

Dr. Denis Onieal



As the Deputy United States Fire Administrator, Dr. Denis Onieal was the senior career federal fire official responsible for the day-to-day operation of the United States Fire Administration (USFA) — the annual training of over 140,000 first responders at and through the National Fire Academy; the National Fire Incident Reporting System, which documents and analyzes 28 million fire department emergency responses a year; the USFA's fire prevention, public information and public education programs; and the 26 campus buildings and the grounds of the historic National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Prior to his appointment as Deputy Fire Administrator, he served as Superintendent of the United States National Fire Academy. During his tenure, the NFA staff increased enrollments from 15,000 to over 100,000 students per year; completely revised all curriculums so that each course received undergraduate or graduate credit recommendation through the American Council on Education; established a nationwide fire training system in partnership with each State Fire Training Academy; instituted an alliance with over 110 associate and bachelor degree programs to standardize fire degree programs; and launched an on-line training program to include self-paced and instructor led courses for those unable to attend campus classes.

An honorably discharged Army veteran, he joined the Jersey City Fire Department and rose through the ranks from firefighter to deputy chief, and then to acting chief, leading a uniformed force of 650 firefighters and officers. With the exception of his time as Chief of Department, he spent his entire time "in the street" as a line fire officer – including 15 years as a firefighter, lieutenant and captain in two of the city's busiest ladder companies.

He completed a Bachelor of Science from New Jersey City University, a Master of Public Administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University and a Doctorate in Education from New York University (NYU). He taught in the master and doctorate programs in education at NYU for five years.

Beginning on Sept. 12, 2001, he led the USFA's team at the World Trade Center, working behind the scenes to help the New York City Fire Department re-establish their systems of command, control and on-site communications. In 2005, he was sent to Atlanta, Georgia, to lead the in-processing, training and dispatch of 4,000 firefighters to assist in the response to Hurricane Katrina. He served in leadership roles in almost every national disaster.

He is the recipient of the Department of Homeland Security Secretary's Medal for Exceptional Service; the Congressional Fire Services Institute Mason Lankford Leadership Award; the North American Fire Training Director's Lifetime Achievement Award; the International Association of Fire Chiefs President's Award for Outstanding Leadership; the James O. Page EMS Achievement Award for Exemplary Leadership; the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs President's Award of Distinction; the Dr. John Granito Award for Excellence in Fire Leadership and Management Research; the IFSTA Everett Hudiburg Award; the Fire Engineering Lifetime Achievement Award; and the Firehouse Magazine Lifetime Achievement Award.

He is a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the International Association of Fire Chiefs. He serves on the Boards of the International Fire Service Training Association, the National Fire Protection Association and the Wellspan Health System.