BERRIEN COUNTY
FIRE CHIEF'S ASSOCIATION
BERRIEN COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Call to Order: 0831-0900 **Date:** November 17, 2026

Old minutes: Old minutes emailed out. Motion to accept old minutes by: Chief Mattix.
Seconded by: Chief Benard. Motion passed. None opposed.
Agenda Changes:
Presentation: Plaque presentation to retiring Fire Chief Mike Mattix of North Berrien Fire.
Treasurer's Report: Beginning Balance: $8389.64; Two checks: 1173/$1635.04 for batteries and 1174/$990.00 tune and align; to SMR Communications. Ending balance $5764.60.
Motion to accept treasurers report by: Chief Harper. Seconded by: Chief Mattix.
Motion passed. None opposed.
Bills: Twin City Award and Trophies$120.00 Plaque.
Communications:
General Communications:
New Chief/Visitor: Chief Mattix introduced Frank DeLaTorre as the new Fire Chief of North Berrien Fire.
EMS: (Great Lakes Drone:Medic-1:S.M.C.A.S.:Med Control:) None
Dispatch/911: CAD update yesterday went well. Working on the benchmark tabs. There was a CAD meeting with Julia on setting up map data. Chief 's get your fire hydrant information to Julia. Needs to be in a shape file. Chief Myers sent an email explaining what is needed. If you did not receive the email contact Chief Myers. CAD map issued need to be directed to Tyler. Reminder: you need to be attached to the call to get the tabs across the top. There will be an update to ProQA December 08, 2026.
Communications Committee: None
CAD: Discussed above.
HAZMAT: Chief Weich stated he had a meeting with the county CEO Council last week. There was interest in trying to keep the hazmat team and requested a presentation for early 2027. Chief Weich received interest from about 10 firefighters for the hazmat team. But only two chiefs have agreed. The firefighters need to have fire chief approved MOU to join the team. Need 15-16 members. A letter of support from the Berrien County Firefighters Association was presented. Copy attached. A discussion that at the BCFC meeting several firefighters stated they were not aware of the possibility of losing the hazmat team. A discussion on how we as fire chiefs need to take the information from our meetings and disseminate to our firefighters. Chief Myers reminded all that we have created guidelines and that we need to make sure we get that information we discuss and vote on here to our firefighters. Chief Myers stated that there currently six fire departments being penalized in main for accountability issues.
BCFA: Gerry reminded all that he sent an email to the chiefs requesting to share that email with firefighters that will allow firefighters to be part of an email list he is trying to create to help share information with firefighters in the county. If you have a message you want to get out to the firefighters, send it to Gerry and he will send it out via the list he is creating. December 02. 2026 next meeting at Royalton. It is the Christmas meeting. Gerry stated he was approached by the Berrien County Foundation. They are willing to donate about $6750.00 towards smoke detectors. Gerry stated the BCFA is working to match funds to help with the purchase smoke and CO detectors. More information to come. Boxcards posted in secure section on BCFA website.
Training: East Jorden plastics after action presentation at Berrien Springs on November 30, 2026, at 1830hrs. MUST RSVP to attend. Additional training listed on the website.

Emergency Management: There will be a planned exercise on September 21, 2027, with DC Cook. Practice will take place on August 24, 2027, and September 07, 2027.
Sheriff: Nothing.
MABAS:
Other Comments:
Old Business: None
New Business: Discussed CAD overlays for map. Icons will be set to appear when zoomed in so as to not overload the map.

New call type will go into effect next week. Traffic control. Lincoln has a traffic control vehicle.

Nominations:

President: Chief Doug Myers nominated for President.
No other nominations: Nominations closed.
Vice-President: Chief Jamie Flick nominated for Vice-President.
No other nominations. Nominations closed.
Secretary-Treasurer: Chief Frank DeLaTorre nominated for Secretary-Treasurer.
No other nominations: Nominations closed.

REMINDER: MUST BE PRESENT TO VOTE PER BCFCA BYLAWS: Article 10.2

Next Meeting: December 16, 2026, at the Berrien County conference room.

Adjourn: Motion to adjourn by: Chief Steinke. Seconded by: Chief Mattix. None opposed.
Meeting adjourned: 0900hrs.

BERRIEN COUNTY FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION
ATTENDANCE SHEET

November 18, 2026

NAME	SIGNATURE	DEPARTMENT
Frank DeLaTorre		North Berrien/Niles
Doug MYERS		
Gary Rabelman		S.J.C.I.F.D.
Mike Mattix		WBFR
ZAC BERNARD		RTFD
Caitlin Sampsell		BC 911
EVERETT STEINKE		STFD
Jim Peterson		SJCFD1
Jamie FLICK		NBTFD
David Albers		BCSO
Allen Welch		Chikaming Twp FD
Dave Flick		TCFD
ROB HARPER		BCTFD
Mike Phelps	Virtually	SJDPS
Jim James	Virtually	Bridgman
Norm Carl	Virtually	Fair Claire
Brandon Chiarello	Virtually	Lake/Lincoln
Bill Whitney	Virtually	Watervliet
Ted Nitz	Virtually	Weesaw
Micah Bagget	Virtually	Bridgman

Letter of Concern Regarding the Future of the Berrien County Hazardous Materials Response Team

11/06/2026

Berrien County Fire Chiefs Association,

On behalf of the firefighters serving communities throughout Berrien County, we wish to express our serious concern regarding the potential loss of the Berrien County Hazardous Materials Team effective December 31, 2026.

The majority of firefighters throughout our county are trained and equipped to operate at the Hazardous Materials Awareness and Operations levels. While this training allows personnel to recognize hazardous materials incidents, establish scene safety, and initiate defensive actions, it does not provide the specialized training, equipment, or technical expertise necessary to safely mitigate many complex hazardous materials emergencies. For decades, local fire departments have relied upon the Berrien County Hazardous Materials Team as a critical resource and trusted group of subject matter experts capable of responding to incidents involving chemical releases, transportation accidents, industrial emergencies, unknown substances, and other hazardous conditions.

The potential loss of this team presents significant concerns for firefighter safety, public safety, and emergency response effectiveness throughout Berrien County. The absence of a locally available hazardous materials response team could result in longer response times for specialized resources, requiring assistance from teams located outside the county, such as those responding from the Battle Creek area or other neighboring jurisdictions. These delays could place additional burdens on local Incident Commanders who may be forced to manage increasingly complex situations while awaiting specialized support.

More importantly, delayed access to hazardous materials technicians and specialized equipment may increase the risk of prolonged exposure to dangerous chemicals for firefighters, emergency responders, residents, businesses, and the environment. In many hazardous materials incidents, the first hour of response is critical for containment, evacuation decisions, risk assessment, and mitigation efforts. A significant increase in response times could have far-reaching consequences for public health and safety, environmental protection, and incident stabilization.

Berrien County is home to numerous industrial facilities, transportation corridors, rail lines, commercial businesses, agricultural operations, and residential areas where hazardous materials incidents can and do occur. The availability of a well-trained local Hazardous Materials Team has long been an essential component of the county's emergency response system. The loss of this capability without a clearly communicated replacement plan creates understandable concern among the firefighters who are expected to protect our communities during these incidents.

We understand that the Berrien County Fire Chiefs Association has been working through the logistics of assuming responsibility for the Hazardous Materials Team from the Berrien County Sheriff's Department. However, to date, many firefighters and local departments have not received official communication regarding the status of this transition, the timeline for implementation or the future operational availability of the team.

As firefighters who serve the residents of Berrien County every day, we respectfully request greater transparency and communication regarding the future of this critical emergency response resource. Specifically, we would like to request that a representative who is knowledgeable about the current status of the Hazardous Materials Team transition attend our next Association Meeting on December 2, 2026, at the Royalton Township Fire Station. We believe this would provide an important opportunity for our firefighters to receive accurate information, ask questions, and better understand what hazardous materials response capabilities will be available to Berrien County in 2027 and beyond.

Our intent is not to criticize those involved in this transition effort, but rather to advocate for the continued safety of our firefighters, emergency responders, and the residents we serve. We strongly believe that maintaining a local hazardous materials response capability is essential to protecting our communities and ensuring an effective emergency response system throughout Berrien County.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to public safety. We look forward to receiving an update on the future of the Berrien County Hazardous Materials Team and working together to ensure this critical capability remains available for our county.

Respectfully,

Berrien County Firefighters Association

Berrien County Fire Training Information

Proudly Serving Southwest Michigan

Training Committee meetings are held on the 4th Sunday every month at 14:00 (2:00 P.M.)
at the Berrien Springs/Oronoko Township Fire Department



BC Fire Training Trailer



Career Pathways

- - Berrien County Firefighter Communications Training - -

- - Radio Ettiquette Quick Drill - - Incident Command SOG - ICS Video

The Berrien County Firefighter Training Committee & Benton Harbor Public Safety

Winter 2026 Fire Academy

November 3rd, 2026 to March 12th, 2027

Tuesday & Thursday Nights 1800-2200 and Saturdays 0830 to 1700

at Benton Harbor Firehouse - - - Details

Berrien Springs-Oronoko Fire Department

East Jordan Plastics Fire

Monday November 30th 2026 - - - 6:30 PM to 11:00 PM

at Berrien Springs-Oronoko Fire Department

4411 E Snow Road Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103 - - - Details

Benton Harbor Department of Public Safety
Texas A&M Engineering & FEMA

Wide Area Search

Tuesday to Thursday December 8th-10th, 2026 0800-1600 each day

Corewell Health Upton Auditorium at Corewell Health St. Joseph Michigan

Registration - - - Details

The Berrien County Firefighter Training Committee

2026-2027 Fire Fighter 1 & 2 Course

Starts December 2nd, 2026 thru April 28th, 2027

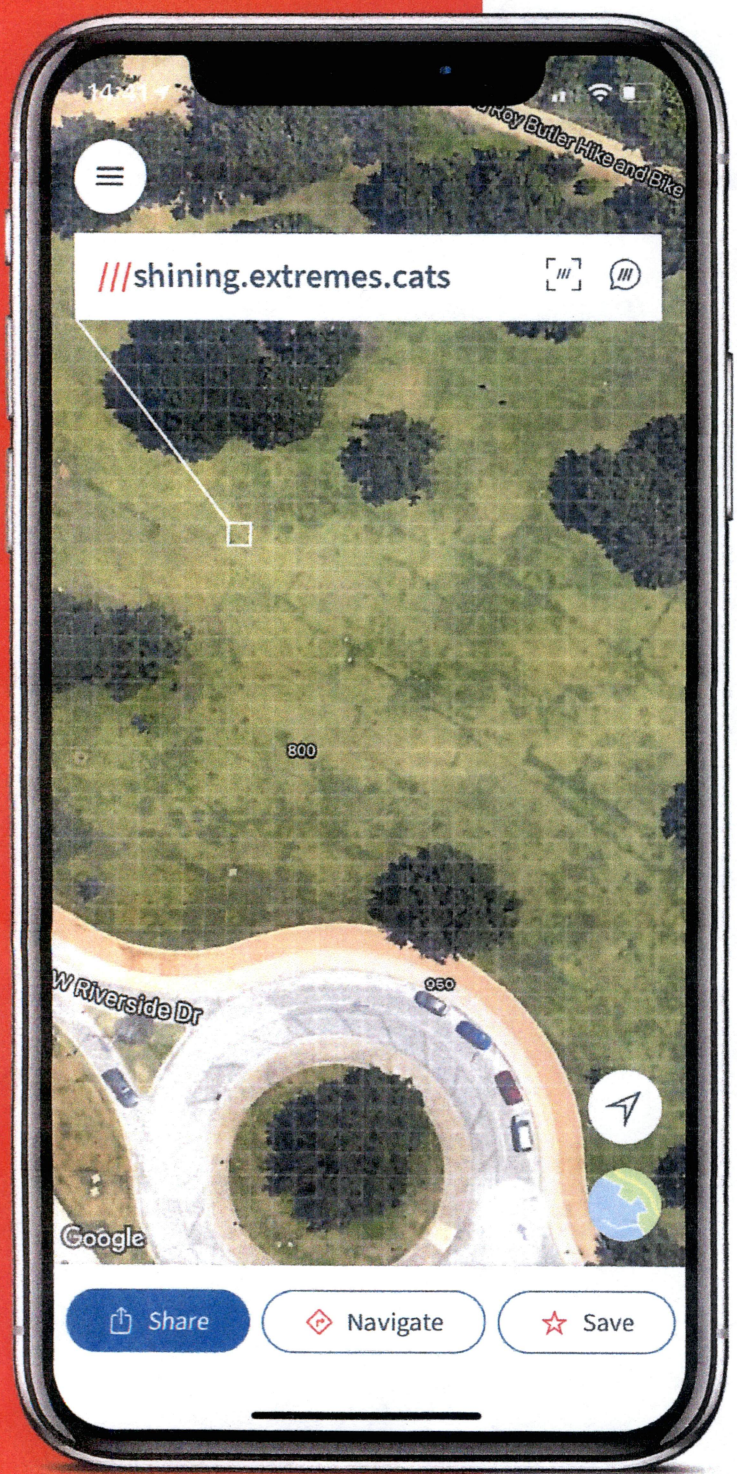
More Info Click Here To register, go to: Smoke

Benton Harbor Department of Public Safety

Street-Smart Firefighting

Tuesdays January 5th, 2027 ro March 2nd, 20207

Online Strategy & Tactics Training Series - Details



Use the free what3words app to tell 911 exactly where help is needed

Call the emergency services and follow these steps:

1. Open the app
Wait a few seconds for the blue dot to settle in one place.

2. Locate yourself
Tap ◁ on iPhone or ⊕ on Android. The 3 words for your location will display at the top of the screen.

3. Give the 3 words
Read the what3words location over the phone.

/// what3words