



Executive summary of the public audit report

ARE FIRE AND RESCUE FORCES ADEQUATELY PREPARED TO FIGHT FIRES?

20 December 2013 No. VA-P-40-9-22



Full audit report in Lithuanian is available on the website
of the National Audit Office: www.vkontrole.lt

ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Abbreviations and definitions:

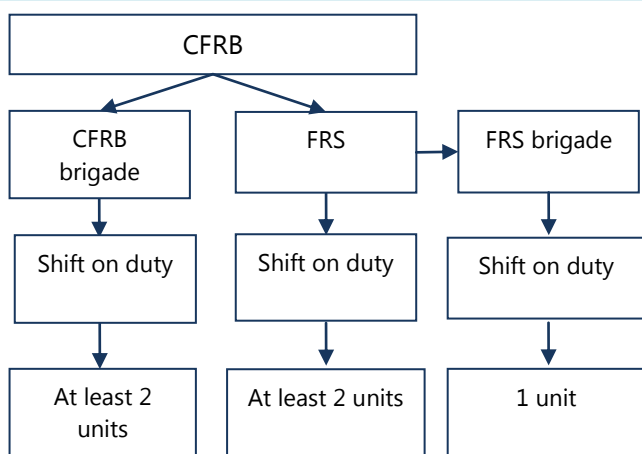
MoI – Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania;

FRD means the Fire and Rescue Department under the MoI;

SFRS means the State Fire and Rescue Service. It consists of the FRD, county fire and rescue boards and specialised bodies;

CFRB means the County Fire and Rescue Board. It consists of CFRB brigades and fire and rescue services (FRS). The detailed structure is provided in the scheme below (Figure 1).

Figure 1. CFRB structure



MFS means a municipal fire service, regardless the name, legal form, etc. of the structural subdivisions of the municipal fire forces;

ERC means the Emergency Response Centre;

FB means fire brigade.

For the purposes of this report, the SFRS and MFS are referred to as **fire and rescue forces**.

The SFRS is also referred to as the **state fire and rescue forces** and the MFS – as municipal fire forces.

The personnel working at the SFRS are firefighters-rescuers and those at the MFS are firefighters. In the report they are referred to as **firefighters** or fire personnel.

The terms “**statutory public servant**” and “**official**” shall have the same meaning in the report.

The road tanker is referred to as the “**fire truck**”.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of fires that broke out in Lithuania over the period 2010-2012 totalled 35,751, with 518 people killed. Almost half of the fires occurred in small towns and rural areas, which are inhabited by one third of the Lithuanian population. The number of human losses in these fires is nearly twice higher than in cities.

The responsibility for fire prevention and fighting, rescuing lives and property in case of fire, i.e. organisation of fire safety all over Lithuania, has been assigned to the Ministry of the Interior.

The Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior has been charged with organising firefighting, rescuing lives and property, fire mitigation work, heading the said work, and organising the state fire supervision.

The fire and rescue forces consist of the State Fire and Rescue Service, municipal fire services, departmental fire forces, and volunteer firefighting formations. The annual amount allocated from the state budget for maintaining these forces totals more than LTL 200 million. The forces must be always prepared to extinguish fires quickly, safely and efficiently and to carry out rescue operations of people and property. The Law on Fire Safety which entered into force in 2003 provided for that when participating in the shaping of and when implementing state policy in the field of fire safety, the Government shall set the standards for ensuring fire safety. The Government approved the Fire Safety Standard in 2013, i.e. ten years after the adoption of the said law. This Standard sets forth the criteria for the time period during which fire and rescue forces are supposed to respond to requests for help, to leave and to arrive to the site of the incident, as well as the organisational structure, the principle for determining the number of the forces required to respond to requests for help and to handle the incident, and the criteria for determining the amount of the firefighting and rescue equipment needed by the forces.

The audit objective was to assess whether the state and municipal fire and rescue forces are properly prepared to extinguish fires by answering the following questions:

- Are the functions of the fire and rescue forces clearly defined?
- Are there adequate human resources of the fire and rescue forces in place?
- Are the fire and rescue forces provided with firefighting and rescue equipment and all necessary devices;
- Are records of the data on fires and rescue operations properly kept?
- Is the preparedness of the fire and rescue forces subject to sufficient control?
- Is fire prevention properly organised?

The audit did not aim at evaluating whether the fire safety function is sufficiently funded; instead, the objective was to see whether there are internal resources to organise the performance of this function more efficiently.

The audit was conducted at the Ministry of the Interior, the Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior. Information was collected from the institutions subordinate to the Department and from municipalities.

The audit covered the period 2010–2012 and until June 2013. In some case, data from other periods was also used.

The public audit conclusions and recommendations were drawn upon the assessment of the audit findings.

The audit found that the Ministry of the Interior and the Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior had failed to ensure that all fire and rescue forces are properly prepared to fight fires and to rescue lives and property.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The annual amount allocated from the state budget to municipalities for performing the state fire safety function (the function assigned by the state to municipalities) totals about LTL 50 million. However, the works to be carried out when performing this function have not been explicitly established. The Ministry of the Interior has not set any requirements on how municipalities should organise the performance of the state fire safety function and has not specified what basic operations of rescuing lives and property delegated to municipal fire services under the Law on Fire Safety should be carried out by the said services. It is therefore not possible to properly justify the need for funds allocated from the state budget for this function and to organise the provision of necessary devices and equipment to municipal fire services.

2. The Ministry of the Interior and the Fire and Rescue Department have failed to take all necessary steps to form adequate human resources for carrying out the fire safety function:

2.1. A number (about 20 per cent) of firefighter positions are vacant. Also, the need for firefighters has been insufficiently assessed, so it is often the case that fire brigades of incomplete composition are on shift duty and go to fires and thus are not always able to perform complete operations of firefighting and rescuing lives and property

2.2. There is untapped potential of volunteer firefighters, because almost a decade has passed since the Law on Fire Safety came into force but the Ministry of the Interior has still not drafted necessary secondary legislation for the establishment and operation of volunteer firefighting units provided for in the said Law.

2.3. Legislation does not contain any requirements for the position of the firefighter at the municipal fire service, so 15 per cent of firefighters of municipal fire services do not have the firefighter's qualification, since they have not completed the training under the Fire and Rescue Training Programme. The suitability of firefighters for the job position held is not evaluated, and continuous improvement of their physical and professional skills is not ensured. Therefore, it is not always that they provide qualified help in case of fire.

3. The provision of personal protective equipment and communication devices for firefighters has been organised improperly, which has resulted in failure to ensure efficient use of state budget funds and provision of all firefighters with necessary devices:

3.1. Not all personal protective equipment (special services uniforms) is purchased by the State Fire and Rescue Service in a centralised manner. Decentralised procurement requires more human resources and does not ensure uniform supply to all firefighters. There is no procedure for establishing and meeting the demand of personal protective equipment, which has resulted in failure to ensure the supply of personal protective equipment to those firefighters whose equipment is no longer suitable for use.

3.2. The provision of personal protective equipment to municipal firefighters was carried out by each municipal fire service. Some municipal firefighters were using protective equipment that is not designed to perform dangerous work. No institutions have examined whether the special uniforms acquired by the municipal fire services do protect firefighters from the risks that could threaten their health and safety.

3.3. Firefighters of municipal fire services are usually the first forces to arrive in case of fire in small towns and rural areas. However, they are not always able to start rescue operations pursuant to safety at work requirements, because less than one-fifth of firefighters of the municipal fire services have breathing apparatus.

3.4. All fire and rescue forces were supposed to be equipped with digital radio communication devices under the Programme for the Development of the Infrastructure of Single Emergency Call Number 112 Services approved by the Government in 2008; however, only the State Fire and Rescue Service has been provided with these devices. So far, the majority (65 per cent) of the municipal fire services have not been equipped with digital radio communication devices, thus failing to ensure proper management of the fire and rescue forces.

4. The fire and rescue forces have not been properly provided with necessary firefighting and rescue equipment, which directly determines their work success – rescued lives, saved property and natural resources. 63.9 per cent of the fire trucks of the State Fire and Rescue Service and 97 per cent of the trucks of the municipal fire services are older than 10 years, meanwhile the structural units of the State Fire and Rescue Service in 21 municipalities do not have fire truck ladders or fire truck platforms.

5. The control of the preparedness of the fire and rescue forces to take firefighting actions does not encompass the assessment of all factors (such as the compliance of the response time duration, provision of fire and rescue equipment, composition of shifts on duty with the established requirements) affecting the status of the preparedness of the municipal and state fire and rescue forces. The elimination of shortcomings of the preparedness of the municipal fire forces identified during assessments have not been controlled either. As a result, there is no exact information about the preparedness of the forces to fight fires on the entire territory of Lithuania.

6. The statistics on fires and rescue operations and the resources used published by the Fire and Rescue Department is insufficiently informative and not always accurate, so the Ministry of the Interior is not able to properly assess the performance of the state and municipal fire and rescue forces and to provide for measures for improving the organisation of fire safety throughout the territory of the Republic of Lithuania.

7. Fire prevention activities are not always properly organised resulting in failure to use all opportunities to ensure that risks of fires, loss of lives and destruction of property in case of fire throughout the territory of the Republic of Lithuania are lower and properly managed:

7.1. Legislation does not provide for what fire prevention programmes (inter-institutional, institutional, or branch) should be developed and who should develop these programmes. There is no strategic document (programme) which would provide for fire prevention priorities, measures, and institutions implementing these measures. Fire prevention measures in 14 per cent of all municipalities are implemented according to fire prevention programmes developed by municipal institutions. In other municipalities, however, there is a lack of cooperation between municipalities and state institutions in preventive activities.

7.2. Technical fire inspections carried out pursuant to the procedure laid down by the Director of the Fire and Rescue Department does not involve the inspection of objects which, as demonstrated by statistical data, most often catch fire where people are killed, i.e. residential buildings. Other prevention measures for managing and reducing fire risks are not sufficient either. Only a small number of the staff of companies administering apartment buildings have been trained under the Fire and civil protection training programme for heads of associations of apartment buildings and administrators of houses.

7.3. Technical fire inspection plans for 2011–2012 were not implemented, so the compliance with legislative fire safety requirements was not found in a number of objects (approximately 3600). The progress of the implementation of the officials' instructions was usually checked during the next inspection, which did not encourage enterprises, institutions and organisations to eliminate the shortcomings identified during inspections more promptly. Technical fire inspection results have not been publicly available, which prevents people from exercising their right to obtain information about the fire condition of public buildings.

7.4. Not all teachers assigned with the task of providing basic fire safety knowledge have completed an introductory civil protection training course, which is mandatory under the Civil Protection Training Procedure approved by the Government, meanwhile the Fire and Rescue Department has not developed continuing civil protection training programmes, so this may have a negative impact on developing students' awareness of fire safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Ministry of the Interior

1. In order to ensure that the Ministry of the Interior has at its disposal reliable and informative statistics on fires and rescue operations which would allow proper assessment of the performance of the state and municipal fire and rescue forces and to improve the organisation of the performance of the fire safety function, the Ministry should determine what statistical data should be collected, organised and published by the Fire and Rescue Department.

2. In order to ensure the efficient use of state budget funds allocated for performing the fire safety function, the Ministry should:

2.1. revise the investment priorities in all management areas assigned to the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania so that more funds, if possible, are allocated for upgrading the fleet of fire trucks.

3. In order to organise the performance of the state fire safety function assigned to municipalities in a more efficient manner, the Ministry should:

3.1. establish requirements for persons wishing to become firefighters at the municipal fire services, for the assessment of their suitability to occupy this position, and for continuous improvement of firefighters' physical preparedness and professional skills;

3.2. make decisions on the provision of municipal firefighters with personal protective equipment and digital radio communication devices.

4. In order to better manage and reduce the risk of fires, loss of lives and destruction of property in case of fire at the national level, the Ministry should set fire prevention priorities, measures, and implementing bodies.

To the Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior

1. In order to organise the performance of the functions assigned to the State Fire and Rescue Service more efficiently, the Department should:

1.1. determine the need for firefighters pursuant to the Fire Safety Standard approved by the Government in 2013;

1.2. provide for measures to reduce the number of vacant positions of firefighters;

1.3. ensure that all factors affecting the status of the state and municipal fire and rescue forces are assessed as part of the implementation of the preparedness of the fire and rescue forces to put out fires;

1.4. establish a procedure for determining and meeting the demand for personal protective equipment (special service uniform) for firefighters ensuring that priority is given to the provision of personal protective equipment to those firefighters whose equipment is no longer suitable for use.

2. In order to ensure more efficient use of human resources and state budget funds allocated to the State Fire and Rescue Service, the Department should centralise the procurement of personal protective equipment for firefighters.

3. In order to prevent the occurrence and spread of fires and to reduce their possible consequences, the Department should:

3.1. amend the organisation of fire prevention so as to ensure:

- planning of more preventive measures in objects which, as demonstrated by statistical data, most often catch fire where people are killed;
- publishing the results of fire inspections in public buildings;
- implementing annual technical fire inspection plans.

3.2. approve a continuing civil protection training programme for teachers;

3.3. introduce measures to encourage the implementation of preventive measures in apartment buildings.

4. In order to ensure that all statistics on fires and rescue operations published by the Fire and Rescue Department is accurate and correct, the Department should provide for controls to ensure the reliability of the data provided thereto.

Considering the fact that a Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on Fire Safety has been drafted¹ and aims to regulate the framework for voluntary firefighting activities in the

¹ Draft Law on Amending and Supplementing Articles 1, 2, 7, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18 of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Fire Safety and supplementing it with new Chapter 6 was registered on 20 July 2012 in the system of draft laws of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, No.

Republic of Lithuania and social guarantees of volunteer firefighters, no recommendations for establishing volunteer firefighters units have been issued in this report.