



**MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION**

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY**

**COMPLIANCE AUDIT REPORT**

**FOR THE PERIOD**

**JANUARY 1, 2004 TO DECEMBER 31, 2006**



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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 Marion Heights 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 Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association was allocated state aid from the following municipality:

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>
Marion Heights Borough	Northumberland	\$3,063	\$3,390	\$3,416

BACKGROUND (Continued)

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

Marion Heights Hose Company

Mr. Ronald Coroniti, President  
MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS'  
RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
Northumberland County

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Marion Heights 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, 2004 to December 31, 2006. The audit was conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* applicable to performance audits, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

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 Marion Heights 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 applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws and administrative procedures significant within the context of the audit objectives. We also tested transactions, confirmed the Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association's cash balance as of December 31, 2006, with the custodian of the funds, and interviewed selected officials to the extent necessary to satisfy the audit objectives.

The results of our audit found that for the period January 1, 2004 to December 31, 2006, the Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association expended funds as presented in the accompanying information and as of December 31, 2006, had a cash balance of \$8,690 and no investments. Additionally, the results of our tests indicated that, in all significant respects, the Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association received and expended state aid and accumulated relief association funds in compliance with applicable state laws, contracts, bylaws and administrative procedures, except as noted in the following findings discussed later in this report:

Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws

Finding No. 2 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Inadequate Minutes of Meetings

Finding No. 3 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Failure to Maintain a Complete and Accurate Membership Roster

Finding No. 4 – Insufficient Officer's Bond Coverage

Finding No. 5 – Inappropriate Presigning of Blank Checks

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

September 19, 2007

JACK WAGNER  
Auditor General



MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDINGS

COMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association has complied with the following prior audit findings and recommendations:

- Failure to Obtain a Federal Tax Identification Number

By obtaining a federal tax identification number and furnishing it to the financial institution in which the relief association maintains funds.

- Failure to Obtain a Pennsylvania Sales Tax Exemption Number

By obtaining a state sales tax exemption number and furnishing this number to all vendors from which the relief association purchases equipment.

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association has not complied with the prior audit findings and recommendations. These issues are further discussed in the following findings noted in the Findings and Recommendations section of this report:

- Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws
- Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Inadequate Minutes of Meetings
- Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation – Failure to Maintain a Complete and Accurate Membership Roster

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

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Inadequate Relief Association Bylaws

Condition: As cited in the prior audit report, the existing bylaws of the Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association do not contain all of the provisions required by Act 84 at 53 P.S. § 8505(c). Specifically, the relief association bylaws still do not:

- Adequately describe the various classes of relief association members as required by Act 84. The relief association bylaws extend death benefits to "A" members: however, an "A" member is not defined in the relief association's bylaws.
- Designate the procedures to be followed in amending the bylaws, and specify the notice to be required with respect to proposed amendments.

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

- The constitution or charter shall state the name, the purposes, and the form of the organization, **shall designate the class or classes of persons eligible for membership**, and the procedures to be followed in making amendments. (emphasis added)

In addition, Act 84 at 53 P.S. § 8505(c) states, in part, that the relief association's bylaws should include the following provisions:

- Specify the requirements of securing membership, the voting rights of different classes of members, if any, and the conditions under which membership may be terminated.
- The bylaws shall set out the procedures to be followed in amending the bylaws, and shall specify the notice required with respect to proposed amendments, including the time, place, and the date when any proposed amendment shall be considered.

In addition, prudent business practice dictates that the relief association should only be extending benefits to individuals that participate or have participated in the fire service. While a relief association's bylaws could contain more restrictive provisions than Act 84, its bylaws cannot provide for benefits that are not authorized by Act 84.

Cause: While notified in the prior audit report that the association's bylaws were not in compliance with Act 84, the relief association officials neglected to make the necessary amendments.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – (Continued)

Effect: As a result of these provisions not being included in the bylaws, the relief association may have conducted its affairs without proper authorization. In addition, as a result of the membership classifications not being defined, it is uncertain whether the relief association is only extending benefits to individuals that are entitled to benefits.

Recommendation: We again recommend that relief association officials review and update the bylaws governing their organization so that the bylaws meet the requirements set forth in Act 84 and properly authorize the operating procedures of the relief association. 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.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 2 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Inadequate Minutes of Meetings

Condition: As cited in the prior two audit reports, the relief association failed to maintain detailed minutes of meetings, as required by Act 84. Specifically, the relief association's minutes did not address all of the financial-related transactions, which occurred during the period under review.

Criteria: Act 84 at 53 P.S. § 8505(a) states, in part, that the relief association:

. . . must provide for the taking and preserving of minutes of all meetings, and the maintenance of such books of account as may be necessary and appropriate to afford a permanent record of its financial affairs.

Cause: While notified in the prior two audit reports of the requirement to maintain minutes of meetings, the relief association officials again neglected to comply with this Act 84 provision.

Effect: The failure to maintain detailed minutes of meetings prevented the verification as to whether all relief association business was presented before the membership for approval.

Recommendation: We again recommend the relief association maintain detailed minutes of meetings, including all financial-related business conducted by the relief association. 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.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 3 – Noncompliance With Prior Audit Recommendation –  
Failure to Maintain a Complete and Accurate Membership Roster

Condition: As cited in the prior audit report, the relief association officials did not maintain a complete and accurate roster of relief association members. While the relief association did provide a roster of its members, it only included names and indicated the individuals were "A" members. However, the relief association's bylaws do not define the different classes of the relief association membership. (See Finding No. 1)

Criteria: Relief association officials should maintain a complete and accurate roster of the relief association's membership, as identified by criteria set forth in the relief association's bylaws. A comprehensive roster of all relief association members should include the following:

- Name of each member.
- Member's mailing address.
- Date of birth.
- Date of membership.
- Membership classification.

In addition, a notation should be made on the roster identifying those who participate or who have participated in providing fire service and the date of a member's resignation or death.

Cause: While notified in the prior audit report of the requirement to maintain a comprehensive listing of relief association members, the association neglected to maintain a detailed and comprehensive roster of members.

Effect: The failure to maintain a comprehensive membership roster could result in the payment of benefits to nonmembers, or deprive eligible relief association members from receiving authorized benefit payments.

Recommendation: We again recommend the relief association officials compile and maintain a complete and accurate roster of the relief association's membership. For additional 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.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 4 – 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 \$8,000; however, as of December 31, 2006, the cash assets totaled \$8,690.

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.

However, subsequent to the audit period under review, on January 1, 2007, the relief association increased the officer's bond coverage to \$12,000.

Recommendation: We recommend the relief association ensure that, in the future, a faithful performance bond adequately covers the disbursing officer, as required by Act 84. 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.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 5 – Inappropriate Presigning of Blank Checks

Condition: A review of the relief association's checkbook revealed that two blank checks were presigned by one of the two relief association officials who are authorized to sign checks. The presigning of blank checks negates the relief association's internal control over the disbursement process.

Criteria: Checks should be signed and co-signed only after each authorized person has reviewed and approved the nature, purpose, and propriety of each expenditure.

Cause: The relief association failed to establish internal control procedures to prevent the presigning of blank checks.

Effect: The practice of presigning blank checks prevents the relief association from maintaining an adequate segregation of duties necessary to ensure the proper safeguarding of its assets.

Recommendation: We recommend that the practice of presigning blank checks be immediately discontinued. Furthermore, checks prepared for each expenditure should accompany the invoice and any other supporting documentation. This will enable each authorized official to review the nature, purpose, and propriety of each expenditure prior to signing the check. 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.

MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
 ACCOMPANYING EXPENDITURE INFORMATION  
 FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY 1, 2004 TO DECEMBER 31, 2006

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	\$ 2,033
Death benefits	200
Total Benefit Services	\$ 2,233
Fire Services:	
Equipment maintenance	\$ 792
Total Fire Services	\$ 792
Administrative Services:	
Officer compensation	\$ 1,800
Other administrative expenses	127
Total Administrative Services	\$ 1,927



MARION HEIGHTS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS' RELIEF ASSOCIATION  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Edward G. Rendell  
Governor  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Marion Heights Volunteer Firefighters' Relief Association Officers:

Mr. Ronald Coroniti, President

Mr. Mark Zenyuch, Secretary

Mr. Albert Olszewski, Treasurer

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

Ms. Lee Ann Smith, Secretary  
Marion Heights Borough

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).