



For Immediate Release
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Date: April 1, 2019

State Chiefs to Remember S.C. Fallen Firefighters

The South Carolina State Association of Fire Chiefs, and other members of the state's fire service, will gather Wednesday, April 3, 2019, to remember firefighters who have died while serving their communities.

The 11 a.m. ceremony will be held at the S.C. Fallen Firefighters Memorial, which is housed on the grounds of the S.C. Fire Academy, 141 Monticello Trail in Columbia.

One line of duty death occurred Nov. 7, 2018, in Lancaster County. Assistant Chief Dennis Straight, 59, of the Charlotte Road-Van Wyck Volunteer Fire Department was killed while working at a motor vehicle collision scene. He had been a member of the department for more than 20 years.

Five additional firefighters who died between 1949 and 1973 will also be remembered. These include:

Fire Warden Clarence R. Malphrus, South Carolina Forestry Commission

Date of Death: May 30, 1949

Malphrus was killed in an automobile crash while in the course of his employment.

Firefighters Cecil Griggs, Monroe Wilkes, and Otis Wilkes, South Carolina Forestry Commission

Date of Deaths: December 4, 1970

These three men were killed when a bulldozer overturned on their way to fight a fire. Their flatbed truck transporter slid into a ditch on a timber trail. The weight of the bulldozer pulled the truck over, crushing the men in the cab.

Firefighter Walter Bryant "Buzz" Varella, North Charleston Fire Department

Date of Death: May 30, 1973

After fighting two fires on May 29, Varella succumbed to a heart attack the following evening.

"Every year, we stand alongside each other to pause and honor all of our fallen firefighters," Chief Chris Smith, president of the Fire Chiefs Association, said. "This year, we will remember the service and sacrifice of Chief Dennis Straight and five other firefighters whose names deserve a place on the wall. These were great firefighters who were devoted to helping their neighbors in need."

The S.C. Fallen Firefighters Memorial, which is housed on the grounds of the S.C. Fire Academy, honors the courage, commitment, and sacrifices made by each fallen firefighter.

"There are now 117 firefighter names on the memorial wall who gave their lives in service to us all," South Carolina State Fire Marshal Jonathan Jones said. "We stand committed to always remember these brave fallen heroes. Their legacy lives on in those who continue to protect and ensure the safety of the communities they served."