



REBECCA OTTO  
STATE AUDITOR

# STATE OF MINNESOTA

## OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR

SUITE 500  
525 PARK STREET  
SAINT PAUL, MN 55103-2139

(651) 296-2551 (Voice)  
(651) 296-4755 (Fax)  
[state.auditor@state.mn.us](mailto:state.auditor@state.mn.us) (E-mail)  
1-800-627-3529 (Relay Service)

January-February, 2011

Article for *Minnesota Fire Chief*

---

### **2010-2011 Fire Relief Working Group Begins Its Work**

*By Rebecca Otto, State Auditor*

This fall, the Office of the State Auditor convened the Volunteer Fire Relief Association Working Group for the fourth consecutive year. The Working Group brings major relief association stakeholders together each year to discuss relief association issues, facilitate communication, develop relationships, and make the pension process easier and more effective by recommending legislative changes.

Last year's Working Group had great legislative success. In May the Governor signed the Omnibus Retirement Bill, which included the 2009-2010 Fire Relief Association Working Group Bill. Most of the changes for fire relief associations in the new law were based on suggestions made by the Working Group. The Working Group's proposals included technical changes, substantive changes, and updates to current drafting standards.

#### **Working Group Membership**

Members of the twelve-member group include relief association trustees from both the Metro Area and Greater Minnesota representing each plan type, municipal representatives, the fire service organizations, Legislative Pension Commission staff, and the State Auditor.

This year's membership includes Wayne Anderson, Inspector, Coon Rapids Fire Department; Bruce Duncan, President, Excelsior Fire Relief Association; Dave Ganfield, Administrator, Apple Valley Fire Relief Association; Jim Hansen, Training Officer, Spring Lake Park Fire Relief Association; Dave Jaeger, Treasurer of the Mahnommen Volunteer Fire Department; John King, Secretary, Le Sueur Fire Relief Association; Lawrence Martin, Executive Director, Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement; Bruce Roed, Trustee of the Mentor Fire Relief Association; Tim Simon, Finance Director of the City of Elk River; Steven Wallner, Finance Director of the City of Watertown; and Nyle Zikmund, Chief of the Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department.

## **Topics Being Considered**

At the first meeting of this year's group, members reviewed a draft record retention schedule and discussed some technical issues, as well as topic suggestions that were submitted by relief association trustees from across Minnesota. Members agreed at the next meeting on some technical changes to volunteer fire relief association laws and tentatively agreed on some tweaks to the return-to-service law. Members also began discussing updates to the list of allowable administrative expenses that may be paid from a relief association's special fund.

Based on suggestions from relief association trustees, the Working Group considered pursuing changes to allow filing and application fees that are payable to a federal or state governmental entity, like IRS Form 990 filing fees, to be paid from the special fund. The Working Group also discussed whether board trustees should be allowed to receive salary payments from the special fund. Currently, only a relief association's president, treasurer, and secretary may receive special fund salary payments.

The Working Group will continue discussions on administrative expenses and return-to-service issues. A list of additional topics that the Working Group will be considering this season as well as agendas and meeting materials are available on the Office of the State Auditor's website at [www.auditor.state.mn.us](http://www.auditor.state.mn.us). On the homepage select "For Local Officials", and then click on "Fire Relief Association Working Group".

## **Moving Ahead**

The Office of the State Auditor will keep you updated about the Working Group's activities and any law changes through our weekly E-Update, our monthly Pension Newsletter, and regular articles in the Fire Chief. The meetings are open to the public, and anyone is welcome to attend.

(Photo on next page)



State Auditor Rebecca Otto meets with the members of the 2010-2011 Volunteer Fire Relief Association Working Group at the Office of the State Auditor in St. Paul. Front row, left to right: Nyle Zikmund, Chief, Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department; Steven Wallner, Finance Director of the City of Watertown; Dave Jaeger, Treasurer of the Mahnomen Volunteer Fire Department; State Auditor Rebecca Otto; John King, Secretary, Le Sueur Fire Relief Association; Bruce Roed, Trustee of the Mentor Fire Relief Association. Back row, left to right: Jim Hansen, Training Officer, Spring Lake Park Fire Relief Association; Tim Simon, Finance Director of the City of Elk River; Dave Ganfield, Administrator, Apple Valley Fire Relief Association; Lawrence Martin, Executive Director, Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement; Bruce Duncan, President, Excelsior Fire Relief Association.

Absent: Wayne Anderson, Inspector, Coon Rapids Fire Department