultural tolerance, and leadership silence allow poor performance to persist in systems that depend on accountability and teamwork. Through honest discussion and operational examples, the course challenges providers to examine their own roles—as partners, crew members, and leaders—in either enabling or correcting these patterns. The goal is not to shame individuals, but to spark reflection, strengthen professional standards, and reinforce the responsibility every provider carries to their crew, their organization, and the patients who depend on them.</p>
9:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.	<p>From Academy to Degree: A Workforce Model for Building and Retaining the Modern Fire Service <i>Dr. Kellie McElroy-Hooper & Chief Antonio Burden</i></p> <p>This presentation highlights a pioneering partnership between the Augusta Fire Department and Augusta Technical College that serves as a national model for aligning internal fire academy training with higher education without replacing or restructuring existing programs. The model creates a seamless pathway from recruit training to degree attainment by allowing new hires to earn most of their academic credits during initial training, while incumbent firefighters benefit from Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), enabling them to convert past training into academic credit and complete degrees with minimal additional coursework. Designed to support the full workforce lifecycle—from entry to advancement—this approach also represents a strategic shift at the executive level by embedding employer-delivered instruction into an academic framework, where department instructors serve as adjunct faculty. This ensures training quality and operational standards are maintained while every hour of instruction contributes to academic progress, career development, and promotional readiness.</p>
9:45 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Coffee Break
9:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	<p>Exhibit Hall Open</p> <p>Spend additional time this morning meeting the companies and organizations that support Georgia's fire service. Lunch will be provided in the exhibit hall.</p>
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	<p>Lunch <i>Served in the Exhibit Hall</i></p>
12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	Memorial Service
1:45 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	GAFC Business Session
2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Ice Cream Social
3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	GSFA Business Session

4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	<p>#strongaugusta and NFPA 3000 Augusta leads the way to a Whole Community Approach <i>John Ryan & Chief Antonio Burden</i></p> <p>This engaging session addresses unified mass casualty event mitigation, planning, response, and recovery. The event will feature lessons learned from the ongoing effort in Augusta, GA to engage the entire community in the adoption of a NFPA 3000™ Standard as an Active Shooter/Hostile Event Response (ASHER) Program. Working across societal sectors, response disciplines and geographic boundaries for a safer community, Augusta was the first municipality in the nation to formally adopt NFPA 3000 and has many lessons to share.</p>
5:30 p.m.	<p>Firefighters Competition & Meal Get ready to have some fun as fire departments compete through a series of challenges to claim top title! Join us in Augusta to enjoy some good-spirited fun!</p>
FRIDAY, AUGUST 28, 2026	
7:45 a.m. – 8:15 a.m.	<p>Morning Devotion Service</p>
8:15 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	<p>The Resilient Department: Integrating CISM, QPR, and Leadership Accountability <i>Timothy Chipley</i></p> <p>In the fire service, we are meticulously trained to mitigate external emergencies, yet we often lack the tactical framework to manage the internal psychological toll of the job. This comprehensive 2-hour session provides fire service leaders and personnel with a proactive blueprint for behavioral health. The course integrates the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) framework for immediate post-incident stabilization with the evidence-based QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) methodology for suicide prevention. Moving beyond basic awareness, this session dives into the Stress Continuum to help responders identify "psychological injuries" before they become career-ending illnesses.</p>
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	<p>FF Safety: Hazards of Lightweight Construction & The New GA Truss/EIJ ID Law <i>Leigh T Hollins</i></p> <p>This class will discuss the differences between the construction methods of old..."legacy" with the construction methods of the last 30 years..."light frame" and how it applies to our firefighting operations & FF Safety. Also, how the new (soon to be) GA lightweight construction building marking system law "Preston Fant & Brant Chesney Firefighter Safety Act" factors into this issue will also be discussed. I am the author of the FL Aldridge/Benge FF Safety Act of 2008 (Truss Law) & the soon to be passed 2026 GA "Preston Fant and Brant Chesney Firefighter & Safety Act" (Truss/EIJ Law)</p>
11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	<p>Break</p>
11:15 p.m. – 12:45 p.m.	<p>Protecting Our Own: Using the CRR Framework for Fire Service Health and Safety <i>Beverley Walker</i></p> <p>Across the country, CRR has successfully reduced community fire and injury rates through data-driven interventions. This presentation proposes a shift in perspective: applying these same proven strategies to our internal hazards. By treating issues like behavioral health and cancer with a CRR mindset, we can provide the same level of mitigation and prevention to the fire service that we provide to our citizens.</p>
12:45 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.	<p>GSFA/GAFC Joint Closing Session</p>
1:15 p.m.	<p>Lunch on Your Own</p>