

CITY OF MUSCATINE



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CONTRIBUTIONS TO HAZMAT PROGRAM RECOGNIZED

Muscatine firefighter honored with Iowa Hazmat Technician of the Year award

MUSCATINE, Iowa — Lieutenant Spencer Ripperger of the Muscatine Fire Department (MFD) has been named the 2024 Iowa Hazmat Technician of the Year by the Iowa Hazmat Task Force, recognizing his outstanding contributions to hazardous materials response and training. He is the second MFD firefighter to receive this prestigious honor and will attend the International Association of Fire Chiefs' Hazmat Conference in Baltimore, June 12–15.

"Spencer has demonstrated exceptional skills and expertise in the hazardous materials field," said Captain Pat Gingerich, who



Muscatine Fire Captain Pat Gingerich (left), the 2015 Iowa Hazmat Technician of the Year, and Muscatine Fire Lieutenant Spencer Ripperger, the 2024 Iowa Hazmat Technician of the Year.

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nominated Ripperger for the award. "He has consistently produced outstanding work that has earned him a great reputation within the department."

Interim Fire Chief Mike Hartman agreed the award was well deserved.

"It is people like Spencer that make this place so special," Hartman said.

Ripperger joined the MFD nine years ago, earning his Hazmat Technician certification in 2017. He currently serves as a member and instructor for the department's Hazardous Incident Response Team (HIRT) and was promoted to Lieutenant in 2022. Since then, he has taken on a leading role in advancing the department's Hazmat capabilities.

Gingerich, who received the same award in 2015, praised Ripperger for helping maintain the department's Hazmat program at a high standard.

"This is a well-deserved recognition," he said.

In his role, Ripperger oversees both shift and department-wide Hazmat training. He has coordinated specialized sessions, including a rail safety class with Canadian Pacific-Kansas City Rail and training focused on lithium-ion battery fires—both critical given the increased risks posed by rail transport and emerging technologies.

"Canadian Pacific brought their training trailer here, allowing our team to get two weeks of hands-on experience," Ripperger said.

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The Muscatine Fire Department and Muscatine Power and Water conducted a Hazmat drill at the MPW Power Plant on Nov. 19, 2024.

The trailer includes a variety of valves, tank car components, and other equipment responders may encounter in rail-related Hazmat incidents.

He also led a full reorganization of the Hazmat truck two years ago to improve efficiency and accessibility during responses.

Beyond internal training, Ripperger is an active member of the Hazmat Outreach Program, delivering refresher training to volunteer fire departments across Muscatine, Louisa, Henry, Washington, and Keokuk counties.

"We set a date, travel to their location, and teach a four-hour class," he explained. "It's incredibly beneficial for these departments, and not many teams provide this kind of outreach."

Ripperger has also built relationships with outside agencies, including the Iowa National Guard's 71st Civil Support Team, which handles hazardous materials and WMD emergencies across the state.

At the upcoming Hazmat Conference in Baltimore, Ripperger will engage in advanced training on a wide range of topics, from transportation safety to bioterrorism and mass decontamination.

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Captain Gingerich reflected on the similarities between his own path and Ripperger's.

"Spencer has followed a similar route to mine," he said. "He's incredibly dedicated and confident in his role, and we look forward to his continued leadership."

In 2015, Gingerich was nominated by Gary Ronzheimer after filling in for Ronzheimer when he was deployed overseas and was honored with the Iowa Hazmat Technician of the Year award. The award also recognized Gingerich for his work with the Iowa Hazardous Materials Task Force during the avian flu outbreak. Gingerich, along with other firefighters, assisted the USDA with monitoring bio-security, cleaning, and decontamination at infected sites and landfills.

The Muscatine Fire Department is designated as the regional team for Region 16 and provides services to Muscatine, Louisa, Henry, Washington, and Keokuk counties in Iowa.