

# From the Office of Florida's Chief Financial Officer

## State Fire Marshal and Insurance Fraud Divisions Gear Up for Summer

As Florida's CFO, I also serve as the State Fire Marshal (SFM) and oversee two sworn law enforcement divisions: SFM's Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations and the Division of Insurance Fraud. This legislative session my top priority was to protect the funding for our law enforcement agencies. Fortunately, the legislature supported this priority — we kept funding for our Personal Injury Protection and Workers' Compensation fraud prosecutors, added a surveillance van to Division of Insurance Fraud, and also tightened up the proviso language for our dedicated prosecutors. Of course, this is all subject to the Governor's veto pen, but overall these divisions were spared some damaging cuts that had been tentatively discussed by the legislature due to Florida's budget deficit.

Now that the session has come to an end, we are busy gearing up for summer and the potential threats of hurricanes and brush fires that can come with the hot summer months. These threats keep the State Fire Marshal's four bureaus — Forensic Services, Fire & Arson Investigations, Fire Prevention, and Fire Standard & Training — especially busy this time of year as they proactively participate in statewide educational programs and prepare for the upcoming storm season.

### Educational Programs – Arson Awareness Week

The State Fire Marshal's Office participates in many educational programs to provide Florida and its visitors with the proper tools and information to deter and report fires. In May, the SFM division participated in Arson Awareness week (an event that takes place every year around the state). The theme of the annual event changes every year, often reflecting a change in crimes. This year's theme, **Arson for Profit** — also referred to as "economic arson" — focused on arson cases where businesses and/or individuals set fires to reduce financial loss, recover initial investments, or dispose of depreciated assets usually for a payout from insurance companies. Arson for Profit is a type of insurance fraud.

Statistics from the Insurance Information Institute show that nationwide, approximately \$900 million in insured property has been destroyed and 295 people have been killed over the past two years as a result of arson-related crimes. In 2007, the SFM's Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations investigated 4,018 fires, of which 2,070 were determined to be arson. The 2008 annual report is expected to be published in the fall of this year.

As Florida's State Fire Marshal, I commend the many men and women who help keep our state safer every day, and who helped put together this year's statewide Arson Awareness Week, which helped everyday Floridians become more aware of the costly crime.

### SFM's State Emergency Operation Center – SFM Responsibilities

As the hurricane season quickly approaches, the State Fire Marshal division has begun to descend into its emergency operations mode, and I know we all will be hearing the words "ESF 4 and ESF 9" a lot more in the coming months. The SFM is the lead agency for these two Emergency Support Functions at the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), and the

#### The goals of ESF 4 and 9 are:

- Verifying requests for resources and information from impacted local governments;
- Ensuring that appropriate assistance is provided;
- Ordering the resource;
- Tracking and documenting the resource;
- Estimating the cost associated with the resource request;
- Ensuring the resource has the necessary logistical support to fulfill the assigned mission; and,
- Ensuring relief is provided for any resource necessary for an extended operation.

Division is responsible for the management and staffing of ESF 4 (Firefighting) and ESF 9 (Search & Rescue) at the SEOC, as mandated by the State of Florida Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan.

On occasion, the SFM also gets called upon for assistance with wildfires. While the primary responsibility for this falls on the Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Division of Forestry, there are times when the SFM is needed for assistance. As well, the SFM is a member of the State Emergency Response Team.

I am proud to say that the Division accomplishes this responsibility through a successful partnership with the Florida Division of Forestry and the Florida Fire Chiefs' Association, both of which supply personnel at the SEOC as part of the staffing plan.

Developed shortly after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the services at the SEOC have been used many times. I would like to commend so many dedicated people for the time and effort they put forth to ensure the SFM division upholds its responsibilities to the SEOC and Floridians across the state.

### Directing the Division – Newly Appointed Julius Halas

I announced at the end of April that the Department of Financial Services would have a new State Fire Marshal Director, and after an extensive interview process, Chief Julius Halas was selected. Chief Halas brings over 35 years of experience to the position, having worked as a firefighter, paramedic, instructor and fire officer, and I am confident that he will be an excellent leader for the SFM division. Prior to joining the SFM team, Halas achieved the position of Fire Chief for the City of Sarasota in 1992 and served as the Fire Chief for the Town of Longboat Key for that past 10 years.

As the SFM Director, Chief Halas will oversee the four bureaus within the Division of SFM as well as the Florida Fire Incident Reporting Section within the Director's Office. He will also be responsible for leading the management and staffing of firefighters and search & rescue teams at the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) in the event of a disaster or state emergency.

As your CFO and State Fire Marshal, I continue to be thankful and proud of the service provided by our officers in the Division of State Fire Marshall and all of you to keep Florida's families safe and secure. ■



Alex Sink

As a statewide elected officer of the Florida Cabinet, Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink oversees the Department of Financial Services, a multi-division state agency responsible for management of state funds and unclaimed property, assisting consumers who request information and help related to financial services, and investigating financial fraud. CFO Sink also serves as the State Fire Marshal.

### The Perks of Growing Old

In a hostage situation, you are likely to be released first.

No one expects you to run — anywhere.

People call at 9 p.m. and ask, "Did I wake you?"

People no longer view you as a hypochondriac.

There is nothing left to learn the hard way.

Things you buy now won't wear out.

You can eat supper at 4 p.m.

You can live without sex but not your glasses.

You get into heated arguments about pension plans.

You no longer think of speed limits as a challenge.

You quit trying to hold your stomach in no matter who walks into the room.

You sing along with elevator music.

Your eyes won't get much worse.

Your investment in health insurance is finally beginning to pay off.

Your joints are more accurate meteorologists than the national weather service.

Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can't remember them either.

Your supply of brain cells is finally down to a manageable size.