

Division of Fire Safety**Central Office**

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*Department of Public Safety***MEMORANDUM****TO:** House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs**FROM:** Michael Desrochers, Executive Director, Division of Fire Safety**SUBJECT:** Assistant Fire Marshal and State Electrical Inspector Justification**DATE:** February 12, 2014

Basic Overview: The Division of Fire Safety has 4 district offices (Springfield, Rutland, Barre, Williston). Each office is responsible for a large geographical area of responsibility consisting of 40 -70 communities. The Regional offices are subdivided into geographical areas where Assistant Fire Marshals and State Electrical Inspectors work together responding to complaints, conducting construction inspections, and testing life safety systems.

Electrical Inspector Position Request:

Prior to electrical wiring commencing in a public building the electrician is required to submit an electrical work notice (statement of work to be performed) to the Division. The Division on average receives approximately 4950 electrical work notices. Each individual electrical work notice may require multiple inspections (energizing, rough, partial final, final). Hotel 1 at Jay Peak required 8 electrical work notices from 4 different electrical companies requiring 61 electrical inspections. Stowe Mountain Lodge required 28 electrical work notices from 15 electrical companies resulting in 122 electrical inspections.

The division completes approximately 6900 electrical inspections a year with only 8 inspectors averaging over 850 inspections. This is a tremendous work load when considering travel time, inspection time, report writing and data entry. We have also seen more demand on the electrical inspectors due to purchase and sale inspections.

We have 9000 open electrical work notices to date and we continue to see an increase in volume of electrical work notices spanning several years

Year	Electrical Work Notice Received	Number of Inspectors	Inspections
2006	4151	8	6424
2007	4081	8	6525
2013	4789	8	6466



Problem:

There are a number of apparent issues stemming from this continued demand on services below are a few;

- Not able to conduct final electrical inspections in a timely manner delaying building openings indirectly delaying payments to contractors.
- Millions of dollars in new construction on the horizon compounding our ability to respond to the inspection demand.
- Inspectors are giving verbal authorization to electricians to conceal wiring without inspection. Electricians expect an inspection to be conducted in response to the fee they pay for the electrical work notice and if the wiring is not inspected many violations are being covered jeopardizing occupant safety.
- In some cases energizing permits cannot be issued in a timely manner. Energizing permits provide power to job sites and construction trailers so construction can start.
- Closing are delayed on purchase and sale inspections because the electrical inspector cannot respond in a timely manner to inspection requests because of priorities.
- The excessive work load is having a negative impact on morale inspector morale.

Assistant Fire Marshal Position Request:

Assistant Fire Marshal responsibility is much different than an electrical inspector in that Fire Marshals interact with architects, engineers, tenants, owners, contractors, designers, fire service, local government, health officers, and other State agencies. There has been a steady increase in the number of plans submitted to our division. Additionally, the increase in volume can be validated by the increase in construction valuation.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Construction Permits Received</u>	<u>Construction Valuation</u>	<u>Inspections</u>
2006	2500	551 Million	6322
2007	2336	448 Million	7458
2008	2652	525 Million	8944
2009	2819	376 Million	8851
2010	3265	506 Million	8792
2011	3213	437 Million	9105
2012	3237	588 Million	8638
2013	3321	751 Million	8884

Problem:

We continue to see an increase in permits and a significant increase in construction valuation without additional resources. The following are challenges we face;

- Historically we issue 95% of our building permits within 30 days of receipt. Today we are issuing approximately 80% of our permits within 30 days. This is delaying construction projects from legally starting.
- Fire Marshals are not able to schedule final occupancy inspections in a timely manner delaying building openings. Our inspectors are faced with making risk assessments to accommodate the business community.
- Due to the high volume of new construction we are unable to focus on the inspection of existing residential occupancies where we know we are losing lives. We need to continue to conduct our residential follow ups in a timely manner we are struggling to stay on tract.
- Inspectors are overwhelmed with the daily work load.
- Many projects require phase-in occupancy which is becoming very difficult to manage.
- Life safety components are being covered without first validating compliance with the codes.
- Buildings are being authorized to open without a final inspection. Although we have established inspection priorities the sheer volume of work has stretched the boundaries of our inspection priorities.
- Contractors, architects, engineers and trades people are paid when their work has been inspected and approved by our inspectors. When we cannot inspect a project upon request disbursement of funds is delayed.
- Purchase and Sale Inspections has added a significant work load to our staff especially in Chittenden County where these inspections are most prevalent.

In Closing:

Our mission is to protect lives and property with a coordinated effort in code enforcement, fire service training, public education, and hazardous materials response. Adding these two positions will allow us to conduct 800 more electrical inspections and approximately 600 more building inspections. In 2014, we have already received 120 Million in construction valuation and expect several hundred million dollars of EB-5 related construction.