Airport Rescue and Fire Fighting Standards

Current FAA standards for Airport Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) are gravely deficient and woefully out-of-date. Last updated in 1988, FAA regulations do not recognize the reality of modern air travel, with larger planes carrying more passengers and more fuel, often flying to and from facilities unequipped to handle heavy traffic. Neither do current standards recognize modern firefighting techniques, equipment and training.

**Current FAA Standards**

- **Misguided Mission**: Airport fire departments are not required to rescue passengers or extinguish fires inside an airplane; the FAA currently requires airline flight crews to fulfill this role, while fire fighters are to provide only a safe path for exit from the airplane.

- **Slow Response Times**: Airport fire departments are only required to deliver the first fire apparatus to the scene of a crash in three minutes, with remaining apparatus in four minutes, even though the FAA’s own tests show that the conditions in the fuselage of a downed airplane may become deadly in three to four minutes.

- **Unsafe Fire Fighter Staffing**: Airport fire departments are not required to maintain even a minimum staffing level, other than the minimum number of personnel necessary to operate vehicles and meet the response times and minimum discharge rates, i.e., one or two fire fighters per vehicle. Such staffing levels make it impossible for fire fighters to conduct a timely, safe and effective response.

- **No Responsibility for Hazardous Materials / WMD Incidents**: Current FAA standards permit airport operators to rely on local government to provide the primary response to hazardous materials and WMD incidents at airports. However, at most airports, the response times of mutual aid units are significantly slower than the response times of airport fire departments. Additionally, many communities lack proper equipment and training to conduct a specialized hazardous materials response.

All other standards making bodies that address airport fire fighting – including the Department of Defense (DoD), the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) – have standards for safe and effective airport rescue and fire fighting that far exceed FAA standards.

Under federal law, the FAA should have already updated and strengthened current ARFF standards. The National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act of 1995, Public Law 104-113, requires federal agencies to comply with national voluntary consensus standards. Current FAA ARFF standards fail to do so.

The FAA and the Airport organizations helped write the national consensus standard for airport fire fighting, and worked to ensure that it is reasonable and effective. In order to adequately protect the flying public, the FAA should adopt these very minimal requirements as embodied in NFPA national voluntary consensus standards.

No matter how demanding preventative measures are or how diligently they are enforced, aviation accidents will occur at airports. By updating and strengthening ARFF standards, we can better protect air passengers, airline crews and airport fire fighters so that when accidents do occur, we may obtain the best outcome possible.
(a) Within 180 days of enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall promulgate regulations revising Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) standards to ensure the ability of airport fire departments to adequately protect the safety of passengers and airport personnel, and to bring ARFF standards into compliance with existing national, voluntary consensus standards. To achieve these goals, the regulations shall:

1. Clarify that the mission of ARFF personnel includes initiating exterior and interior aircraft fire suppression, and performing extrication and rescue of trapped passengers;
2. Bring ARFF standards for response time and deployment into compliance with NFPA 403;
3. Bring ARFF staffing standards into compliance with NFPA 1710;
4. Clarify that ARFF personnel have the responsibility for airport HAZMAT incidents and bring ARFF standards relating to such responsibilities into compliance with NFPA 472;
5. Require that airport fire department companies that deploy to structural incidents and emergency medical incidents on airport property meet the response time standards established in NFPA 1710.