Accreditation Report

Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service
100 Edison Park Dr.
Gaithersburg, MD 20878
USA

**This report was prepared on July 31, 2023
by the
Commission on Fire Accreditation International**

**This report represents the findings
of the peer assessment team that visited the
Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service
on April 30 - May 5, 2023**

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PREFACE

To the citizens and the governing body of the agency: This report represents a thorough review of the organization to verify and validate how this agency is executing its stated mission in accordance with universally accepted practices for a contemporary fire and emergency services organization. Quality improvement can only be initiated and realized by those agencies that challenge themselves through a comprehensive self-assessment. This report documents that this agency is seeking organizational improvements and discovering elements of excellence. Please note that the recommendations by the peer assessment team are opportunities for improvement provided from professionals in the fire and emergency service industry.

To the agency: This report communicates the outputs and outcomes of your dedication and commitment to quality improvement. Your self-assessment, community risk assessment/ standards of cover, and strategic plan amount to years of work to understand your community, establish accountable goals, institute transparency, and factually comprehend what you did not know about your organization. The verification and validation of your agency by a team of peers represents a major accomplishment. The recommendations in this report are opportunities to become better and stronger in your community. Finally, take this report and communicate to your community the areas you identified during your self-assessment that were outstanding and those that represent improvement opportunities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) is a combination organization with 1,200 career uniformed personnel and 850 volunteer responders staffing 35 engines, 16 tower/ladder companies, 6 heavy rescues, and 42 transport units out of 37 fire stations. All engine companies are staffed with four firefighters and equipped to provide advanced life support (ALS). One tower/ladder company is also staffed with four firefighters and provides ALS while the remaining special services apparatus (tower/ladders and heavy rescues) are staffed with three. Transport units are ALS or basic life support (BLS) equipped and staffed with either volunteer or career personnel. The department operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with a minimum of 316 personnel. Daily staffing includes three paramedic chase cars, three emergency medical services (EMS) duty officers, five battalion chiefs, and one duty operations chief. The number of personnel dedicated to community risk reduction/public fire education is three full-time and one part-time. Seventeen full-time personnel are dedicated to fire training and are supported by 120 state-credentialed adjunct instructors.

The county represents 507 square miles and is in the eastern United States Piedmont Plateau, just to the north of the District of Columbia. Montgomery County is the most populous county in the state, with a 2020 census population of 1,062,061.

The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) has completed a comprehensive review and appraisal of Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service based upon the tenth edition of the accreditation model. The commission's goals are to promote organizational self-improvement and to award accreditation status in recognition of good performance. The peer assessment team's objectives were to validate the department's self-assessment study, identify and make recommendations for improvement, issue a report of findings, and conclude if the department is eligible for an award of accreditation.

The peer assessment team followed CFAI processes and Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service demonstrated that its self-study accreditation manual, community risk assessment/standards of cover (CRA/SOC), and strategic plan met all core competencies and criteria. The peer assessment team recommends accredited agency status for Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service from the Commission on Fire Accreditation International.

The MCFRS planning and accreditation section is supported by data-savvy and forward-thinking program managers. Two members of the department regularly act as peer assessors for CFAI. By maintaining a systematic approach, the agency can ensure continuity, more direct access to quality improvement, and the engagement of a broader spectrum of the department.

The peer assessment team had meetings with county human resources representatives, analysts from county financial services, leadership in county permitting services, and representatives of the volunteer and professional firefighters' associations. Individually and collectively, they expressed an understanding of the process and a willingness to support MCFRS in their continuous improvement efforts. There is a commitment to continue to follow and support the implementation of identified opportunities for improvement.

The peer assessment team identified opportunities for improvement that are provided below. These recommendations flowed from discussions, interviews, and a review of supplied documentation to support its self-assessment conclusions.

The following represents a synopsis of the recommendations that were made by the peer assessment team during the on-site visit. Additional details for each of these recommendations can be found in the Observations Section of this report. For each of the recommendations, the performance indicator from the model is provided, including noting if it is a core competency (CC).

<u>Recommendations</u>

Recommendations were developed from the evaluation of criterion, core competencies, and performance indicators.

1. It is recommended the agency follow through with plans to transition to the use of census tracts as its planning zones. (CC 2A.3)

2. It is recommended the agency enhance its existing planning process to build measurable objectives that include timelines and/or metrics to support the agency in effectively documenting progress and communicating priorities. (CC 3B.1)

3. It is recommended the agency collaborate with the county office of management and budget to develop a process for documenting a review of its financial policies. (4A.2)

4. It is recommended the agency's program appraisal process for the fire investigation, origin, and cause program document fire investigation cause, determination, and outcome data for improved documentation and process improvement. (CC 5C.4)

5. It is recommended that the department implement a process to provide quality assurance (QA) on a percentage of charts from low to high acuity for report compliance and accuracy. (5F.7)

6. It is recommended the timeline for the replacement of physical resources is consistent with the agency's goals and strategic plan. (6A.1)

7. It is recommended the agency evaluate its current staffing and workload distribution for its human resources functions to ensure that strategic priorities and required processes are completed effectively. (7A.2)

8. It is recommended the agency ensure and document its annual policy review and update process to eliminate conflicting language with older published documents. (7A.3)

9. It is recommended the agency work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure that the department's facilities, conditions, and work environment are designed to accommodate a diverse and qualified workforce in alignment with its goals and objectives. (7B.8)

10. It is recommended the agency develop a process for reviewing and, as necessary, revising the minimum levels of training and education required for all positions. (8A.4)

11. It is recommended the agency evaluate its staffing model to ensure that a sufficient number of instructional personnel are available to support the training program's goals and objectives. (CC 8C.2)

12. It is recommended the agency follow-through on its plans to develop a process for ensuring that curriculum and instructional materials remain current. (8C.4)

13. It is recommended the agency establish a conflict resolution policy for all defined external partnerships. (10A.4)

14. It is recommended the agency formalize the review, revision, and completion process for agreements. (10B.2)

15. It is recommended the agency review and update their policies to align with existing practices. (Criterion 11A)

16. It is recommended the agency incorporates occupational safety and risk management program components into the Health and Safety formal annual program appraisal to capture effectiveness of the program and its impact on meeting the agency's goals and objectives. (11B.6)

The department responded to a total of 132,593 emergencies in 2022 including: 18,427 fire calls (13.9 percent); 99,131 emergency medical services (EMS) calls (74.7 percent); 473 special operations calls (.5 percent); 9,062 service and special event calls (6.8 percent); and 5,500 out of county automatic aid calls (4.1 percent). Servicing these calls in 2022 resulted in a total of 237,641-unit movements, including 71,480 EMS transports.

In August of 2022, the Insurance Services Office (ISO) visited the county to rate its public protection classification. The outcome of the visit was a public protection classification of 02/10 (urban with water supply infrastructure) and a 04/10 (rural without infrastructure).

MCFRS has created a comprehensive inventory of its critical infrastructure and key resources available via a web-based map viewer, so that the information is easily accessible throughout the

department. The features are sorted into multiple layers which can be toggled on or off, and the infrastructure aligns with the critical infrastructure sectors identified by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). This is considered an innovative practice for others to emulate.

In addition, the MCFRS Community Risk Reduction (CRR) Section has created an innovative process to engage line staff in after-the-fire and pre-fire risk identification efforts. This process starts with a targeted approach in the academy, where recruits learn about the community and the unique risks in each first-due area. The staff attempts to highlight the area where the new member will be assigned whenever possible. This provides a proactive perspective for the line firefighters as they enter the department. To maintain this connection, the CRR staff provides a detailed after-the-fire report to leadership and the responding crews post-incident. It includes building stock age, construction information, fire incident details, neighborhood demographics, and other details that support the crew in doing outreach and communicating with the impacted members of their first-due communities. The consistency and rapidity with which this information is compiled and disseminated are what highlight this as an innovative best practice.

OBSERVATIONS

Category 1 — Governance and Administration

The governing body and/or agency manager is legally established to provide general policies to guide the agency, approved programs and services, and appropriated financial resources. Montgomery County Fire Rescue Services (MCFRS) is a department of Montgomery County government, as well as a public-private partnership. MCFRS consists of a division of volunteer services, a division of fire and rescue operations, and other divisions necessary for effective management and administration, as defined in Montgomery County Code Section 21. On May 4, 2004, the county council authorized and enacted bill 36-03, effective January 1, 2005; thus, changing the charter law under Part II, Chapter 21 providing for a single fire chief for the county, who is authorized and responsible for all entities providing emergency fire and rescue services in the jurisdiction. Prior to this change a large portion of policy guidance and procedures for the volunteer organizations was codified in the county code of regulations. MCFRS administrators therefore have policy guidance in several different places including codes, laws, labor contracts, policies guidelines, and general orders.

The organizational structure aligns with or supports the agency's mission, purposes, goals, strategies and objectives. MCFRS is one of the largest combination fire and rescue departments in the nation. Its current structure allows for the day-to-day service delivery and administration of fire, rescue, and emergency services activities. The agency works collaboratively with its partners and volunteer entities to ensure consistency across responses within the county and with automatic aid partners in neighboring jurisdictions.

Category 2 — Assessment and Planning

The agency collects and analyzes data specific to the distinct characteristics of its legally defined service area(s) and applies the findings to organizational services and services development. Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) clearly identifies its jurisdictional extents and those of its regional aid partners through the use of geographical information system (GIS) data. The agency has identified 840 risk management zones throughout the county that serve as its planning zones. GIS mapping clearly identifies population density for each zone as well as additional response area characteristics. Critical infrastructure locations are comprehensively mapped in alignment with the infrastructure sectors identified by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

The agency has found the risk management zones to be problematic in that they are specific to the department and prevent alignment with publicly available demographic information. A desire to transition to using census tracts as the planning zones has been expressed in order to better align with Montgomery County policies on making decisions based on social equity. It is recommended the agency follow through with plans to transition to the use of census tracts as its planning zones.

The agency identifies and assesses the nature and magnitude of all hazards and risks within its jurisdiction. Risk categorization and deployment impact consider factors such as cultural, economic, historical and environmental values, as well as operational characteristics. MCFRS has conducted a thorough analysis of risk throughout its jurisdiction using an internally developed process that scores each planning zone based on identified risk factors and mitigating factors by risk category. Historical service demand is tracked by call category, and future call demands forecasted. The agency regularly engages with external partners to collaboratively address approaches to shared risks.

The agency identifies and documents the nature and magnitude of the service and deployment demands within its jurisdiction. Based on risk categorization and service impact considerations, the agency's deployment practices are consistent with jurisdictional expectations and with industry research. Efficiency and effectiveness are documented through quality response measurements that consider overall response, consistency, reliability, resiliency and outcomes throughout all service areas. The agency develops procedures, practices and programs to appropriately guide its resource deployment.

The agency consistently dispatches resources for all incident types in accordance with its critical tasking, which has also been documented through its published policies and procedures. Performance is tracked for all response time components, and performance data is shared throughout the department via a SharePoint site. Outlier data is regularly monitored, and the appropriate personnel engaged to provide corrected data when necessary.

The agency has assessed and provided evidence that its current deployment methods for emergency services appropriately address the risk in its service area. Its response strategy has evolved to ensure that its deployment practices have maintained and/or made continuous improvements in the effectiveness, efficiency and safety of its operations, notwithstanding any external influences beyond its control. The agency has identified the impacts of these external influences and communicates them to the authority having jurisdiction.

MCFRS regularly evaluates its ability to deliver services through monitoring of response time data, as well as through thorough after-action reports of major incidents. A gap analysis is conducted annually on all response time components, with benchmarks updated as determined appropriate. Performance is communicated to the AHJ through the county executive, and external stakeholders are regularly engaged through regional collaborative committees, as well as participation in citizen advisory boards.

Category 3 — Goals and Objectives

The mission, vision and values of the agency are incorporated into a strategic plan. Once a strategic plan is in place and resources are available, the strategic plan provides direction, determines initiatives, and guides the goals and objectives of the agency. The agency operates under a master plan that is developed within county guidelines and in accordance with county code. The plan is adopted by the AHJ during each review cycle. The agency's 2016-2022 plan was extended to include 2023 due to challenges secondary to the COVID19 Pandemic. The existing planning process is effective in creating a list of goals and objectives for the organization but does not require specific measures, timelines, or details related to the path for achieving those goals and objectives.

MCFRS maintains a strong working relationship with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission's Montgomery County Planning Board, which is responsible for managing physical growth and planning communities. This relationship allows MCFRS to maintain awareness of overall community planning goals and to ensure their voice is heard related to decisions that will impact their response capability. The agency also collaborates with its automatic aid partners when evaluating goals and identifying needs for the future.

The strategic plan defines the agency's general goals and S.M.A.R.T. objectives, directs its activities in a manner consistent with its mission and is appropriate for the community it serves. MCFRS completes an environmental scan during the planning process and considers the impact of demographics, housing/building stock, development, and mass transit on the agency's risk and service demand. This effort coupled with their internal stakeholder feedback allows for the development of objectives for the master plan. It was observed during the document review and on-site validation that MCFRS has multiple places it documents completion of goals and objectives including annual reports and excel spreadsheets maintained by the planning section. The documented objectives and monitoring documents have very few measurable outcomes, lack specific timeline, and provide no detail related to responsible party for each objective. The goals are clearly prioritized into A, B, and C categories but the agency explains that in some cases the progress of a goal is impacted by funding decisions even though it may hold a high priority. It is recommended the agency enhance its existing planning process to build measurable objectives that include timelines and/or metrics to support the agency in effectively documenting progress and communicating priorities.

The agency uses a management process to implement its goals and objectives. The planning section articulated that the management processes for the agency's goals and objectives have changed during the last five years. The current manager is working to understand the county's processes and master planning requirements and has maintained tracking of goal progress in a spreadsheet. Any completed goals are also listed in the agency's published annual report. The peer team reviewed documents and emails that demonstrate the collaborative process of identifying goals and engaging program managers. The planning team has not yet documented specific personnel responsible for those goals in their published master plan. Both internal and external stakeholders have access to the Master Plan and annual reports that document completion of goals during the previous year.

Processes are in place to measure and evaluate progress toward completion of goals and objectives and overall plan performance. The goals and objectives are re-examined and modified periodically. The planning team and leadership team articulated an informal yet consistent review and discussion of their existing goals and objectives. The county's process for making changes to the master plan is not one that provides significant flexibility for the agency as it is intended to remain static. Therefore, many goals are written with minimal detail and then monitored by internal processes within the divisions of MCFRS. It is clear that leadership and managers are reviewing their work progress and goals on a regular basis even if this process and its subsequent changes are not documented outside of emails and meeting notes.

Category 4 — Financial Resources

Agency planning involves broad staff and community participation in financial planning and resource allocation. The agency's financial planning and budget process reflects sound strategic planning and a commitment to its stated goals and objectives. The agency prepares a balanced budget, which adequately maintains level of service and personnel resources. The Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget (OMB) oversees the development of the annual, six-year capital, and capital improvements program budgets for all county departments. The OMB reports directly to the County Executive, who is responsible for proposing the recommended budgets to the Montgomery County Council. The Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) budget is coordinated by the division chief of fiscal management under the direction of the fire chief.

The OMB creates the policies, guidelines, and processes for the budget development process that begins in the late summer of each year. Many of the county's financial policies have been adopted into charter or code. Other financial policies have been adopted by the OMB and are reviewed; however, no review of these policies has been documented. It is recommended the agency collaborate with the county office of management and budget to develop a process for documenting a review of its financial policies.

Revenue and expenditure projections are monitored throughout the year by the OMB and are utilized when developing the next year's recommended budgets. The MCFRS utilizes the goals and objectives outlined in its master (strategic) plan and considers input from all of its divisions when developing its budget requests. The county council holds public hearings in multiple venues and languages, and the proposed and adopted budgets are available to the public through an open access website. The recommended budget is released on March 15th and must be adopted by the county council no later than June 1st, with the fiscal year beginning on July 1st.

Agency financial management demonstrates sound budgeting and control, proper recording, reporting and auditing. The peer assessment team confirmed that the county is in receipt of the most currently available Distinguished Budget Presentation and Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting (certificates) from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) of the United States and Canada for its Budget and their Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR). The department has submitted its most recent GFOA certificates as prima facie compliance with this criterion.

Appropriately allocated financial resources support the organizational mission, stated long-term plan, goals and objectives and also maintain the quality of programs and services. Montgomery County has a stable and diverse revenue base that is predicted to rise slowly in the coming years. The OMB maintains a balanced budget and has achieved its goal of preserving ten percent of revenues, including the revenue stabilization fund, per Section 20-65 of the Montgomery County Code. The OMB should be commended for maintaining its AAA bond rating for 50 consecutive years and earning consistent recognition from the GFOA since 1984.

The fire chief collaborates with the division chief of fiscal management to ensure that the current and planned levels of service for MCFRS are supported in the budget and are in alignment with the short- and long-term goals outlined in the master (strategic) plan. Funding is allocated to support the agency's sworn, civilian, and volunteer staff; apparatus and equipment; facility; and other operational needs.

Category 5 — Community Risk Reduction Program

Criterion 5A – Prevention Program

The agency operates an adequate, effective and efficient program as identified in the community risk assessment and standards of cover. The approach is comprehensive and includes both prevention and mitigation strategies such as life safety, hazard risk reduction, plan review, code compliance, and the detection, reporting and control of fire and non-fire risks. The Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services' Residential Construction and Fire Code Compliance Division is responsible for planning, managing, coordinating, implementing, inspecting, licensing, and facilitating all aspects of fire and life safety within the county, based on the Maryland State Fire Prevention Code, which adopts by reference the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) 1: *Fire Code*, and NFPA 101:

Life Safety Code®. The department of permitting services has adopted the 2015 edition of NFPA 1 and NFPA 101 into the Montgomery County fire safety code.

The fire code compliance division conducts over 20,000 inspections per year with a staff of 13 inspectors, three field supervisors, and a manager who oversees the entire section. Additionally, there are three engineers that provide technical advice in the areas of plans review, fire department access, and fire department water supply management. Personnel work shifts that maximize the ability to conduct inspections during normal business hours while ensuring there is adequate support for after-hours questions or complaints. The current staffing and deployment model allows the division to meet its goal of inspecting occupancies licensed by outside agencies and high-risk buildings on an annual basis.

Criterion 5B – Public Education Program

A public education program is in place and directed toward reducing community risks in a manner consistent with the agency's mission and as identified within the community risk assessment and standards of cover. The peer team has observed that the Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) has a dedicated community risk reduction (CRR) section in place that is comprised of 3.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members: The CRR manager, a program manager dedicated to community education, a program manager dedicated to the car seat program coordination, and a part-time contractor dedicated to senior outreach. The CRR section is responsible for identifying, developing, and coordinating programs, campaigns and initiatives of the agency's public. The agency demonstrated that they utilize demographic, incident, and CRR activity records to identify the most vulnerable communities and target programs to mitigate identified risk factors. The CRR section provides programs to the community such as car seat installation, home safety checks, educational presentations, "File of Life", school visits, "Sound Off" program, after incident education, and others. The agency utilizes innovative analytic software to assist in evaluating potential risks and CRR program outcomes (CRAIG 1300 and Athena mobile CRR application).

The agency has established relationships with other organizations that serve large-loss potential or high-risk audiences. These partnerships include faith-based organizations, the American Red Cross, public health departments, county departments, veterans' groups, after school programs, car dealerships, universities, and schools.

The agency recruits volunteers from within its membership to participate in providing CRR programs. The agency has 28 trained car seat installation technicians. Newly hired career and volunteer members attend five hours of CRR education upon hiring with the agency. Part of this training is familiarizing new members with the profile of the community as a whole, as well as their first-due areas (as the majority of agency staff do not live in the agency's jurisdiction).

The agency described that due to the high demand for CRR programs and services, there are long wait times for program appointments (car seat installations, educational presentations, and events). As such, the CRR section is seeking to increase the number of staff members to be able to meet the demands of the community with less delay. The CRR team has stated the intention to leverage the large pool of volunteers and send them to CRR training. The intention is to have a dedicated full-time key educator who can attend educational presentations complemented with a detail of on-duty firefighters (the full-time dedicated staff member can stay if the on-duty personnel receive a call for

response). Presently, any career staff members providing educational presentations do so on overtime after or between shifts.

Criterion 5C – Fire Investigation, Origin and Cause Program

The agency operates an adequate, effective, and efficient program directed toward origin and cause investigation and subsequent classification of fires, explosions, and other emergency situations that endanger life or property to drive community risk reduction activities. Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) Fire and Explosives Investigations (FEI) Unit is part of the department's special operations Section. FEI provides 24-hour coverage for the county via a rotating shift-work schedule consisting of two 12-hour days and two 12-hour nights. All unit personnel receive fire and explosives investigations training and certification to industry standards. The unit is designated by the State of Maryland as a law enforcement agency. This provides the authority for the agency to investigate the origin, cause, and circumstances of any fire, explosion, or other hazardous condition. The agency uses a systematic approach based on the scientific method and utilizes National Fire Protection Association 921: *Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations*, to assist in developing accurate origin and cause determination. The fire investigations section is fully staffed with state-certified law enforcement officers. FEI operates as the Montgomery County Bomb Squad and works with local law enforcement as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). FEI completes all required MCFRS-required emergency medical services (EMS) and fire training in addition to scheduled training with local law enforcement, FBI, and ATF. The fire investigation division also has an ATF-certified canine that is utilized throughout the county.

It was observed by the peer assessment team that MCFRS fire and investigation tracks yearly fires and explosion datahowever there is no information in the appraisal on investigation reviews and outcomes. Further documentation of fire investigation review could aid the department in process improvements and FEI training. It is recommended the agency's program appraisal process for the fire investigation, origin, and cause program document fire investigation cause, determination, and outcome data for improved documentation and process improvement.

Criterion 5D – Domestic Preparedness Program

The agency operates an all-hazards preparedness program that includes a coordinated multiagency response plan designed to provide the community preparedness and resiliency in response to terrorist threats or attacks, major disasters, and other large-scale emergencies occurring at or in the immediate area. The peer review team observed that the agency collaborates with the Montgomery County Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (OEMHS) and other county departments, offices, community partners, private utilities, and representatives from the 19 municipalities constituting the emergency management group (EMG) to develop and maintain a regional emergency operation plan (EOP). The EOP defines assigned emergency roles and responsibilities throughout 17 emergency support functions. The plan also incorporates the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as the standard for emergency response operations. The agency articulated that all Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) Integrated Emergency Command Structure (IECS) certified personnel are required to complete NIMS incident command system (ICS) training in compliance with the Montgomery County Code. The agency demonstrated that the OEMHS coordinates local and regional group training sessions to ensure compatibility across all participating partners of the EOP.

In addition to a physical EOC, the OEMHS maintains a web-based EOC (WebEOC). Activation of the WebEOC can be requested by any partnering agency in the region and its main functions are to provide internal document management, situational awareness, and resource management. The peer team observed that the agency has a written continuity of operations plan (COOP), as defined in the EOP, which is stored directly in the WebEOC. The OEMHS conducts WebEOC drills, during which the agency's COOP is reviewed (and revised if needed).

The county's office of public information (OPI) maintains the *Alert Montgomery* program, which community members can sign up to receive mass alerting from the county during an event. The agency has an internal public information officer (PIO) who releases information internally to the elected officials and county executive office. The agency's PIO also sends out alerts via social media platforms. The agency can submit a request to the county OPI for a mass alert to be sent out to the community via the *Alert Montgomery* program.

The OEMHS maintains a hazard mitigation plan, which identifies and ranks hazards located in the community using input from the agency (fire, emergency medical services (EMS)) and police department. The agency's community risk assessment/standards of cover document identifies the community's critical infrastructure.

The peer team observed that the agency currently has one completed annual formal program appraisal for the domestic preparedness program. The appraisal contains information on the program's outputs, outcomes, and impacts, along with intended initiatives and strategies moving forward.

Criterion 5E – Fire Suppression Program

The agency operates an adequate, effective, efficient and safe fire suppression program directed toward controlling and/or extinguishing fires to protect the community from injury or death, and reduce property loss. Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) provides fire suppression services to its community from 35 fire stations throughout the county. Its 35 engines are staffed with 4 firefighters, and its 16 aerial units are staffed with 3 firefighters. Fire incidents are dispatched based upon a thoroughly tested critical tasking analysis, which has been documented through the agency's policies and procedures. The response includes sending three tankers to provide water supply in areas without hydrants. The agency uses a National Incident Management System (NIMS)-compliant incident management system, in accordance with county code. Thorough after-action reports are prepared following major fire incidents, and data from fire incidents is used to support its risk reduction program.

Performance Gap Analysis

The following tables represent the agency's actual performance (baseline) versus the goal (benchmark). The gaps are provided in red (representing improvement opportunities), and green (when actual performance exceeds the goal).

2018-2022 Moderate Risk Fire Suppression Response Times				
1st/ERF	**Urban/Rural**	**Baseline**	**Benchmark**	**Gap**
1st Due	Urban	9:35	9:30	**00:05**
		n=11296		
1st Due	Rural	14:08	14:00	**00:08**
		n=322		
ERF	Urban	13:31	12:30	**01:01**
		n=7924		
ERF	Rural	19:02	16:30	**02:32**
		n=182		

2018-2022 High Risk Fire Suppression Response Times				
1st/ERF	**Urban/Rural**	**Baseline**	**Benchmark**	**Gap**
1st Due	Urban	9:40	9:15	**00:25**
		n=3314		
1st Due	Rural	13:02	12:30	**00:32**
		n=51		
ERF	Urban	21:28	21:00	**00:28**
		n=1028		
ERF	Rural	23:08	21:45	**01:23**
		n=14		

2018-2022 Special Risk (Non-Hydrant) Fire Suppression Response Times				
1st/ERF	**Urban/Rural**	**Baseline**	**Benchmark**	**Gap**
1st Due	Urban	11:38	10:45	**00:53**
		n=71		
1st Due	Rural	14:34	14:15	**00:19**
		n=84		
ERF	Urban	33:11	30:00	**03:11**
		n=20		
ERF	Rural	39:53	38:45	**01:08**
		n=31		

2018-2022 Special Risk (High Rise) Fire Suppression Response Times				
1st/ERF	Urban/Rural	Baseline	Benchmark	Gap
1st Due	Urban	8:25	8:15	**00:10**
		n=446		
ERF	Urban	20:25	20:00	**00:25**
		n=172		

Criterion 5F – Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Program

The agency operates an EMS program with a designated level of out-of-hospital emergency medical care that protects the community from injury or death. Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) provides all emergency medical services within the borders of Montgomery County. The department's response and deployment standards are based upon the urban and rural population densities, and the emergency medical demands of the community. Thirty-five fire stations and two rescue stations provide county-wide coverage; department staffing is based upon station location, incident type, and frequency. MCFRS has developed a program of measurement and assessment to ensure the department is meeting the expectations of the community. During the past five years MCFRS worked on improving advanced life support (ALS) response times, adding basic life support (BLS) transport capacity and implementing a mobile integrated health program to address the needs of repetitive EMS users. During COVID-19, MCFRS increased deployment by five paramedic chase cars by moving the ALS resource off transport units while maintaining transport capacity to address the extra demand on the 911 system and the overcapacity of the hospital system. The department was unable to determine the effect of the chase cars to make assumptions about normal operations, and returned to daily deployment of three chase cars. MCFRS EMS responses include high-risk ALS2, moderate-risk ALS1, low-risk BLS Hot, and lowest-risk BLS Cold. The agency is meeting emergency deployment objectives for these programs.

These program measures also contribute to the department's annual strategic plan to guide all its actions toward achieving its goals and objectives. The department completes an National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) report for each unique incident and one for each unit response; at least one patient care report is completed for each patient contact. The department maintains and trains all its members in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act to ensure patient privacy. The department also completes an annual review of the EMS program and conducts a formal program appraisal.

The department changed its HIPAA compliance reporting to comply with county requirements and this resulted in decreased chart review, it is recommended that the department implement a process to provide quality assurance (QA) on a percentage of charts from low to high acuity for report compliance and accuracy.

Performance Gap Analysis

The following table represents the agency's actual performance (baseline) versus the goal (benchmark). The gaps are provided in red (representing improvement opportunities), and green (when actual performance exceeds the goal).

2018-2022 Moderate Risk EMS Response Times				
1st/ERF	**Urban/Rural**	**Baseline**	**Benchmark**	**Gap**
1st Due	Urban	11:18	10:15	**01:03**
		n=164722		
1st Due	Rural	14:51	14:00	**00:51**
		n=4949		
ERF	Urban	12:40	11:30	**01:10**
		n=65464		
ERF	Rural	18:07	16:45	**01:22**
		n=1563		

2018-2022 High Risk EMS Response Times				
1st/ERF	**Urban/Rural**	**Baseline**	**Benchmark**	**Gap**
1st Due	Urban	10:05	9:45	**00:20**
		n=21108		
1st Due	Rural	13:28	13:15	**00:13**
		n=651		
ERF	Urban	12:41	12:00	**00:41**
		n=14212		
ERF	Rural	17:39	17:00	**00:39**
		n=419		

Criterion 5G – Technical Rescue Program

The agency operates an adequate, effective, efficient and safe technical rescue program directed toward rescuing the community from any life-endangering causes (e.g., structural collapse, vehicle accidents, swift water or submersion, confined space, cave-in, trench collapse). The Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) provides a scalable all-hazard approach to technical rescue incidents occurring within Montgomery County. All members of the MCFRS are trained to the awareness level in technical rescue, and many to the operations level, per National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards. Technician level response is provided for the sub-specialties of structural collapse, rope, trench, and confined space rescues from three fire stations with a daily minimum of members training to the technician level. Response to water rescue incidents is done through five operations-level boat crews located on the eastern and western fringes of the county. These operations level resources respond to incidents on the Potomac River, local waterways, and nearby lakes in and around Montgomery County. At the same time, the department responds to swift water and ice rescue incidents with the swift water rescue team. If severe weather or flooding is anticipated, operations-level water rescue resources are staffed with technician-level responders to add up to five additional swift water-capable boats for incidents. The agency staffs a technical rescue team (TRT) station daily with TRT technicians that cross-staff apparatus. The peer assessment team

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verified all standard operating guidelines and policies are up to date with a five-year review or as needed. It was also verified by the peer assessment team that the TRT is a county resource and responds to calls outside the county as needed under mutual aid and an automatic agreement with surrounding municipalities.

If the scope of the incident exceeds MCFRS capabilities the on-duty response personnel and equipment resources from Maryland Task Force 1, which is sponsored by MCFRS, can be requested and utilized on site. A formal and documented appraisal process is in place for determining the technical rescue program effectiveness using a task book format as well as the MCFRS formal appraisal process template. The technical rescue team and swift water rescue team both utilize position-specific task books to monitor and track individual training and effectiveness. This individual appraisal is then reviewed by team leadership, typically on a quarterly basis, to determine training priorities for the next training cycle.

Performance Gap Analysis
The following table represents the agency's actual performance (baseline) versus the goal (benchmark). The gaps are provided in red (representing improvement opportunities), and green (when actual performance exceeds the goal).

2018-2022 Moderate Risk Water/Ice Rescue Response Times				
1st/ERF	**Urban/Rural**	**Baseline**	**Benchmark**	**Gap**
1st Due	Urban	17:55	16:45	**01:10**
		n=136		
1st Due	Rural	18:54	17:00	**01:54**
		n=41		
ERF	Urban	26:24	24:30	**01:54**
		n=36		
ERF	Rural	29:20	29:00	**00:20**
		n=22		

2018-2022 Special Risk Water/Ice Rescue Response Times				
1st/ERF	**Urban/Rural**	**Baseline**	**Benchmark**	**Gap**
1st Due	Urban	16:45	16:15	**00:30**
		n=157		
1st Due	Rural	19:59	19:15	**00:44**
		n=76		
ERF	Urban	26:36	26:30	**00:06**
		n=61		
ERF	Rural	34:56	34:45	**00:11**
		n=200		

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Criterion 5H – Hazardous Materials (Hazmat) Program

The agency operates an adequate, effective, efficient and safe hazardous materials program directed toward protecting the community from the hazards associated with the uncontrolled releases of hazardous and toxic materials. Montgomery County Fire Rescue Services (MCFRS) maintains two hazardous materials units, each cross-staffed with a total of four firefighters trained to the hazmat technician level. A minimum of five additional hazmat technicians are staffed at two additional stations, for a total minimum of thirteen available per shift. Annual continuing education training is documented for all hazmat technicians through skills check-off packets. The agency engages a variety of external partners as needed to ensure comprehensive incident response, mitigation, and clean up.

Performance Gap Analysis

The following tables represent the agency's actual performance (baseline) versus the goal (benchmark). The gaps are provided in red (representing improvement opportunities), and green (when actual performance exceeds the goal).

2018-2022 Moderate Risk Hazmat Response Times				
1st/ERF	**Urban/Rural**	**Baseline**	**Benchmark**	**Gap**
1st Due	Urban	13:07	9:30	**03:37**
		n=385		
1st Due	Rural	13:34	12:00	**01:34**
		n=11		
ERF	Urban	29:38	25:00	**04:38**
		n=80		

It was verified and validated by the peer assessment team that the Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service had a statistically insignificant number of moderate risk hazardous materials incidents requiring an effective response force (ERF) in rural areas for 2018 - 2022, to provide a sufficient data set to study. Therefore, no performance gap analysis for the rural ERF is provided in this report.

2018-2022 High Risk Hazmat Response Times				
1st/ERF	**Urban/Rural**	**Baseline**	**Benchmark**	**Gap**
1st Due	Urban	11:46	9:30	**02:16**
		n=159		
ERF	Urban	31:39	30:00	**01:39**
		n=42		

It was verified and validated by the peer assessment team that the Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service had a statistically insignificant number of high-risk hazardous materials incidents in rural areas for 2018 - 2022, to provide a sufficient data set to study. Therefore, no performance gap analysis for the rural areas is provided in this report.

Criterion 5K – Wildland Fire Services Program

The agency operates an adequate, effective, and efficient wildland fire program directed toward controlling and/or extinguishing wildland fires to protect the community from injury or death and to reduce property loss. The Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) is the primary response agency for wildland fires and provides services consistent with their mission statement. Wildland fire responses are sometimes supplemented by the Maryland Forest Service, particularly if the fire involves state land.

A fleet of 4 specialized all-wheel drive brush engines supported by 12 brush trucks and 8 tanker/tenders support the relatively low frequency wildfire responses within the county. Most incidents are handled by a small contingent of apparatus and involve mostly short grasses. Wildland and brush fires are handled through standardized staffing and deployment. The deployment is effective in mitigating the primary types of wildland incidents found in Montgomery County.

Performance Gap Analysis

It was verified and validated by the peer assessment team that Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service had a statistically insignificant number of wildland incidents requiring a first-due or effective response force (ERF) for 2018 - 2022, to provide a sufficient data set to study. Therefore, no performance gap analysis for these responses are provided in this report.

Criterion 5L – FEMA Urban Search & Rescue

Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) is the sponsoring agency for Maryland Task Force 1 (MD-TF1), one of the nation's 28 federally funded urban search and rescue (USAR) teams established under the authority of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Each National Incident Management System (NIMS) Type 1 urban search and rescue task force is comprised of 70 members specializing in search, rescue, medicine, hazardous materials, logistics, and planning. The team is also capable of responding as a water rescue mission-ready package (MRP), which can work alongside local rescuers to help those trapped by floodwaters. MD-TF1 has around 210 personnel actively participating from 6 different agencies.

The required and maintained cache ensures that the task force is completely self-sufficient for 72 hours and can maintain around-the-clock operations for up to 14 days. In addition to the standard USAR cache, MD-TF1 members are also responsible for maintaining a hazardous materials (HazMat) equipment push package (HEPP), one of only seven USAR HEPP caches in the nation.

FEMA ensures administrative readiness evaluations (ARE) are completed for each team. These evaluations are conducted by selected peer representatives from the other federal USAR teams. The evaluators conduct a full evaluation of the team's administrative processes including personnel training records, logistical management, cache management, team deployment processes, fiscal management of team operating funds, and other requirements of the cooperative agreement.

Performance Gap Analysis

It was verified and validated by the peer assessment team that Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service had a statistically insignificant number of FEMA USAR incidents for 2018 - 2022 to provide

a sufficient data set to study. Therefore, no performance gap analysis for these responses are provided in this report.

Category 6 — Physical Resources

Development and use of physical resources are consistent with the agency's established plans. A systematic and planned approach to the future development of facilities is in place. These are outlined in the Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) Master Plan. The agency currently maintains 47 different work sites, 37 of which are fire-rescue stations, while the remaining 10 provide support and administrative functions. Of the 37 fire-rescue stations, 12 are county-owned, and 25 are volunteer corporation-owned. In the last 10 years, 4 fire stations (18, 25, R2, and 32) were constructed to meet both current and future personnel and equipment needs.

There is a well-established countywide process for building, remodeling, renovating and/or adding new facilities that the agency is mandated to conform to. A team of staff members, including a county capital projects manager, fire and rescue staff, and personnel from a local fire rescue department, if applicable, are involved with the planning for all new fire and rescue stations and/or renovations.

MCFRS is currently limited to two capital improvement projects per six-year plan cycle. This limitation has significantly restricted the ability of fire and rescue to keep pace with the facility needs outlined in their master plan. The agency has projects that are listed in the master plan that continue to be pushed out years. It is recommended the timeline for the replacement of physical resources is consistent with the agency's goals and strategic plan.

The agency designs, maintains and manages fixed facility resources that meet the agency's goals and objectives. All of the agency's fixed facilities were built and maintained to comply with federal, state, and local codes and regulations. MCFRS will not occupy any facility without ensuring an approved occupancy permit has been issued by the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services. The MCFRS Facilities Section ensures that the facility and equipment maintenance is properly coordinated and planned.

MCFRS Facilities Section utilizes an internal fire station defect reporting system. Defects and requests for service are submitted by station personnel for both volunteer and county-maintained facilities. The facilities section tracks all defect reports and ensures completion through the defect reporting system. This process has ensured that fire and rescue facilities remain safe and in good condition.

Apparatus resources are designed, purchased and maintained to adequately meet the agency's goals and objectives. Frontline apparatus and reserves are in place to meet operational needs consistent with the department's standards of cover and service level objectives. The department's apparatus resources include engines, aerial apparatus, heavy rescue units, ambulances, and support vehicles appropriate for the functions served. Apparatus is designed and purchased based on the apparatus specifications committee recommendations, which include an MCFRS mechanic, a career chief officer, a representative from International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 1664, and the Montgomery County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association providing technical input.

The agency's apparatus replacement plan is conveyed within the Montgomery County Capital Improvement Plan, predicated on a six-year funding cycle. Apparatus replacement is an ongoing

project intended to provide a steady and continuous flow of funding for minimum replacement needs. The current funding cycle includes the replacement of 46 ambulances, 18 engines, 7 aerials, 4 rescue squad/hazmat units, 2 tankers, and 16 other support apparatus.

The inspection, testing, preventive maintenance, replacement schedule and emergency repair of all apparatus are well established and meet the emergency apparatus service and reliability needs. The MCFRS Fleet Section is led by the assistant chief for fleet operations and support, who manages the fleet division personnel and daily operations which include inspections, maintenance, repairs, specification, and ordering of all fire department fleet vehicles and apparatus. The fleet section has 12 technicians, 4 crew chiefs, 2 parts technicians, an equipment services coordinator, and a manager.

Apparatus drivers are trained to perform daily, weekly, and monthly preventive maintenance inspections with deficiencies reported in the online defect reporting system. Fleet maintenance personnel are trained and certified to diagnose and repair all apparatus in the fleet. Fleet maintenance personnel perform annual pump and hose testing; a third-party vendor is used for annual ladder testing. Mechanics are trained and certified through the Emergency Vehicle Technician Certification Commission (EVT) and National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE).

The fleet operations and support section of the division of support services is located at an appropriately sized central maintenance facility. The maintenance facility consists of two very large warehouse buildings that allow the agency to perform most maintenance indoors on various apparatus types. The reserve fleet of apparatus is located on-site at the maintenance facility. The agency has a robust reserve apparatus fleet, including 30 reserve and secondary engines, 10 aerials, 20 ambulances, 2 rescue squads, a tanker, and a brush truck.

Equipment and supplies are adequate and designed to meet the agency's goals and objectives. The fleet maintenance section ensures all vehicles are purchased with equipment to meet operational needs. Tools and equipment are standardized and distributed for specific vehicles. The department maintains an annual budget for small equipment repair and replacement. Acquisition of new equipment is planned and prioritized through the annual budget process.

Equipment testing, inspections, and maintenance is conducted by qualified personnel per manufacturer recommendations. Fleet maintenance technicians are trained and certified by qualified equipment manufacturers. The fleet maintenance section has primary responsibility for maintaining many of the department's tools and equipment.

Self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), compressors, fire hose, and non-life safety equipment is maintained in-house. Two full-time and several part-time personnel are manufacturer-trained and certified SCBA technicians. The agency contracts annually with certified third-party vendors for other specialized equipment maintenance. Records of equipment repair and maintenance are tracked electronically.

Safety equipment is adequate and designed to meet agency goals and objectives. The agency has established and followed internal policies that outline the type and quantity of personal protective equipment (PPE) issued to personnel. MCFRS has identified, provided, and distributed adequate structural firefighting safety equipment to all applicable personnel consisting of turnout coats/pants, boots, hoods, helmets, and gloves. An individual SCBA mask is provided to each applicable person, and SCBAs are available on each apparatus. All safety equipment meets the applicable National Fire

Protection Association (NFPA) requirements. Personnel are also provided with non-emergency safety equipment such as safety glasses, hearing protection, etc.

All career operations field members are assigned two sets of structural PPE, while most volunteer members receive only one set. Structural PPE is sent a minimum of twice yearly to a vendor for specialized cleaning and inspection. Structural firefighting bunker gear is replaced at least every ten years. All other PPE and safety equipment is replaced as needed based on advanced inspection.

Category 7 — Human Resources

General human resources administration practices are in place and are consistent with local, state/provincial and federal statutory and regulatory requirements. A division chief is designated to oversee human resources (HR), personnel, and policies related to recruitment, hiring, and incumbent processes for the agency. The division chief of volunteer services is the collaborative counterpart of the HR division chief and both work collaboratively with county HR professionals to manage all personnel matters. Human resources activities are governed by several entities, codes, ordinances, policies, regulations, and laws of the county. The Montgomery County personnel regulations (MCPR) provide the principles, procedures, and practices that must be utilized for personnel administration within MCFRS. The Montgomery County Code mandates that the county utilize collective bargaining with the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), Local 1664. The county attorney reviews the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) to ensure it adheres to all statutory and regulatory requirements of the MCPR, state, and federal laws and also guides the agreement process that covers the volunteer members of the agency.

MCFRS has worked to add staffing and adjust workload distribution over the past few years. The division added a battalion chief in 2021 to oversee recruitment and promotions and an administrative specialist to support record keeping and manage documents within the division. The agency has lobbied for funding to add a policy analyst and expresses a desire for hiring a benefits specialist, a dedicated attorney, a recruitment program manager, two additional uniform support staff and an additional administrative specialist to manage the increased human resources workload that is shouldered by the department. It is recommended the agency evaluate its current staffing and workload distribution for its human resources functions to ensure that strategic priorities and required processes are completed effectively.

In addition, because of the historical documentation of policy and procedures into county code as well as the variety of places and processes that the county and the agency use to create and publish agreements, policies, procedures, and guidelines there is evidence of conflicting language and outdated practices that are available in some guiding documents. Effective, reviewed, and sunset dates are not noted on many of these materials. It is recommended the agency ensure and document its annual policy review and update process to eliminate conflicting language with older published documents.

Systems are established to attract, select, retain and promote qualified personnel in accordance with applicable local, state/provincial and federal statutory requirements. The agency has formalized effective processes for hiring and promoting employees within the department. This includes collaborative efforts with volunteer organizations to ensure tenure is valued and operational effectiveness is consistent. All members are given the opportunity to participate in and support recruitment efforts. In 2022, the county and MCFRS retained the National Academy of Public

Administration (NAPA) to perform a comprehensive equity assessment of the department, which included its hiring, training, and promotional processes.

The community served by MCFRS is relatively diverse, however the department does not directly collect or have access to internal demographic data. That information is maintained by the county office of human resources. The agency expressed an interest in having more transparency in this area in an effort to better understand their workforce. There has been discussion of dashboards that will make this data available to departments, but as of the site visit, the data was not published or shared. The MCFRS FY24 budget request included a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) officer position to support the department's efforts to ensure an inclusive approach is taken in future processes and practices.

It was noted that many of the organization's facilities lacked privacy in locker rooms, restrooms, and sleeping areas. This coupled with legacy policies and procedures could impact the ability of MCFRS to ensure that it continues to bring in and maintain diverse staff and volunteers to serve the changing needs of the community. It is recommended the agency work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure that the department's facilities, conditions, and work environment are designed to accommodate a diverse and qualified workforce in alignment with its goals and objectives.

Documented personnel policies and procedures are in place to guide both administrative and personnel behavior. MCFRS has numerous policies and procedures as well as codes, ordinances, and directives that guide employee practices and processes. These are reviewed on one-to-three-year cycles but are not modified unless changes are required. The process to change policies and procedures that lie within the CBAs or in county code is very cumbersome and lengthy. Information is readily available to staff via the web-based MCFRS Quicklinks to include disciplinary and grievance processes and procedures.

Human resources development and utilization is consistent with the agency's established mission, goals and objectives. A position classification system is in place and includes career and volunteer staff as well as non-sworn department members. Job descriptions are published and the performance appraisal system includes feedback and coordination with the training division. Member feedback and input is encouraged and the agency has strong labor management and volunteer management relationships. Professional development programs are organized through the training division and the agency recently hosted a leadership academy program for frontline supervisors.

A system and practices for providing employee/member compensation are in place. General pay and benefits information is available through the county employee self-service system. The IAFF CBA also has compensation information published in several articles, including wages, overtime, special duty differentials, call-back pay, holiday pay, and emergency pay. The MCGEO CBA has similar information on salary, wages, and compensation. Both agreements are posted on the MCFRS Quicklinks site.

Category 8 — Training and Competency

A training program is established to support the agency's needs. The agency provides access to and guidance on educational programs that increase advancement potential and support the agency's needs. The Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) administers a well-established and comprehensive training program that incorporates the required knowledge, skills, and abilities for its personnel to operate in the fire suppression, emergency medical services, technical rescue,

hazardous materials, wildland fire, and urban search and rescue programs. Multiple professional and command officer development programs are also offered through the training division. The MCFRS training program meets or exceeds the requirements of Chapter 21 of the Montgomery County Code, the Maryland Institute of Emergency Medical Services System (MIEMSS), the Maryland Fire Service Personnel Qualifications Board, the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI), and other nationally required standards such as those published by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the National Fire Protection Association, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

A minimum level of training for all positions is documented in Montgomery County Executive Regulation 36-08AM *Certification Standards for Training, Experience, and Credentialing Requirements*. However, this regulation has not been updated since 2009. It is recommended the agency develop a process for reviewing and, as necessary, revising the minimum levels of training and education required for all positions.

Training and education programs are provided to support the agency's needs. The MCFRS offers training for all personnel, including recruits and promotional, chief officer, and volunteer positions. An online training schedule with automated course registration is published, is updated on an ongoing basis, and is available to all personnel. Training is also offered via scheduled in-service sessions and through the delivery of online courses. All completed training is documented in the agency's records management system, which can produce an individual transcript of training completed by MCFRS personnel.

The MCFRS evaluates its crew and officer performance using standardized agency benchmarks. Additionally, all personnel complete an annual individual performance planning and appraisal measurement tool which evaluates performance outcomes based on rank, job class, and/or level within the agency. The training division administers student evaluations following the end of each formal training course. The results of these evaluations are used to assess whether the training course met its announced objectives; the training division staff will also modify future course content or delivery as needed based on the results of these evaluations. A program appraisal that evidences the training division's effectiveness is completed on an annual basis.

Printed and nonprinted training and education resources, library materials, media equipment, facilities and staff are available in adequate quantity, relevancy and diversity, and are current. The MCFRS Public Safety Training Academy (PSTA) is fully outfitted and equipped to support the agency's all-hazards training programs. The peer assessment team toured the expansive PSTA grounds, which opened in 2016. There are several classrooms, a library with instructional and resource materials, multiple burn buildings, various training props, a flashover simulator, a flammable liquid training area, a driver training pad, and storage facilities for the PSTA apparatus and equipment.

There are 17 full-time staff dedicated to the PSTA and its training programs, which are supplemented by approximately 120 adjunct instructors (10 percent of its total career personnel) from the operations division of MCFRS. All instructors hold a minimum of a Level II instructor credential from the Maryland Instructor Certification Review Board and must meet the established continuing education and re-certification requirements from the State of Maryland. There are approximately 30 additional adjunct instructors from the operations division that are available to teach courses that do not require a state-credentialed instructor. The full-time and adjunct staffing levels currently meet the needs of the MCFRS, but the peer assessment team observed that the training division is heavily dependent on

its pool of adjunct instructors. <u>It is recommended the agency evaluate its staffing model to ensure that a sufficient number of instructional personnel are available to support the training program's goals and objectives</u>.

The MCFRS training programs are primarily driven by the required MIEMSS curriculum for emergency medical services training and the MFRI-sanctioned course curriculum that the agency is approved to deliver. The agency utilizes its internal subject matter experts to create and deliver additional curriculum, in-service, and professional development training that support the MCFRS mission and goals. The peer assessment team observed a strong commitment from the training division staff to continue enhancing and expanding its professional development and course offerings. <u>It is recommended the agency follow-through on its plans to develop a process for ensuring that curriculum and instructional materials remain current</u>.

Category 9 — Essential Resources

Criterion 9A – Water Supply

The water supply resources are reliable and capable of distributing adequate volumes of water and pressures to all areas of agency responsibility. All areas meet fire flow requirements in accordance with applicable fire flow criteria. Montgomery County, Maryland is served by three separate domestic water supply purveyors. The largest is the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, with the city of Rockville Public Works and the town of Poolesville Public Works adding additional capacity. The three public water supply systems manage over 23,000 fire hydrants. The reliability of the water supply system was confirmed during the most recent Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification report in 2022, where the agency received 35.77 out of 40 points for water supply.

The Montgomery County Fire Marshal and the department of permitting service's fire prevention and code compliance section are responsible for enforcing the fire and life safety code within the county. Minimum fire flow requirements for new development in Montgomery County are established and mandated through state and county codes. The Maryland State Fire Prevention Code, which adopts National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1, *Fire Code*, which includes minimum fire flow requirements, has been adopted in Montgomery County Code, Chapter 22, *Life Safety*.

Criterion 9B – Communication Systems

The public and the agency have an adequate, effective and efficient emergency communications system. The system is reliable and able to meet the demands of major operations, including command and control within fire/rescue services during emergency operations, and meets the needs of other public safety agencies. Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) has a modern capable computer aided dispatch (CAD) and portable radio system. The peer assessment team observed a very organized, modern, and well-equipped fire dispatch center that is staffed with uniformed fire personnel. The agency's dispatchers are sworn firefighters who have been cross-trained to the state standard for their role.

The MCFRS emergency communications center (ECC) is responsible for assisting with the public safety answering point (PSAP) call taking, while primarily dispatching incidents for fire, rescue and emergency medical assistance and recording pertinent incident information. At the 911 call-taker position, a determination is made on whether an incident is medical- or fire-related. The call-taker

enters the appropriate information on a CAD terminal and sends the CAD incident to the primary radio position to be dispatched.

MCFRS has added a disposition officer that works in the ECC, this position was developed during COVID-19. The cadre of supervisors who staff this position are all currently credentialed emergency medical services (EMS) duty officers. The disposition officer position effectively brought an EMS duty officer to every incident and improved overall quality of care. The disposition officer has a global view of the county and will suggest which hospitals are most appropriate for patient care and have the fastest turnover to get units back in service. The agency has an emergency communication program appraisal process that determines the effectiveness of the emergency communication program and its impact on meeting the agency's goals and objectives.

Criterion 9C – Administrative Support Services and Office Systems

Administrative support services and general office systems are in place with adequate staff to efficiently and effectively conduct and manage the agency's administrative functions such as organizational planning and assessment, resource coordination, record keeping, reporting, business communications, public interaction and purchasing. It was noted by the peer assessment team during the on-site visit that Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service maintains a large and well-established support services system. The agency has recognized the need for additional support staff and is working to add 16 positions in FY24 to assist in fiscal support and human resources. The peer assessment team observed a system for storage of departmental forms and document retention, maintained on a local on-site server, where department policy, training, and other information are sent and available for access by department members. The department follows Maryland state and county rules and regulations for records retention, access, and disposition, as governed by established law.

The agency staffs a full-time public information officer (PIO) that reports directly to the fire chief. The PIO is responsible for reporting all department events and runs the department's social media platforms. The department also staffs several backup PIO's who assume PIO responsibilities when the primary PIO is unavailable. The PIO's programs also focus on outreach programs, activities, and promoting recruiting efforts.

Criterion 9D – Information Technology

Information technology resources are in place to conduct and manage the agency's information technology functions, such as hardware and software implementation and maintenance and data analysis. The peer assessment team identified that Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) supports data collection and analysis and has dedicated staff of 13 personnel responsible for the agency's information technology (IT) needs. The agency's technology service division is supported by the county's technology enterprise and business solutions (TEBS) department and various other support personnel from the county. During the on-site review, the peer assessment team observed that while the current staff can support the needs of the agency, they are working to add a cellular data manager and asset manager in FY24 to improve the capacity of the MCFRS Technology division.

Montgomery County Fire Rescue uses *PowerBI* for analytics and data analysis for incident reporting and performance measures to align with the department's mission, goals and objectives. The county

has moved data collection from server storage to cloud-based storage, which has allowed MCFRS to spend less time on maintenance and shift focus to reporting and data accuracy. MCFRS has addressed the needs of cybersecurity by conducting monthly personnel training, system tests, and best practices. The county has a mandatory multi-factor authentication requirement for all employees and contractors to protect against phishing and ransomware attacks.

Category 10 — External Systems Relationships

The agency's operations and planning efforts include relationships with external agencies and operational systems that affect or may influence its mission, operations and/or cost effectiveness. The agency has demonstrated that they have strong relationships and strategic partnerships with other municipal, county, regional, state, and federal agencies, as well as private sector organizations. The agency is a signatory to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid Operations Plan (MAOP), which establishes a mutual aid agreement between all MWCOG participating jurisdictions. MCFRS also has automatic aid agreements with the federal installations in the agency's jurisdiction and other agencies from nearby counties to provide mutual aid. The agency actively participates in MWCOG committees, such as the fire chief's committee and numerous technical subcommittees, including emergency medical services (EMS); communications; health and safety; hazardous materials; passenger rail; senior operations; and technical rescue. Committee involvement and collaboration has led to the development of regional policies and procedures, large-scale operational exercises, and regional emergency plans. The agency's community risk reduction master plan outlines numerous additional partnerships the MCFRS maintains across an array of outside entities, which outline their contributions to the department's mission or overarching goals.

The peer team observed that the agency has developed strong functional alliances with other agencies and systems, however a conflict resolution policy does not exist between all with whom the agency has a defined partnership. While the agency has demonstrated success with resolving conflicts through committee processes, negotiation, or on an informal basis, it is best practice to have formal conflict resolution provisions in place to protect the agency should an unexpected issue arise. It is recommended the agency establish a conflict resolution policy for all defined external partnerships.

The agency maintains current agreements with those external agencies which support the identified programs. The peer team observed that in early 2023, the agency had digitized all paper agreements, reviewed them for relevance and timeliness, and categorized them in a centralized location within the agency's SharePoint site for easy access by management. In April 2023, the fire chief issued a memo to the division chiefs, informing of the new process for all agreements to be digitized, stored on the SharePoint site, and reviewed at least every three years, or as needed, moving forward. Before this memo was issued, the agency did not have an established process for reviewing and managing agreements. It is recommended the agency formalize the review, revision, and completion process for agreements.

Category 11 — Health and Safety

The agency's occupational health, safety and risk management programs protect the organization and personnel from unnecessary injuries, loss, and liability. The peer assessment team observed that Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) has specific persons assigned responsibility for implementing its occupational health, safety, and risk management programs. The responsibility is

shared between the agency's human resources fire rescue occupational medical services (FROMS) division and the support services safety and supply division.

The agency has demonstrated that it has procedures in place for detecting, reporting, evaluating, addressing, and communicating workplace hazards, as well as unsafe/unhealthy conditions and work practices. The procedures include annual and quarterly station inspections, station defect reporting system, gear inspections, near miss and accident reporting, medical screening, safety trainings, committee studies and reports, and 24-hour on-duty safety officers dedicated to each shift. The agency demonstrated processes for collecting and maintaining injury and exposure records, providing medical and fitness evaluations, as well as wellness/fitness programs to all members, including mental health resources.

While the agency was able to articulate and demonstrate the above referenced processes, the peer team witnessed that some processes were inconsistent with provided policies. This was observed in relation to the quarterly station inspection process and quarterly personal protective equipment (PPE) inspections. The peer team also observed that the agency maintains safety data sheets (SDS) and chemical information lists of hazardous substances, which are updated annually in a web-based system. The agency does perform annual refresher training on the usage of the SDS web-based system; however, there did not appear to be a documentation process in place to ensure that all line personnel are being made aware of changes to the SDS (i.e., actually reading the lists when new substances are introduced). Currently the accountability and follow-up for this training process remains with the station level supervisor The peer team wasn't able to investigate if these were the only existing inconsistencies. It is recommended the agency review and update their policies to align with existing practices.

The agency has a wellness/fitness program for personnel. The agency specifies and communicates the provisions if employees/members do not comply with the wellness/fitness program. The peer team witnessed that the agency has a well-established wellness/fitness program for personnel and verified that the agency has exercise facilities and policies in place that provide dedicated exercise time during each shift. The agency has peer fitness trainers in their battalions who help with designing customized work-out plans for the agency's members and their needs.

The agency has policies that specify the provisions if employees do not comply with maintaining fitness and wellness requirements. A process is in place to assist with bringing members into compliance, when needed.

The agency has a dedicated mental health team that consists of a staff psychologist and a staff therapist. MCFRS also has a peer support – critical incident stress management (PS-CISM) team, which the staff psychologist provides clinical oversight for.

The agency provided one completed annual formal program appraisal for the health and wellness program. The peer team observed that the appraisal focuses primarily on the outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the agency's occupational medicals services. The agency could benefit from including the outcomes and impacts of their occupational safety and risk management efforts into the formal program appraisal as well. It is recommended that the agency incorporates occupational safety and risk management program components into the health and safety formal annual program appraisal to capture effectiveness of the program and its impact on meeting the agency's goals and objectives.