

Following the debacle of the Cameron Todd Willingham and Ernest Ray Willis incidents, Texas was at the absolute bottom of the barrel in terms of the credibility of its State Fire Marshal's Office. After a six-month search, the Texas Department of Insurance selected Chris Connealy as the new State Fire Marshal, and he came in and cleaned up. He was determined to follow **all** of the recommendations of the Texas Forensic Science Commission, which were issued on April 15, 2011.

Fire Marshal Connealy established the Science Advisory Workgroup (SAW), bringing in people (including myself) from around the country to review the work product of his investigators, and to provide quarterly training to those investigators. As a participant in this program, I was gratified to see demonstrable improvements in the quality of the work conducted by the Texas State Fire Marshal's Office, and by 2016, I and many of my colleagues were of the opinion that Texas had moved from worst to first. The International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI) endorsed the SAW concept, and offered to assist with any other state or local Fire Marshal's office to establish a program similar to that in Texas. Because of his ability to turn around the failing Fire Marshal's office, Chief Connealy was a finalist for 2013 Texan of the Year

[http://res.dallasnews.com/interactives/2013\\_December/texan-of-the-year/connealy/](http://res.dallasnews.com/interactives/2013_December/texan-of-the-year/connealy/) Chief Connealy was invited to travel nationwide to represent Texas and its fresh approach to fire investigation. The ability of the Fire Marshal's Office to transform itself can be attributed to one word, "leadership."

Unfortunately, with the appointment of a new Commissioner of Insurance, Texas has decided to "go in another direction," and the SAW has been at least temporarily shut down due to lack of funding. Mr. Connealy has accepted employment in Williamson County as the Senior Director of Emergency Services. Orlando Hernandez has been appointed Interim State Fire Marshal.

<https://www.tdi.texas.gov/news/2018/tdi08272018.html>

It is not known whether or how he plans to follow up on the important work started by Chief Connealy.

It was the blistering hot spotlight of media attention that caused (or allowed) Texas to institute the groundbreaking reforms that brought it to the forefront of fire investigation in the United States, and it appears that it will require some more of that sunshine to once again get the state moving in the right direction.

I'm certain that Chief Connealy and any of the members of the SAW would be happy to provide insight as to how the program worked and why it should continue to work.