



# Chesterfield County, Virginia

## Fire & EMS

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Edward L. Senter, Jr.  
Chief of Department

March 12, 2025

Mr. Billy Hux, State Fire Marshal  
Commonwealth of Virginia  
1005 Technology Park Drive  
Glen Allen, VA 23059

Dear Billy:

The purpose of this letter is to alert you to fire and life safety concerns at the Bon Air Juvenile Correction Center (BAJCC) located at 1900 Chatsworth Avenue, North Chesterfield, Virginia, 23235.

I am requesting that your office, as the authority having jurisdiction for enforcement of the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) at state facilities, review the following issues and take any enforcement action(s) that may be necessary and/or provide “best practice” recommendations for the prevention of fires and protection of life at the BAJCC:

1. The number of incidents annually at BAJCC involving the response of Chesterfield Fire & EMS (CFEMS) has more than doubled from FY-2023 to the current year-to-date (FY-2025). Among the most concerning trends are increases in malicious sprinkler activations (+18 incidents), intentionally set fires (+13 incidents), and malicious fire alarm activations (+4 incidents). The attached PDF provides a summary of the 134 incidents involving CFEMS responses over the past five fiscal years plus the current fiscal year-to-date, as well as excerpts of National Fire Incident Reporting System (NIFRS) commentaries from reports filed by CFEMS company officers regarding malicious incidents.
2. When malicious fires occur, there is continued uncertainty as to which agency is responsible for conducting fire investigations at state facilities such as BAJCC. Are such investigations the responsibility of DJJ staff or another state agency with investigators having the expertise to determine origin and cause such as the Virginia State Police (VSP)?
3. In a media statement dated March 7, 2025 (attached), the DJJ acknowledged two fires at the facility on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> that were intentionally set by residents using the batteries and wires from facility issued headsets that are also used for therapeutic purposes by some residents. The media statement was accompanied by a short video clip that showed how easy it is to turn a battery and wire from such a device into a hot ignition source, and said video was then aired publicly by several local media outlets. The media statement noted that fire-starting is a routine occurrence at the facility given the very challenging population housed therein with high rehabilitative needs, with a small number of residents being repeat offenders. Moreover, the DJJ stressed that in the best interest of the youth under their care, the department refuses to deny residents access to the equipment that is often used to set fires or to separate those residents at risk of setting fires from the general population.

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While the threat of actual fire spread within the facility may be low, the toxic smoke from burning or smoldering synthetic materials presents both acute physical risks and chronic health concerns to residents and staff. As a fire chief with 47 years of fire service experience, I question the logic of accepting such risks as a matter of doing business and allowing known juvenile fire setters to have access to ignition sources and combustibles, particularly in such a confined environment.

4. The increasing number of incidents at BAJCC is more than an inconvenience to CFEMS. They place firefighters and Chesterfield residents at increased risk, unnecessarily. As you are aware of the protocols of CFEMS and other fire departments in Virginia that protect large populations, notification by a monitoring company of a fire alarm activation results in only one or two fire units being dispatched. Conversely, a 911-call reporting a fire in a corrections facility – not unlike a reported fire at another high-risk facility such as a hospital where occupants are unable to exit on their own - requires a more robust response with multiple fire units. Both scenarios necessitate rapid response using red lights and sirens, presenting an increased risk for motor vehicle accidents along the response route(s). Moreover, the fire stations that often respond to BAJCC are responsible for covering some of the busiest areas for fire and EMS incidents in Chesterfield County. When these firefighters are responding to BAJCC for preventable incidents, they are unavailable to respond to more serious incidents in their first due areas. This must stop.

The pattern of increasing malicious fires and damage to fire detection and suppression systems at BAJCC is likely a symptom of much deeper issues at the facility that must be addressed by DJJS. Accordingly, Chesterfield County administration, public safety, and human services leaders are working to bring forward a broader range of concerns to Chesterfield's General Assembly Delegation, the Governor, and Secretary of Public Safety.

If you have any questions or need additional details regarding the fire and life safety concerns at BAJCC, please feel free to contact me at (804) 332-2163 or email at [senterl@chesterfield.gov](mailto:senterl@chesterfield.gov). Your assistance is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Edward L. Senter, Jr., Chief  
Chesterfield County Fire & EMS

Attachments

Cc: Chesterfield Delegation, Virginia General Assembly  
Virginia Secretary of Public Safety and associated directors/agency heads  
Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors  
Dr. Joseph P. Casey, PhD, Chesterfield County Administrator  
Dr. James Worsley, PhD, Chesterfield Deputy County Administrator – Human Services  
Mr. Clay Bowles, Chesterfield Deputy County Administrator – Community Operations  
Sheriff Karl Leonard, Chesterfield County Sheriff's Office  
Colonel Frank Carpenter, Chief, Chesterfield County Police Department  
Ms. Marilyn Brown, Director, Chesterfield County Juvenile Detention Center  
Ms. Natalie Spillman, Director, Chesterfield County Intergovernmental Relations