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Article for *Minnesota FIRE CHIEF*

Updates from the Office of the State Auditor

By Rebecca Otto, State Auditor

Fire Relief Association Working Group

This fall, the Office of the State Auditor will convene the Volunteer Fire Relief Association Working Group for the fifth consecutive year. The Working Group brings together the major volunteer fire relief association stakeholders to work on legislative changes to make the pension process easier and more effective.

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

The Group typically holds about five weekday meetings spread across the fall and early winter months at our office in Saint Paul. Each year membership of the Working Group changes so that new communities can be represented. If you are interested in serving on the Working Group, please contact Rose Hennessy Allen at (651) 296-5985 or at Rose.Hennessy-Allen@osa.state.mn.us. Include your name, the name of your relief association or organization and your position with the association or organization.

Working Group meetings are open to the public. Representatives from relief associations, investment brokers, auditors, pension plan consultants, and members of the public frequently attend the meetings to share their thoughts, suggestions, and experiences. Meeting dates and times are published in the *Fire Chief*, in our Pension Division Newsletter, and on the Office of the State Auditor website, www.auditor.state.mn.us. Agendas and meeting minutes are posted on the website.

Trustees at relief associations throughout Minnesota have suggested topics for each year's Group. We're currently interested in identifying issues for the 2011-2012 Working Group to consider. If you or members in your community would like to suggest topics, please

forward suggestions to Rose Hennessy Allen at the phone number or e-mail address provided above.

Clarification on Tax-Exempt Status Issues

The July/August 2011 issue of Fire Chief contained an article on IRS Form 990 and tax-exempt status issues. I would like to clarify the role of the Office of the State Auditor with regard to the tax-exempt status issue.

The Office of the State Auditor (OSA) is providing technical assistance to individual volunteer firefighter associations and to the coalition of fire service organizations organized on these issues. The OSA cannot play an advocacy role or provide legal advice.

We will, however, continue to share updates that we receive with relief association trustees through our monthly Pension Newsletter and weekly E-Update. The June 2011 Pension Newsletter contains information for relief associations receiving notice that their tax-exempt status has been revoked and also provides links to several helpful informational documents. The Newsletter is posted on the OSA website at www.auditor.state.mn.us. On the home page, go to "Latest News," then click "Pension Newsletter." That will bring you to the Pension Division Newsletters page, where you can click on the "June 2011" link to see the newsletter.

If you would like to sign up to receive the Pension Newsletter or the E-Update, or if you would like to let us know about IRS notices that your relief association has received, please contact Rose Hennessy Allen at (651) 296-5985 or at Rose.Hennessy-Allen@osa.state.mn.us.