



Fire Department Safety Officers Association

**33365 Raphael Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48336
www.fdsoa.org**

For release: Monday, November 7, 2016

**Contact: Rich Marinucci, Exec. Dir.
Ph: 248.880.1864
fdsoainfo@gmail.com**

2016 Safety Officer of the Year is proactive FF health

James Williams, the 2016 Safety Officer of the Year, believes the role of safety officers is not just about keeping firefighters safe on the fireground, but includes improving firefighters' physical and mental health and being proactive in cancer prevention and hearing conservation.

“Think ‘big picture’,” said Williams. “You’ve got to promote your program and promote the concept of health, safety, and wellness in non-emergency settings and in a non-threatening way. One of the goals is to not only reach retirement, but enjoy retirement.”

Williams, a deputy chief with Loudoun County (Va.) Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Management was presented with the award by the International Association of Fire Chief Safety Health & Survival Section and the Fire Department Safety Officers Association [www.fdsoa.org] in August at Fire-Rescue International in San Antonio. The award is presented annually to a safety officer in a fire department (any size or composition) who has made a significant contribution to their organization and/or the fire service as a whole in the area of health and safety.

The Loudoun County (Va.) Combined Fire and Rescue System is a metropolitan; all-hazards organization providing essential fire and rescue services to more than 360,000 customers in the suburban Washington, DC area. The system is comprised of more than 550 career and more than 700 operational volunteer personnel and represents one the fastest growing combination systems in the United States.

In nominating Williams for the award, Loudoun County's Assistant Fire Chief Matthew Tobia wrote that in the course of his tenure, "Williams has facilitated and been responsible for numerous accomplishments in our agency including the development and roll out of a Health and Safety Strategic Plan."

Tobia added, "Williams has developed and continues to expand an exemplary program that seeks to address all aspects of health, safety and wellness while motivating his personnel to expand their knowledge for the improvement of the system."

In 2007 Williams was assigned to the Recruit Training session. "I worked on NFPA1403 compliance and safety officer courses to better prepare and qualify me," he said. "At the time, the way our department operated, if you were assigned to safety and health or in an administrative department, you could run as a safety officer." Williams was cleared to operate as a safety officer and at that time, the safety officer was seven days a week, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Over Williams' tenure, the safety officer program has grown to 24/7 safety officers system-wide.

Through Williams' establishment of a Health, Safety and Wellness Committee, several significant programs have been undertaken: hearing conservation; cancer prevention; EMS Provider Essential Functions; Exhaust Recovery Study; and Integration with Rehab. He also developed an RFP leading to the implementation of a behavioral health program for all personnel.

Williams believes that bringing up the topics of health and safety can't be taken for granted and he introduced a bi-weekly health and safety awareness bulletin. "You've got to work to promote Health, Safety & Wellness in the non-emergency setting," Williams said.

One of the most exciting components Williams is working on for 2017 is to create a system-wide Health and Wellness Center, which will be capable of hosting both the CPAT test for candidates and the WPE for incumbents. "I can see it from my office," Williams said of the old building nearby. "We will be working to retrofit, do some demolition, and then design this facility to support the Health and Wellness work performance."

When asked for Williams' advice to other safety officers? "You have to be willing to speak up on a fireground or to fire department administration and insure your voice is heard as you try to promote this imperative mission," he said.

For updates, trends and to network with other safety officers from across the country, attend the Fire Department Safety Officers Association's annual Safety Forum, January 16-20th, 2017, in Orlando. Pre-conference programs begin January 16-17, a two-day Incident Safety Officer class by Dave Dodson and Shadd Whitehead and a two-day Health Safety Officer class by Steve Raynis and Dan Melia preceding the start of the Safety Forum conference, Wednesday, January 18th to Friday, January 20th, 2017.

For more information on the Safety Forum: www.fdssoa.org.

#####

The Fire Department Safety Officers Association (FDSOA) was established in 1989 as a non-profit association, incorporated in Massachusetts. In 2013, the offices moved to Michigan. Its mission is to promote safety standards and practices in the fire, rescue and emergency services community. The association is led by a volunteer board of directors and has a small staff to handle the day-to-day operations. The association is dedicated to the issues that affect the critical role of the safety officer in protecting and promoting the safety and health responsibilities of fire departments, communities and first responders. FDSOA works to help fire departments achieve proficiency and promote the recognition of training, skills and a secure future. In May 2016, FDSOA won the Paul S. Sarbanes Fire Service Safety Leadership Award for its work over 28 years, “as an organization fully dedicated to the health and safety of the nation’s firefighters.”