



World Fire
Congress

World Fire Congress Communities of Practice

Topic Abstracts — 2026 London Congress

Fire and Civil Defense in Conflict and Hostile Environments

Fire and rescue personnel are increasingly the first responders into deliberate, hostile acts — and increasingly the targets of them. Across a widening set of nations, firefighters are operating in conditions that are not peace, whether or not they are formally called war: sustained aerial attack, sabotage and arson campaigns against critical infrastructure, drone incursion, terrorism, and the long aftermath of protracted armed conflict.

The operational toll is severe and measurable. In Ukraine, more than 100 firefighters have been killed since 2022, alongside the destruction of over 400 fire stations and more than 1,800 fire and rescue vehicles. The Syrian delegation reports more than 300 firefighters killed over years of conflict response.

Responders now face a threat unknown to conventional fire doctrine: the deliberate repeat strike or “double tap,” timed to hit crews arriving at a scene already attacked. In one 2026 incident in Kharkiv, five rescuers were killed and five more injured when a second strike landed while they were extinguishing a fire.

Elsewhere, the threat is quieter but growing. One investigation compiled at least 151 reported hybrid incidents across Europe between February 2022 and March 2026, including arson at defense-industrial sites in Poland, Estonia, Bulgaria, and Italy in August 2026 alone.

In these events the fire service is the first — and often only — agency on scene, making it the de facto front line of national security long before any attribution is made.

International humanitarian law (IHL) already speaks to this. Articles 61 through 67 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions establish specific protections for civil defense personnel and the installations, equipment, and supplies they use. Those protections are poorly known within the fire service, inconsistently claimed, and rarely enforced. [Guide to Humanitarian Law](#)

The mission of this Community of Practice is to connect fire and civil defense leaders serving in conflict and hostile environments so that hard-won operational knowledge is shared rather than relearned under fire — and to advance the protection, continuity, and

recovery of fire services worldwide as a shared international obligation.

Focus of this Community

- **Responder protection.** Doctrine for staging, dispersal, and scene management under threat of secondary or repeat attack — blast, UXO, and drone-threat awareness — protective equipment for hostile environments.
- **Legal protection and advocacy.** Building fire service fluency in civil defense protections under IHL, developing a common standard for documenting attacks on responders, and advancing enforcement of those protections internationally.
- **Continuity of service.** Sustaining routine emergency response when stations, fleets, and personnel are themselves targets, cross-border mutual aid, resupply, and the practical mechanics of receiving international assistance.
- **Hybrid and gray-zone incidents.** Recognizing deliberate ignition, preserving scenes for investigation, coordinating with security services, and communicating publicly without escalating.
- **Responder and family welfare.** Sustained psychological support in protracted conflict, casualty and captivity support, and memorialization.
- **Recovery and reconstitution.** Rebuilding a national fire service after conflict — capability, workforce, and public trust.
- **Readiness transfer.** Preparing services not currently in conflict, as the gray zone expands.

Consistent with the [WFC Code of Conduct](#), this Community of Practice convenes around the operational and humanitarian conditions of responders. It does not adjudicate the conflicts themselves.