



**CARBONDALE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION**

**LACKAWANNA COUNTY**

**COMPLIANCE AUDIT REPORT**

**FOR THE PERIOD**

**JANUARY 1, 2007 TO DECEMBER 31, 2008**



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BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, Act of April 9, 1929, (P.L. 343, No. 176), and the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act, Act of June 11, 1968, (P.L. 149, No. 84), as amended, 53 P.S. § 8501 et seq. (commonly referred to as Act 84), the Department of the Auditor General's duty is to audit the accounts and records of every volunteer firefighters' relief association to determine that funds received under the Foreign Fire Insurance Tax Distribution Law, Act of December 18, 1984, (P.L. 1005, No. 205), as amended 53 P.S. § 895.701 et seq. (commonly referred to as Act 205), are properly expended.

The Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association is a charitable organization that was formed primarily to afford financial protection to volunteer firefighters and to encourage individuals to participate in volunteer fire service.

Act 84 governs the overall operation of the volunteer firefighters' relief association. The relief association's bylaws define the specific operational procedures by which the volunteer firefighters' relief association conducts business. To fulfill its primary purpose, Act 84 authorizes specific types of expenditures and prescribes appropriate volunteer firefighters' relief association investment options. Within the parameters established by Act 84, it is the responsibility of the volunteer firefighters' relief association to choose investments in a proper and prudent manner.

Volunteer firefighters' relief associations receive public tax monies, and the association officers therefore have a responsibility to the public to conduct the association's financial affairs in a businesslike manner and to maintain sufficient financial records to support the propriety of all association transactions. Volunteer firefighters' relief association officers are also responsible for ensuring that the association operates in accordance with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws and administrative procedures.

Act 205 sets forth the computation of the Foreign Fire Insurance Tax Distribution paid to each applicable municipality throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The amount of the distribution is based upon the population of each municipality and the market value of real estate within the municipality. Upon receipt of this distribution, the municipality must allocate the funds to the volunteer firefighters' relief association of the fire service organization or fire service organizations, which is or are recognized as providing the service to the municipality. The Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association was allocated state aid from the following municipality:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
City of Carbondale	Lackawanna	\$27,299	\$27,981

BACKGROUND (Continued)

The volunteer firefighters' relief association and the affiliated fire service organizations are separate, legal entities. The Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association is affiliated with the following fire service organizations:

Columbia Hose Company No. 5  
Cottage Hose Company No. 2  
Mitchell Hose Company No. 1  
West Side Fire Company No. 7

Mr. James Muir, President  
CARBONDALE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS'  
RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
Lackawanna County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association pursuant to authority derived from Article VIII, Section 10 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Section 403 of The Fiscal Code, Act of April 9, 1929, (P.L. 343, No. 176), and mandated by the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act, Act of June 11, 1968, (P.L. 149, No. 84), as amended, 53 P.S. § 8501 et seq. (commonly referred to as Act 84), for the period January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2008.

We conducted this compliance audit in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* applicable to performance audits, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our audit results and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our audit results and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

The objectives of the audit were:

1. To determine if the volunteer firefighters' relief association took appropriate corrective action to address the findings contained in our prior audit report; and
2. To determine if the volunteer firefighters' relief association received and expended state aid and accumulated relief funds in compliance with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws and administrative procedures.

Our audit was limited to the areas related to the objectives identified above.

Volunteer firefighters' relief association officers are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association's administration of state aid and accumulated funds complies with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws and administrative procedures including the safeguarding of assets. In conducting our audit, we obtained an understanding of the volunteer

firefighters' relief association's internal controls as they relate to the association's compliance with those requirements and that we considered to be significant within the context of the audit objectives, and assessed whether those significant controls were properly designed and implemented. Our audit procedures also included tests of documentary evidence supporting the Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association's recorded financial transactions, tests of the physical existence of inventories, interviews of selected officials and direct confirmation of the Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association's cash, investments, and certain other assets and liabilities as of December 31, 2008, with the custodians of the funds, debtors, creditors, and financial institutions to the extent necessary to satisfy the audit objectives. Additionally, we performed procedures to provide a reasonable assurance of detecting instances of violations of legal and regulatory requirements or violations of provisions of contracts that are significant within the context of the audit objectives.

The results of our audit for the period January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2008, found, in all significant respects, the Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association received and expended funds in compliance with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws and administrative procedures, except as noted in the following findings discussed later in this report. The results of our tests indicated the Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association expended funds as presented in the accompanying information and as of December 31, 2008, had a cash balance of \$151,669 and an investment balance with a fair value of \$299,576.

Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Failure to Maintain a Complete and Accurate Equipment Roster

Finding No. 2 – Insufficient Officer's Bond Coverage

However, we also noted another matter that has been included in the following observation discussed later in this report.

Observation – Diversification of Investments

The contents of this report were discussed with the management of the Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association and, where appropriate, their responses have been included in the report.

March 26, 2009

JACK WAGNER  
Auditor General



CARBONDALE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

COMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

The Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association has complied with the following prior audit finding and recommendation:

- Untimely Deposit of State Aid

By adopting internal control procedures to ensure the timely deposit of all state aid received during the current audit period.

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

The Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association has not complied with a prior audit finding. This issue is further discussed in the following findings noted in the Findings and Recommendations section of this report:

- Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Failure to Maintain a Complete and Accurate Equipment Roster

We are concerned with the volunteer firefighters' relief association's failure to correct the previously reported audit finding. The association management should strive to implement the recommendations and corrective actions noted in this audit report.

CARBONDALE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Failure to Maintain a Complete and Accurate Equipment Roster

Condition: As cited in the prior three audit reports, the relief association officials did not maintain a complete and accurate roster of equipment owned by the relief association. Specifically, the roster provided in the current audit period did not contain dates of purchase, unit costs, or names of suppliers to accurately identify the equipment owned. As such, it was impossible to determine if all items purchased during the audit period had been accurately recorded. In addition, there was no indication that an annual inventory of the equipment was performed to account for the relief association's fixed assets.

Criteria: The relief association should establish adequate internal control procedures to ensure the maintenance of a cumulative equipment roster of all items purchased by the relief association in order to provide an effective accounting control over the relief association's fixed assets. A cumulative roster of all relief association equipment should include the following:

- Type of equipment purchased.
- Date of purchase.
- Unit cost.
- Name of supplier.
- Serial number, if applicable.
- Current location of item.
- Final disposition of sold or damaged equipment.
- Notation of the annual inventory.

Cause: While notified of this condition in the prior three audit reports, relief association officials neglected to establish adequate internal control procedures over fixed assets to include the maintenance of a cumulative equipment roster and the performance of an annual equipment inventory.

Effect: The failure to properly record equipment purchases in a detailed equipment roster prevents officials from effectively monitoring the relief association's equipment purchases. In addition, the failure to maintain a detailed equipment roster and perform an annual equipment inventory prevents adequate accountability and safeguarding of relief association assets.

Recommendation: We again recommend the relief association officials maintain a cumulative roster of all relief association owned equipment. Furthermore, the relief association should ensure it performs an annual inventory of all operable equipment and that the inventory be sufficiently documented. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

CARBONDALE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – (Continued)

Management's Response: Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and indicated they will take action to comply with the recommendation.

CARBONDALE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 2 – Insufficient Officer's Bond Coverage

Condition: The relief association did not maintain a bond in a sufficient amount to cover the authorized disbursing officer. The relief association's bond coverage was \$125,000; however, as of December 31, 2008, the cash assets totaled \$151,669.

Criteria: Act 84 at 53 P.S. § 8505(c) states, in part, that:

. . . the disbursing officer, whether designated treasurer, comptroller, financial secretary, or otherwise, shall be bonded by corporate surety for the faithful performance of his duties. The amount of such bond shall be at least as great as the maximum cash balance in current funds of the association at any time during the fiscal year, and the premium on such bond shall be a proper charge against the funds of the association.

Cause: Relief association officials failed to monitor the cash balance to ensure the officer's bond coverage was in compliance with Act 84 provisions.

Effect: As a result of the disbursing officer of the relief association being insufficiently bonded, the relief association's cash assets were not adequately safeguarded.

Recommendation: We recommend the relief association ensure that a faithful performance bond adequately covers the disbursing officer as required by Act 84. This requirement may be accomplished by increasing the officer's bond coverage to an amount greater than the expected maximum balance of cash assets, or by decreasing the cash assets to an amount anticipated to remain below the coverage amount. Relief association officials should monitor the cash balance to ensure that unexpected events affecting current funds do not again result in an insufficient officer's bond coverage. For further guidance, please refer to the Auditor General's publication, MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATIONS.

Management's Response: Relief association management agreed with the finding as presented at the audit exit conference and indicated they will take action to comply with the recommendation.

CARBONDALE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
OBSERVATION

Observation – Diversification of Investments

Within the parameters established by the Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Act<sup>1</sup>, it is the responsibility of the volunteer firefighters' relief association to invest its funds in a proper and prudent manner.

As these investments typically provide an income stream to the relief association for annual operations, it is generally sensible not to invest all VFRA money in one asset or asset class that places the principal at risk. In fact, state law requires VFRA's to "reasonably diversify investments, unless the [VFRA] reasonably determines that it is in the interest of the beneficiaries not to diversify..."<sup>2</sup>.

By diversifying investments, the VFRA can help preserve capital, increase liquidity and decrease volatility. Diversification means spreading one's money among different investments; asset allocation diversifies total investments among different investment classes, such as stocks, bonds, government securities, and cash equivalents.

As of December 31, 2008, the VFRA had \$299,576 (fair value) or 66% of the VFRA's cash and investments in mutual funds.

The VFRA management should periodically review its specific cash needs and investment goals and ensure that its investments are allocated and diversified to prudently meet those needs and goals.

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<sup>1</sup> 53 P.S. § 8506(c)(1997). This provision incorporates the "prudent investor rule" of the Probate, Estates, and Fiduciaries Code, 20 Pa. C.S.A. §7201 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> 20 Pa. C.S.A. § 7204(a) (Supp. 2005).

CARBONDALE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
 ACCOMPANYING EXPENDITURE INFORMATION  
 FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY 1, 2007 TO DECEMBER 31, 2008

Act 84 at 53 P.S. § 8502(1) states, in part, that:

A volunteer firefighters' relief association is an organization formed primarily for the purpose of affording financial protection to volunteer firefighters against the consequences of misfortune suffered as a result of their participation in the fire service. Such an association may also serve other purposes, . . . provided only that adequate provisions be first made to serve its primary purpose. . . .

Act 84 at 53 P.S. § 8506, authorizes the investment of relief association funds and outlines the types of benefits and services that can be provided with volunteer firefighters' relief association funds. All expenditures must be properly authorized as prescribed in the volunteer firefighters' relief association bylaws and approved at an association meeting.

USES OF FUNDS:

Benefit Services:	
Insurance premiums	\$ 4,466
Death benefits	22,000
Total Benefit Services	\$ 26,466
Fire Services:	
Equipment purchased	\$ 16,555
Equipment maintenance	5,697
Training expenses	2,383
Total Fire Services	\$ 24,635
Administrative Services:	
Officer compensation	\$ 1,200
Other administrative expenses	903
Total Administrative Services	\$ 2,103

CARBONDALE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Edward G. Rendell  
Governor  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Carbondale Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Governing Body:

Mr. James Muir, President

Mr. William Henry, Vice President

Mr. Nicholas Dwonczyk, Secretary

Mr. Kevin Colgan, Treasurer

Reports were also distributed to each municipality, which allocated foreign fire insurance tax monies to this relief association.

Ms. Michelle M. Bannon, City Clerk  
City of Carbondale

This report is a matter of public record. Copies of this report may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 318 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120. If you have any questions regarding this report or any other matter, you may contact the Department of the Auditor General by accessing our website at [www.auditorgen.state.pa.us](http://www.auditorgen.state.pa.us).