



For Immediate Release: June 13, 2006

Augusta Fire Dept. Battalion Chief Steven Bell Calls on Congress to Provide Better Training and More Funding for First Responders

Chief Bell recalls the efforts of fire fighters who first arrived on the scene after the Graniteville train accident; tells members of Congress that he hopes "an accident similar to the one in Graniteville does not happen in one of the cities you represent."

Washington, DC – At the invitation of Georgia Congressman John Barrow (12th District), Augusta Fire Department Battalion Chief Steven Bell today testified before the House Transportation Subcommittee on Railways about the steps he believes the federal government should take to help local communities and local first responders better prepare and adequately train for the possibility of future railway accidents involving hazardous materials.



Chief Bell's hazmat team was one of the first to arrive on the scene last January when a train carrying hazardous materials crashed in Graniteville, South Carolina.

"Our training and equipment were put to the test on January 6, 2005, when a freight train carrying chemicals hit a parked train near an Avondale Mills plant in Graniteville, South Carolina." Chief Bell told the Transportation committee. "The impact caused poisonous chlorine gas to leak from one of the moving train's cars. More than 5,000 people were evacuated from the site and nine people were killed."

Bell urged members of the Committee to invest in better training for local first responders and fire fighters. In addition, Bell urged Congress to examine ways to help make sure that local emergency responders are notified about the potential of hazardous cargo before they move in to respond to an accident.

"I hope that an accident similar to the one in Graniteville does not happen in one of the cities you represent." Chief Bell said to members of the Committee. "The federal government has an important role to play ensuring that our nation's emergency responders are properly trained and properly equipped to respond to incidents, such as the accident in Graniteville, involving hazardous materials."

"Last year's accident in Graniteville was a tragedy that cost lives," Barrow said. "Unless we take the steps necessary to better prepare, train, and inform our first responders, we're doomed to repeat the mistakes of Graniteville in other cities across the country."

###

Contact: Harper Lawson, (202) 225-2823