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# Preface

**T**his report is a best practices review of fire services in Minnesota. It is the fifth in a series of best practices reviews conducted by the Office of the Legislative Auditor.

The 1994 Legislature established best practices reviews as a way to identify practices that aid in delivering local government services efficiently and effectively. Our approach is similar in some respects to one used by the British Audit Commission in England and Wales to determine the state of the art in the delivery of local services.

The emphasis on identifying what local governments do well is one of the key distinctions between best practices reviews and traditional audits or program evaluations, which typically focus on compliance and performance deficiencies. The Legislature intended that best practices reviews help local governments improve their service delivery by learning about effective and efficient methods used by jurisdictions similar to them.

To determine which local services should be subjects of best practices reviews, the Legislature created a local government advisory council when it established the program. By law the advisory council comprises three members appointed by the Association of Minnesota Counties, three by the League of Minnesota Cities, two by the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities, and one

*Our best practices reviews look at effective and efficient methods of delivering local government services.*

each by the Minnesota Association of Townships and the Minnesota Association of School Administrators. This advisory council recommended the topic of fire protection to the Legislative Audit Commission, which approved it in May 1997.

We acknowledge and appreciate the help provided by many local fire department personnel around the state. Their interest and cooperation in this review contributed greatly to the final report. The State Fire Marshal Division in the Department of Public Safety was among several state agencies that also willingly offered assistance.

The report was researched and written by Jody Hauer (project manager), Valerie Bombach, and Caryn Mohr, with technical assistance from Gregg Davies. For readers with access to the Internet, this report and related material may be found over the World Wide Web at <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/pe9907.htm>.

*St. Paul, Minnesota  
April 1999*