



COLORADO

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Colorado's Senior State Fire Official Announces Retirement

DENVER — Monday, February 1, 2016 — After 35 years of service to the people of Colorado, Director Paul Cooke announced today that he would soon retire from the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control.

During his 41-year career in fire and emergency services, Cooke has served in volunteer, career and combination departments at all levels of government (local, state, federal, and military). He began his career as a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician in upstate New York, before enlisting and serving 6-1/2 years as a medic in the U.S. Army.

The Colorado portion of his fire and emergency services career began in 1979 when he relocated to Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Aurora. While still on active duty, he began serving his community as a volunteer firefighter/EMT and worked part-time for a private ambulance company. After completing his military service, Cooke spent a year at Buckley Air National Guard Base (now Buckley Air Force Base) Fire Department, before being hired by the Cunningham Fire Protection District in Arapahoe County. While serving as Cunningham's fire chief, Cooke worked with the Colorado legislature as the Chair of the Colorado State Fire Chiefs Association's Legislative Committee. As a result, Cooke said, "I have been actively involved in virtually every piece of legislation affecting the Colorado fire service since the mid-1980s."

Cooke's interest in reducing threats to lives and property from fire and improving firefighter safety led him to employment with state government. Cooke served as Deputy Director, then later as Director, of the Colorado Division of Fire Safety from 1991-2006. Only a few short months after appointment as Director, Cooke was involved in the handling of the aftermath of the blowup of the South Canyon Fire, which claimed the lives of 14 wildland firefighters. "The South Canyon Fire and the tragic loss of life was a life changing experience for me," said Cooke. "It caused me to rededicate myself to firefighter safety and to critically examine Colorado's system for providing fire protection services." As a result, Cooke worked alongside other fire and emergency services leaders to enact changes in the way resources are mobilized for large-scale incidents and managing these incidents.

Cooke left state government in 2006 to become the Executive Director of the Colorado State Fire Chiefs Association, a position that provided the ability to further shape public policy affecting fire protection and related emergency services. In this capacity, Cooke managed the Association's legislative agenda and successfully shepherded many bills of importance to the fire service through the legislative process.



In 2012, the Colorado legislature and Governor Hickenlooper decided to make major changes in the organization and structure of state-level fire and life safety programs, Cooke was asked to lead the consolidation effort. As a longtime advocate for combining all state-level fire functions into one agency, Cooke said, “I could hardly say no when I was asked to return to state government and serve as the head the recreated agency.”

Since creation of the Division of Fire Prevention and Control in 2012, Colorado implemented significant changes in providing fire protection services, including:

- Improved efficiency and effectiveness of the state’s fire and life safety programs (building and fire code functions);
- Reorganized the state’s wildland fire management program;
- Increased opportunities for firefighters to obtain safety equipment;
- Implemented Colorado’s Airborne Wildfire Intelligence Program, reducing the potential for catastrophic wildland fires;
- Modernized the firefighter certification process (implemented computer-based testing and statewide records management system);
- Increased firefighter and fire officer training opportunities; and
- Augmented the fire aviation program, enhancing DFPC’s ability to support to local jurisdictions

Regarding Cooke’s retirement, Governor Hickenlooper remarked, “Paul’s contributions have enhanced public safety for the people of Colorado, and he leaves a legacy he can certainly be proud of.”

The search for the next DFPC Director will begin immediately, and Cooke will remain in the position until his successor is appointed and onboard.



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