



Good News May Be on the Horizon

We've been doing some behind-the-scenes work on two issues important to firefighters. While it takes perseverance to turn around agency policies, I'm happy to report our efforts may be very close to bearing fruit.

First, we have been working for years to establish administrative and legislative protections so that statements provided by employees in safety investigations will be used to improve safety and *not* for any other purpose. Unless employees have assurances that their disclosures will not be used against them, they would be ill-advised to freely and frankly second-guess their actions in a safety interview. Unfortunately, these kind of candid discussions are needed to develop lessons learned and prevent future tragedies. Recently, your union advised employees to refrain from participating in serious accident investigations until adequate protections are put in place. Please see our [Open Letter to the Chief](#).

We are proud to report that one of the necessary reforms is near realization. We've been working in partnership to develop an agency policy under which voluntary disclosures made to safety investigators will be used only to improve safety. The next step is to get legislation passed to prevent disclosures to outside parties, such as the Department of Justice. **Until the new policy is put in place and appropriate legislation is passed, be aware that what you say in a safety investigation is not protected from outside parties even under the new policy.**

Second, we're actively working on the issue of reclassifying certain fire program management positions to the GS-0401 series. For many positions, especially after the OPM policy change that stripped our in-house NWCG courses of their standing, the educational requirements of the 401 series are not related to actual job duties. Your union doesn't believe that a natural resources degree should never be required for any fire management position; instead agency policy must be flexible enough to accommodate the need for natural resources credentials when appropriate without requiring them for all such positions.

We are advocating strongly for a change in course. We testified twice before Congress and provided information on the issue to key Congressional staff and to the Department. Also, our NFFE National Office is working to set up a meeting with the new Director of OPM on this issue. While it ain't over until it's over, we are hopeful. We believe that a genuine and effective stand down in the 401 reclassification process is imminent. The details are not finalized, but the pending stand-down guidance should allow all incumbents to retain their jobs without obtaining 401 credentials (thus freeing up training funds for more pressing needs). It should also open vacant positions to experienced candidates who lack 401 credentials.

For more details, see [NFFE-FSC efforts](#), and our [Congressional testimony](#).

The stand down is but the first step - important and necessary, but not sufficient - on the road to developing a rational long-term policy on this issue. Your union is actively seeking a dedicated wildland firefighting series that properly acknowledges the professionalism of our firefighting workforce. We are committed to working toward this end and for a transition that maintains agency capacity while protecting and honoring those who have given their blood, sweat, and tears during many years of service.

If YOU are interested in getting involved, contact a local union official or a [national officer](#).

In solidarity,

Ron Thatcher
NFFE-FSC President



NFFE-FSC President Ron Thatcher telling it like it is to Congress. NFFE will storm The Hill fight for employee rights in accident investigations during our Legislative Week, May 11-14.

LINKS:

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[NFFE FSC Website](#)

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