

# History Behind the Badge

## CCFR Fire Marshal's Office



**C**apital City Fire Rescue started in Juneau over 130 years ago as the Juneau Fire Department. Many things have changed over time. Many people have come and gone along the way. One thing that has remained is the importance of protecting the community from fire or other disasters through education, engineering, and enforcement when needed. This article introduces the Fire Marshal's Office, who they are, what they do, and how the members of the fire department are very much an integral piece of the office's functions and effectiveness in protecting our community.

Currently, the office is staffed with one full-time fire marshal after the recent retirement of Deputy Fire Marshal Sven Pearson. The Deputy Fire Marshal position was created in 2006 and later unfunded in 2020. For most years there has been a single person responsible for a myriad of duties, obligations, and "other duties as assigned". The title "Fire Marshal" is often thought of by the public as an individual who shuts down a local bar due to overcrowding or arrests someone for an arson crime. These are true; however, a fire marshal must be well-versed and knowledgeable in all aspects of the fire department's responsibilities and be focused on fire prevention as it relates to engineering, education, and enforcement. This is a very broad range of knowledge that encompasses everything from building construction to law enforcement to the methodology of teaching kids and adults of all ages. The fire marshal is the leader in all hazard prevention efforts and must maintain a constant focus for organizations about preventing the loss of life and property in the community.

In 1901, the first City Marshal was hired in Juneau. This position was primarily an early law enforcement position that carried out many fire department-related duties that are still done to this day. The city marshal not only enforced criminal laws when Alaska was a territory, but they also acted as the public safety point of contact. Their duties involved fire safety, watching for fires, and the general safety of the public during the hours of darkness. Some of these duties included ensuring the public sidewalks were free and clear of debris and in good repair since they were constructed of wooden planks placed over mud and dirt. This is still a concern today as we conduct plan reviews for emergency apparatus and responder accessibility.

Another duty the city marshal had was to inspect the brick chimneys and ensure they were safely used and met local ordinances. As early as 1906, the city marshal was directed to notify all persons dumping ashes and garbage on public streets to discontinue the practice or they would be placed under arrest (History of Juneau Police Department, (n.d.)).

In 1912, the city marshal was responsible for notifying property owners and agents of dilapidated or unsanitary buildings to tear them down or render them more sanitary. Inspections of local hotels and rooming houses were conducted and there was a check to ensure that rope fire escapes were provided for guests (History of Juneau Police Department, (n.d.)). This is still a responsibility today however we work in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Building Department and use newer fire escape methods.

The duties and responsibilities have continued to evolve over the decades. The workload is varied and there is rarely a shortage. One of the biggest changes that occurred happened when Alaska became the 49<sup>th</sup> State, which brought with it state statutes and regulations. This has given the fire marshals the legal authority to conduct their work along with local amended ordinances. The CCFR Fire Marshal's Office is one of the only jurisdictions in Alaska that has a very broad authority to enforce fire codes with the ability to write citations up to \$310. They apply for and serve administrative and criminal search warrants with Juneau Police Department assistance and pursue criminal charges for violators of fire & life safety codes or arson-related crimes. The position is the only municipal fire marshal in Alaska to hold a Special Commission as a Peace Officer by the Alaska Department of Public Safety.

The fire marshal is the one component of the fire service specifically designated to reduce the loss of life and property caused by fire through prevention and education. They serve on the front line to prevent deaths and injury due to fire by trying to prevent them from occurring and if they do occur, that life and property loss is kept to a minimum. While it is difficult to measure the successes of these efforts, it is still a very critical office to maintain in the city as they have far-reaching connections with a varied audience in the community. They interact almost daily with other government agencies, schools, businesses, politicians, and industry.

Below is a list of past and present fire marshals, deputy fire marshals, and fire inspectors for the department and their approximate dates of service.

### **Juneau Fire Marshals, Deputy Fire Marshals & Fire Inspectors**

• City Marshal	W.S. Staley	1900 – 1902
• City Marshal	Charles D. Price/William S. Holm	1902 - 1903
• City Marshal	William Orenshaw	1903
• City Marshal	Roy Burnett	1903 - 1905
• City Marshal	J.C. Brown/John Lockhart	1906 - 1908
• City Marshal	J.H. Mulcahy	1908 - 1910
• City Marshal	Charles Biernoth	1910 - 1911
• City Marshal	J.T. Martin	1911 – 1913

***The position started transitioning to Police Chief role 1913 - 1959***

- Assistant Chief (Fire Marshal) Douglas “Doug” Boddy 1960-1969
- Assistant Chief (Fire Marshal) Sevarin “Sev” Swanson 1969-1978
- Fire Inspector Leigh Gallagher 1977-1978
- Assistant Chief (Fire Marshal) Alan “Al” Judson 1978-1980
- Fire Inspector (FPO) Charles “Charlie” Mackey 1978-1986
- Fire Inspector (FPO) Calvin “Cal” Roberts 1986 -1991?

***The Fire Inspector position was eliminated (1993)***

***Proposed consolidation of fire service districts and creation of Capital City Fire Rescue - 1993***

- Fire Marshal Curtis Jones 1993-1999
- Fire Marshal Randy Waters 2000-2003
- Fire Prevention Officer Rich Etheridge 2003
- Fire Marshal Rich Etheridge 2003-2008
- Fire Prevention Officer Dan Jager 2004-2006
- Deputy Fire Marshal Dan Jager 2006-2008
- Fire Marshal Dan Jager 2008-2024
- Deputy Fire Marshal Sven Pearson 2008-2020
- Fire Marshal Theresa Ross 2024-Present

***The Deputy Fire Marshal position was unfunded in FY 2021***

**Reference**

History of Juneau Police Department. (n.d.). As retrieved from  
<http://www.juneaupolice.com/Historyofjpd.php>