

Chief Fire Officers Speech

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to stand before you today as we celebrate a very special occasion in the life of the Bermuda Fire & Rescue Service the completion of our 2024/2025 Recruits Foundational Course.

This year's program has been remarkable for more than one reason. It was the first time in our history that we had two foundational courses intersecting each other. In late 2024, a foundational Airport Rescue Firefighting course began in Newcastle, England. That 2024 cohort successfully completed their Aircraft Rescue Firefighting module before returning to Bermuda — just in time to intersect with our 2025 group, the pioneers who are the first to complete a Bermuda-based foundational course designed to lead to Skills for Justice Level 3 international certification in structural firefighting.

The two streams met during the Emergency Medical Technicians Course, creating a unique moment in which recruits from different programs shared part of their journey together. It was a logistical challenge, but also a fantastic opportunity to blend experiences and perspectives.

In total, fourteen recruits have taken part in this historic training cycle with eight pioneers completing all the requisite training for the Skills for Justice Level 3 certification. While they have achieved this important milestone, their final assessments will be conducted in January 2026, after which their international qualification will be formally awarded.

Over the past 10 weeks, these eight have undergone rigorous training, mastering:

- Fire ground skills and understanding community risks
- Hazardous material operations
- Self-contained breathing apparatus
- Working safely at height
- Water rescue
- Road traffic collisions and extrications

They've learned to tie firefighter-specific rescue knots, manage hazardous substances, deploy hoses, extinguish fires, rescue casualties, and provide emergency medical care often all before lunch.

They also faced seven exams, prepared and delivered four mini-teach topics, and gave a 20-minute community risk presentation to instructors and senior officers. Physically, they've been pushed to their limits through daily fitness sessions I suspect some discovered muscles they didn't know existed and may still be avoiding eye contact with the treadmill.

We are obviously very pleased with what they have accomplished, and today we celebrate their success to date. But I must also remind them yes, you have successfully completed an important first step, but the journey is not over. Over the coming months, you will gain crucial work experience in preparation for your National Registry Emergency Medical Technicians test. That step is every bit as important as the training you have just completed, and it will further define your readiness to serve.

This milestone also reflects the fact that our Training Division is evolving. We are deliberately aligning ourselves with UK Fire & Rescue Service industry standards, adopting best practices that strengthen both our capability and credibility. This change in direction also represents a change in philosophy — moving away from the idea of simply “training” people, and instead focusing on learning and development. Training gives you skills; learning and development shapes professionals who continue to grow, adapt, and lead throughout their careers.

Both Sgt. O'Brien and Sgt. DeSilva are also on their own professional development journey, working toward becoming qualified Assessors through our partnership with KLamb Associates.

This is part of our broader vision to build a fully qualified, highly competent BFRS training team right here in Bermuda.

This journey began with them assisting in the delivery of the first recruit course in Bermuda for many years, supported by KLamb Associates. Going forward, this partnership will include:

- Assessor qualifications
- Teaching qualifications
- Dedicated instructor courses in Breathing Apparatus, Road Traffic Collisions, Hazardous Materials, Water Safety, and Working at Heights

All of this supports our vision of best-practice learning and development delivered in Bermuda by BFRS instructors, ensuring that future recruits receive world-class preparation without ever leaving the island.

This course could not have been accomplished without the efforts of many present today. We wish to express our appreciation for the support provided by the Government of Bermuda, in particular Minister Michael Weeks, JP, MP. My unreserved thanks go to the hardworking staff of the Bermuda Fire & Rescue Service; our combined cohort of training officers from BFRS and KLamb Associates; our Emergency Medical Services Coordinator, Nurse Rache Hodsoll; the Newcastle International Training Academy, Graham Reeve, and Gary Wright; Ms. Regina Ferguson of Public Lands and Buildings; and Ms. Joanna Cranfield of the Bermuda Land Management Corporation for their valued support.

This speech could be much longer but instead, I encourage you to speak with our recruits afterward. They can tell you first-hand what this journey has meant to them.

To our recruits you began as individuals, but today you stand as members of one of the most respected and trusted professions in the world. The helmet, the uniform, and the badge carry great responsibility and even greater honor.

Remember firefighting is a team sport. Keep looking out for each other, keep learning, and keep your sense of humor. You'll need it.

Congratulations we are proud of you, we believe in you, and we look forward to serving alongside you.