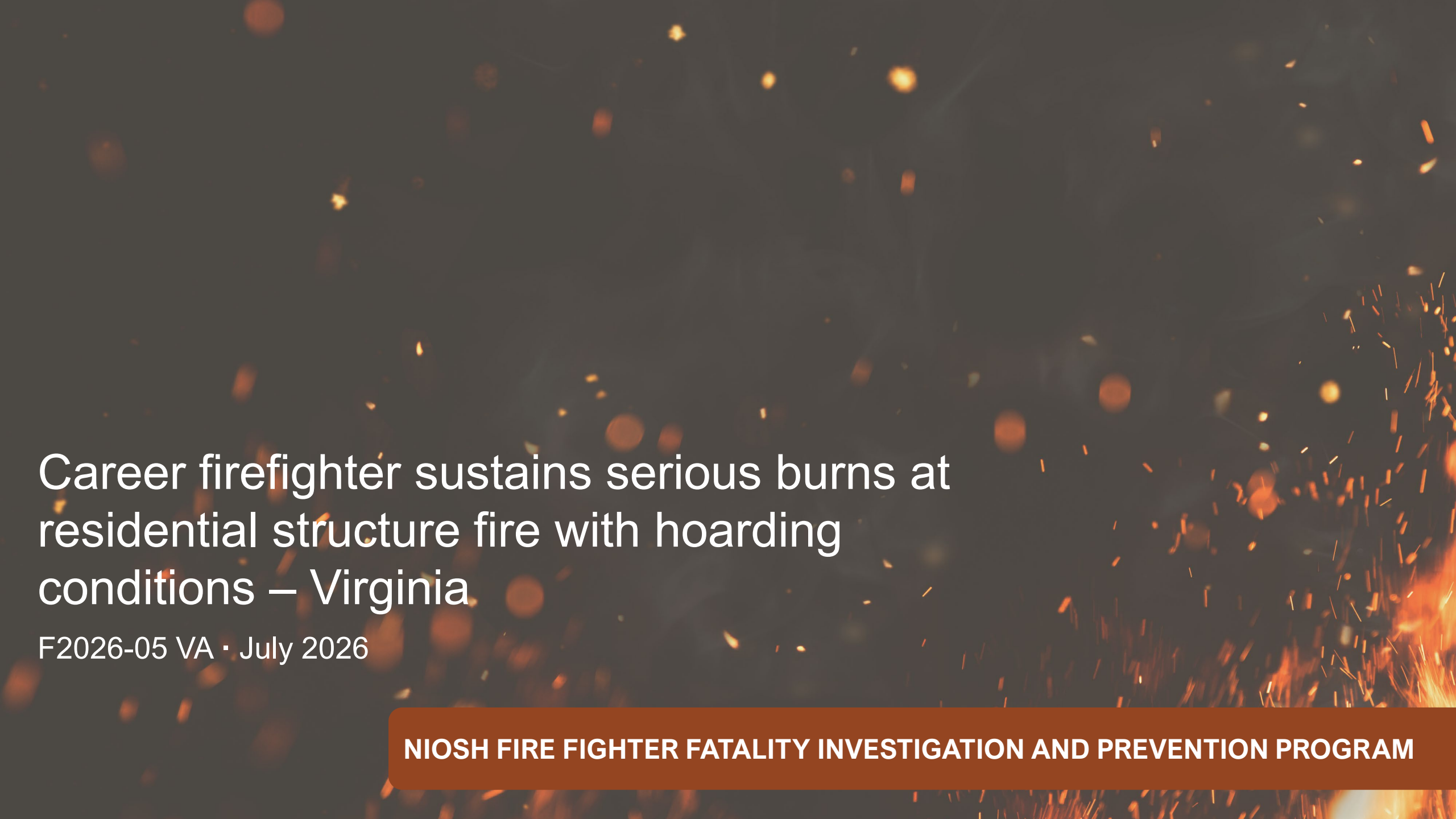


The background of the slide is a dark, atmospheric image of a fire. Numerous bright orange and yellow sparks are captured in mid-air, creating a sense of intense heat and movement. The sparks vary in size and brightness, with some appearing as sharp points of light and others as softer, glowing embers. The overall color palette is dominated by the warm tones of the fire against a dark, almost black background.

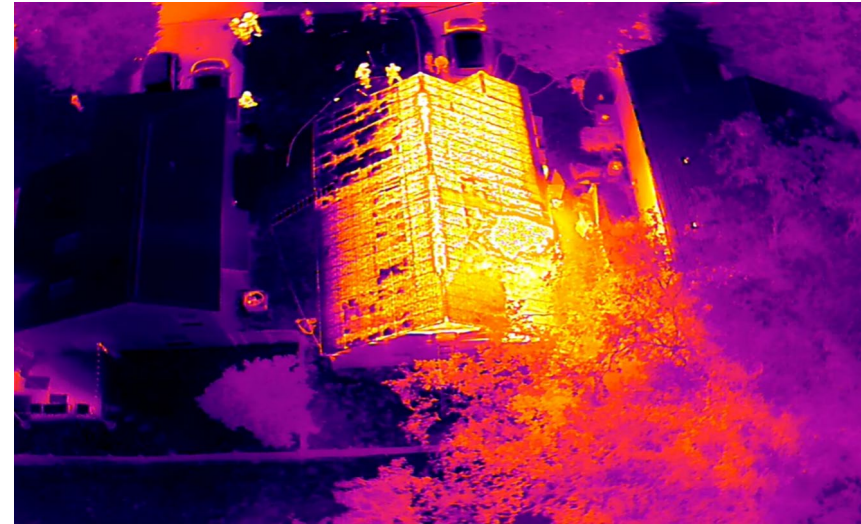
Career firefighter sustains serious burns at residential structure fire with hoarding conditions – Virginia

F2026-05 VA • July 2026

NIOSH FIRE FIGHTER FATALITY INVESTIGATION AND PREVENTION PROGRAM

KEY POINTS

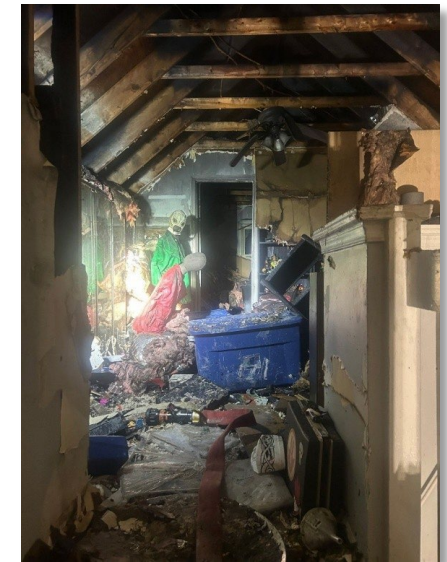
- › On April 18, 2026, one career firefighter was seriously injured while fighting a knee wall fire in an attic with hoarding conditions.
- › Hoarding, or the excessive accumulation of materials, is a significant threat to firefighters conducting interior operations.
- › Firefighters can use exterior fire suppression to safely extinguish knee wall and attic fires when hoarding conditions are present and delay reaching the seat of fire.



Thermal imager reading from Fire Drone, view from above Side Charlie. (Source: Fire department)

SUMMARY

- When the Engine 16 crew arrived in the attic, the officer reported hoarding conditions.
- Although they began to flow water, they could not reach the source fire behind the knee wall.
- Reaching the source fire was complicated by hoarding conditions, which made hoseline navigation difficult.
- The fire rapidly grew, the ceiling collapsed, and Engine 16 officer was burned on his wrists and hands.
- Interior crews exited the attic as a Mayday was called.



Knee wall door (left) and hoarding conditions on second division (right), post-overhaul. (Source: Fire department)

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS & PREVENTION ACTIONS

Contributing factor	Prevention action summary
1. Knee wall fire into attic with hoarding conditions	Consider exterior fire suppression when hoarding conditions are present and delay reaching the seat of fire in a knee wall and attic.

FIRE DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

Category	Information
Department type	Career
Branches	Services, operations, and finance & budget
Jurisdiction	307 square miles and 42 miles of shoreline
Population	450,000 residents with over 14,000,000 visitors annually
Average response	73,000 calls for service, including 700 fires annually
EMS	Advanced life support
Personnel	500
Shifts	Three (A, B, and C)
Shift type	56-hour work week (21-day cycle)
Shift staffing	130 minimum
Leadership	One chief, three deputy chiefs, and six assistant chiefs

FIRE DEPARTMENT ACTIONS TO ECHO



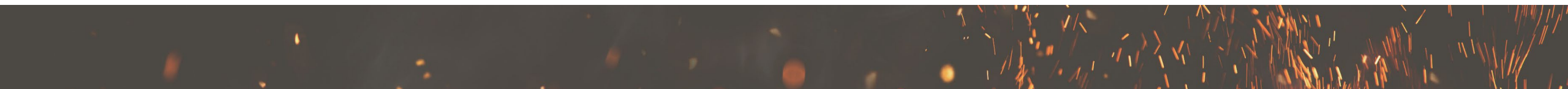
Educate personnel on the use of radio communication processes for sharing critical information, such as conditions and actions.



Train firefighters and fire officers to use Task-Location-Objective assignments for clear communication of expectations.



Ensure personnel cool the environment as they advance to reduce rapid fire progression.



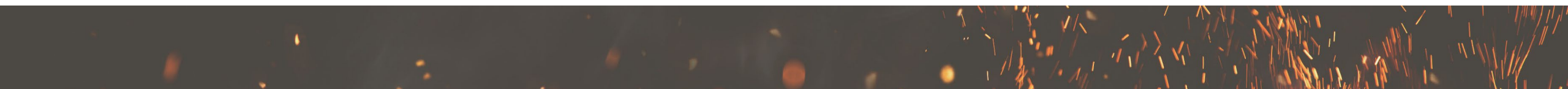
FIRE DEPARTMENT ACTIONS TO ECHO



Develop and promote a psychologically safe fireground through training, leadership practices, and ongoing reinforcement that empowers firefighters to openly communicate concerns, report changing conditions, and contribute to incident decision-making.



Consider assigning or appointing a staff aide to assist incident commanders.



CONSIDER THIS

Community risk reduction (CRR)

CRR is the process of identifying and prioritizing local risks, followed by the integrated and strategic investment of resources to reduce their occurrence and impact [NFPA 1300 2026]. Hoarding is a community risk that could have a detrimental impact on residents, their properties, and firefighters responding to emergencies. CRR efforts to address hoarding may include prevention through fire and life safety education or intervention through referral to community groups such as hoarding task forces [USFA 2023; NFPA 2012].

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