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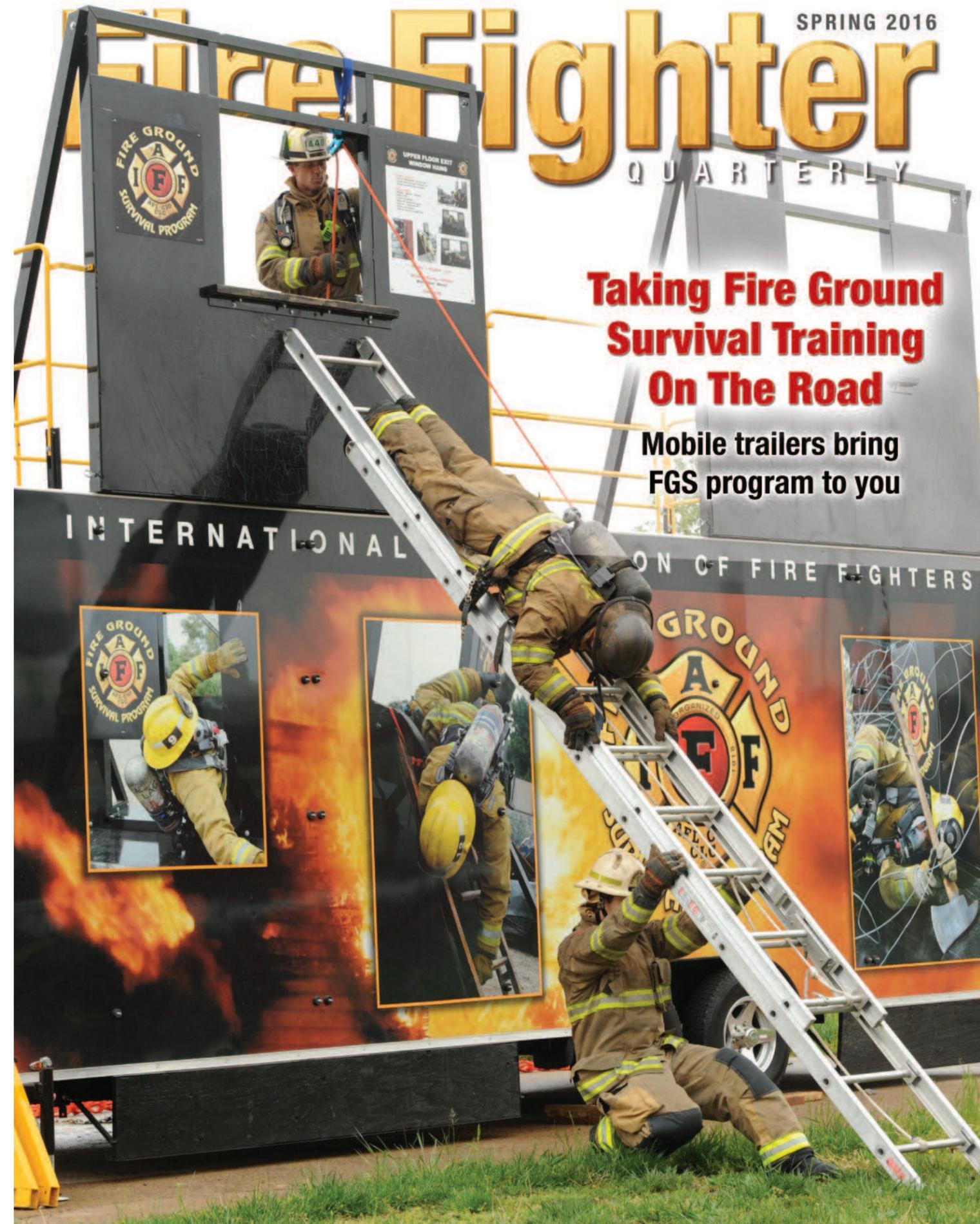


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SPRING 2016

# Fire Fighter

QUARTERLY

**Taking Fire Ground  
Survival Training  
On The Road**

Mobile trailers bring  
FGS program to you

# Mobile Life-Saving Training

**“DISPATCH! MAYDAY ... MAYDAY ... MAYDAY ...  
BATTALION 6, I NEED A FULL RESPONSE.  
I HAVE FIRE FIGHTERS MISSING.”**

Tamalyn Nigretto's voice was loud and clear as she called in a Mayday after an explosion caused by a natural gas leak rocked the streets of downtown Seattle and sent nine fire fighters to the hospital.

Nigretto, a member of Seattle Fire Chiefs Local 2898, had just participated in the IAFF Fire Ground Survival (FGS) training program designed to provide consistent Mayday operations throughout the fire service and to increase fire fighter survivability when the unpredictable happens.

“Having had that training, I knew I needed to call that Mayday as soon as the blast occurred,” she says. “The level of devastation was immediately apparent, and I was concerned about the survival of my fellow fire fighters. So for the first time in my 29-year career, I called a Mayday.”

Fire fighter fatality data compiled by the United States Fire Administration (USFA) have shown that fire fighters “becoming trapped or disoriented represent the largest portion of structural fire ground fatalities.” The incidents in which fire fighters have lost their lives have a consistent theme — inadequate situational awareness put them at risk.

The IAFF Fire Ground Survival program is funded by the IAFF and assisted by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) through the Assistance to Firefighters (FIRE Act) grant program.

Subject matter for the program was developed through fire fighter fatality investigations and research by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Underwriters Laboratories, the USFA, the military, IAFF members and the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). The program includes an online awareness course and a 32-hour Train-the-Trainer that allows members to become FGS instructors.

Incorporating federal regulations, proven incident management best practices and survival techniques

from leaders in the field, the FGS program teaches fire fighters and incident command to be prepared for the worst-case scenarios. Topics covered include situational awareness, air management, communication, avoiding panic, disentanglement and upper-floor escape techniques.

Successful completion of the FGS awareness course (a pre-requisite for participation in the FGS Train-the-Trainer program) requires the study of actual near misses and fatalities. Students watch videos of simulated Mayday incidents and learn how to prepare for and handle a Mayday.

Developed as a way to ensure the highest degree of survivability when things on the fire ground go wrong, the FGS training program has spread its influence across the nation with mobile training apparatus (large trailers) stationed strategically across the United States and Canada to maximize the number of participants who can benefit from the training.

“The training is only as good as our ability to provide it to all of our members, even those in remote areas that may lack the resources of some of our larger affiliates,” says General President Harold Schaitberger.

Two mobile FGS units, equipped with heavy-duty props that can effectively recreate a number of entrapment and entanglement scenarios, were deployed in 2014 to begin to push the program out and get as many fire fighters trained as possible.

FGS instructors across North America conduct the training using the mobile trailers, traveling to smaller departments



that may not have the resources or training facilities available to otherwise receive this level of instruction.

The first two affiliates to receive FGS trailers were Los Angeles County, CA Local 1014 and Fairfax County, VA Local 2068.

“It's been extremely effective for both our veterans of 30-plus years and our recruits coming through the academy,” says Fairfax, VA Local 2068 President John Niemiec. “Training for how to deal with a Mayday has been invaluable, but even more important has been learning how to avoid

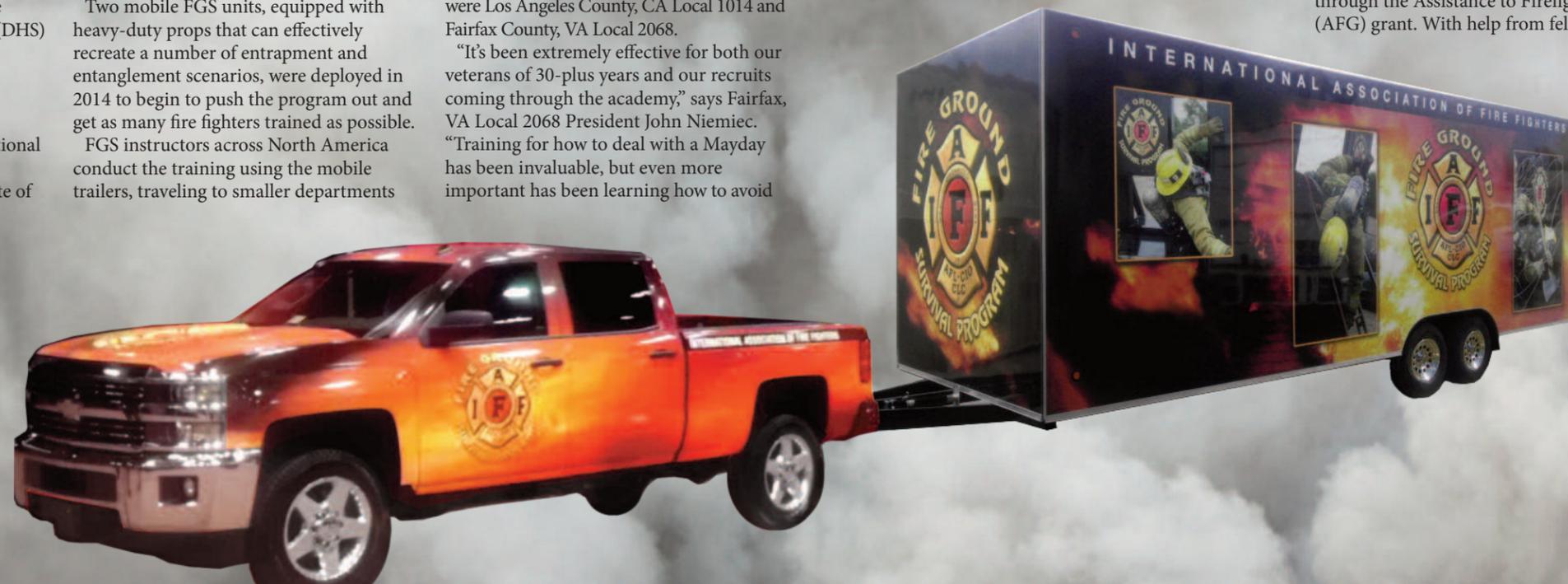
getting into a Mayday situation. The props included in the mobile trailer — wall breaches, entanglements, emergency bailouts — are great at assisting us in simulating situations we run into out there.”

Fairfax County has worked with other locals in Maryland and southern Virginia to extend the training to departments that lack the facilities or resources to reenact the training scenarios that the FGS program provides.

“What I do know is that the FGS training increases our confidence and our ability to self-rescue if and when the need arises. It puts the skills in our hands,” says Niemiec. Currently, Fairfax is setting up to work the FGS program — using its ready-made trailer — with the City of Alexandria and Loudon County.

On the West Coast Assistant Fire Chief Derek Alkonis — a member of Los Angeles County Local 1014 — is trained as a FGS master instructor. Los Angeles County also operates an IAFF-owned FGS trailer that has been used to train 22 different battalions and more than 3,000 fire fighters, covering 2,300 square miles.

“Having a mobile FGS unit has made a huge difference,” says Alkonis. “We have used this program to develop a standard operating procedure for responding to a Mayday. Logistically, it would be hard to get that many fire fighters together to train at the same facility, but we can tow this trailer all over and reach not only our fire fighters, but all the fire fighters that work for the 30 other departments within Los Angeles County. The result is that we are on the same page when the worst possible response is called in — when one of our own goes down, we are ready.”



Saginaw, MI Local 102

Alkonis notes that Los Angeles County responded to an incident last May where fire fighters became trapped when a roof caved in. In the post-incident report, several attributed their safe escape to the FGS training and being able to stay calm and control their breathing.

Los Angeles County is currently working with Los Angeles City Local 112, which also operates an FGS trailer, to command Mayday scenarios using the FGS training program. The Los Angeles County trailer is also made available to those outside of the county in order to reach as many fire fighters as possible.

“These trailers, which we are fortunate enough to operate, ensure that this critical FGS training makes it to all fire fighters, no matter where they are,” says Local 1014 President David Gilotte. “It's where the rubber hits the road, and it's saving lives.”

Saginaw, MI Local 102 maintains an FGS trailer that was made available to the local through the Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) grant. With help from fellow

members, Local 102 Vice President and Fire Ground Survival instructor Brandon Hausbeck submitted the grant. Members as far away as Calgary have benefited from the FGS training. “This program is very important. All of our new members go through it right away, as well as continually on a quarterly basis,” says Hausbeck. “To have the capability and the confidence to get yourself out of bad situations is huge. We had bigger guys that looked at some of these small spaces and thought, ‘no way’ — and then they were able to do it and build that confidence.”

He adds, “Our members are very receptive to the training. You get sick of classrooms and PowerPoints, and this program allows them to practice these scenarios in the real world.”

More than 33,000 IAFF members are now certified at the Fire Ground Awareness level. The IAFF has certified more than 1,300 instructors, and the operational course has reached more than 250 departments and potentially exposed over 79,000 fire fighters to the life-saving training.

By deploying mobile units across the United States and Canada, the IAFF can continue to deliver critical life-saving information to as many fire fighters as possible.

Currently, nine departments over five states (California, Washington, Texas, Michigan and Virginia) are operating FGS training mobile trailers, with plans to equip Indianapolis and Toronto with mobile units in the near future.

“Using our affiliates on the frontlines, we can offer this critical life-saving program in areas where the lack of a training facility would have previously prevented the delivery of what has become the gold standard in survival training,” says Schaitberger. ■