



**Virginia Department of Forestry**  
**Accident Investigation Report**  
**Part-Time Firefighter Fatality**

March 30, 2024

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## ACCIDENT INFORMATION

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**ACCIDENT:** Part Time Firefighter Fatality

**LOCATION:** 151 Garland Drive, Gate City, Virginia, Scott County

**DATE:** March 30, 2024

## ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM

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**TEAM LEADER/ LEAD INVESTIGATOR:**

Chad Briggs  
Safety/Training Coordinator, Virginia Department of Forestry

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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On Saturday March 30, 2024, at 15:10 hours, a brush fire at 151 Garland Drive in Gate City was reported to Scott County 911. Fire units from Weber City and Gate City were initially dispatched, along with units from Sullivan County, Tennessee.

Precise details are shown in the map.

**(Refer to Map 1)**

- ◆ Address of fire is shown.
- ◆ Locations where photos were taken are represented.
- ◆ Red line denotes left flank.
- ◆ Orange line shows approximate fire boundary.

## Weather

Weather at the time of the incident was as follows:

**KBDI – 53**

**Wind – 11 MPH gusting to 39 MPH out of the WSW**

**RH – 29%**

**Dewpoint – 39**

**Temp – 73**

**Fire Danger Rating – HIGH**

## Chronology of Events

**16:22** – Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) units were dispatched by Scott County to help with suppression efforts. This included one full-time employee and several DOF part-time firefighters that were a part of the Scott County Crew. One part-time employee arrived on scene and was taken to the “left flank” of the fire area by the landowner where several members of local fire departments were currently engaged in fire control efforts.

**(Refer to Photo 1)**

A Gate City firefighter using a leaf blower met up with the part-time DOF firefighter at the bottom of the hill on the left flank.

**(Refer to Photo 2)**

Both individuals then proceeded up the hill on the left flank. The Gate City firefighter leading with the leaf blower, the DOF part-time firefighter was approximately 10-20 feet behind him with a forestry rake. At one point, the Gate City firefighter looked back and no longer had a visual on the DOF part-time firefighter. The Gate City firefighter walked backed along the left

flank to locate the DOF part-time firefighter and found the firefighter had collapsed on the fireline, (denoted by RED pin flags).

**(Refer to Photos 3 and 4)**

**16:47** – The Gate City firefighter immediately determined that the DOF part-time firefighter was unconscious and radioed *“rescue was needed, have a member down”*.

**16:47** – The Scott County Life Saving Crew was immediately dispatched to the scene of the fire.

**16:50** – A *“Code Blue”* was transmitted.

**16:51** – Units on scene were advised CPR was in progress.

A Gate City Fire Department Polaris UTV was used to transport the firefighter from the left flank of the fire to awaiting Rescue 32. Life saving efforts continued the entire time.

**17:21** – Rescue 32 was transporting the firefighter to Holston Valley Hospital.

**17:34** – Rescue 32 arrived at Holston Valley Hospital.

Though life saving efforts were begun immediately upon finding the firefighter unconscious and continued until the arrival at the hospital, the firefighter did succumb to his medical emergency suffered on the fireline. Personnel on scene that spoke with the DOF part-time firefighter prior the medical emergency stated the firefighter did not report feeling ill or having any other issues. The firefighter was wearing all appropriate wildland PPE to include Nomex shirt and pants, boots, chest harness/radio, fire shelter, hardhat and work gloves. At the time of the incident, the firefighter was carrying and using a standard fire rake.

## FINDINGS

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**Finding 1:**

DOF part-time personnel began fire suppression efforts prior to the arrival of a DOF full-time employee. It is not unusual for this region of the agency to have part-time personnel work without direct supervision of a full-time employee initially on some wildfires. Due to the remoteness and travel time for that part of the state, this is the only way to have DOF representation on scene to engage in suppression efforts in the early stages of a wildfire.

**Finding 2:**

Life saving efforts were begun immediately upon discovering the part-time firefighter had collapsed and was unconscious.

**Finding 3:**

Western Region Dispatch was not aware of which part-time firefighters were on scene and engaged in fire suppression efforts on Garland drive.

**Finding 4:**

DOF part-time firefighter had "passed" his pack test in the fall of 2023 which made him eligible for fire suppression activities in 2024.

## CAUSES

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**Cause 1:**

Medical emergency.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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**Recommendation 1:**

Ensure positive tracking of DOF firefighters responding to incidents. This could be handled by phone, radio or use of FiResponse dispatching application.

Example: Have each part-time firefighter or group of part-time firefighters phone or radio in to their regional dispatch office. This would help ensure all parties are aware of the movements and distribution of resources on fires.

**Recommendation 2:**

When calling on part-time firefighters to work an incident, it is the agency's responsibility to ensure that the individuals are rested and fit to fight fire on that occasion. Simply questioning the individual about the past hours and their work/rest periods should help in determining this.

# PHOTOS AND MAPS

## Map #1



### Part Time Firefighter Fatality March 30, 2024

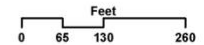
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4/9/2024



Approximate fire perimeter.



While VDOF has attempted to ensure that the features shown on this map are accurate, VDOF did not perform survey work or otherwise verify information provided to it in preparing this map and all features and acreages shown are approximate. VDOF expressly disclaims all warranties of any type concerning this map, and any use of the map assumes you understand and agree with this disclaimer.



**Photo #1**



**Photo #2**





**Photo #3**



**Photo #4**

