

The most important FPE of his generation: an obituary for Philip J DiNenno, 1953–2013

Craig Beyler

Hughes Associates, Inc., Baltimore, MD, USA



Phil was best known as the founding editor of *the SFPE Handbook of Fire Protection Engineering*, for which he was Editor-in-Chief through four editions. From his college years, Phil had the vision to transform the FPE profession from a specification-oriented discipline to a quantitative science-based engineering discipline. He understood that ultimately the transformation needed to come from within the practicing engineering community.

Corresponding author:

Craig Beyler, Hughes Associates, Inc., Baltimore, MD, USA.

Email: cbeyler@haifire.com

Early in his career he served on the SFPE Education Committee (chair, 1983–1985), organizing many courses and symposia to bring existing and emerging areas of fire science to the practicing engineering community. Some of these symposium proceedings became issues of the then fledgling *Fire Safety Journal*. During this time, Phil recognized that a handbook defining the new quantitative engineering methods would be needed. He conceived of *the SFPE Handbook of Fire Protection Engineering* and recruited other members of the Education Committee to act as section editors. The handbook, first published in 1988 by NFPA, has come to define the FPE discipline in the way Phil originally envisioned when he, only in his early 30s, began its development. In his Guise Medal speech in 2005, Phil identified the volunteer efforts of the 54 authors as a leap of faith on their part. Phil inspired that kind of faith among the best of the fire science and engineering communities.

Phil contributed to SFPE in many other ways, including service on the Board of Directors and as President of the Society of Fire Protection Engineers. In recognition of his accomplishments, stature, and service to SFPE and the fire protection engineering profession, Phil received almost every one of SFPE's awards, including the membership grade of Fellow (1996), the Harold E. Nelson Service Award (1998), the President's Award (1989 and 2002), the Arthur B. Guise Medal (2005), and the D. Peter Lund Award (2009). He served on the Editorial Boards of the *Journal of Fire Protection Engineering* and *Fire Technology*. SFPE's obituary characterized Phil as "an unparalleled leader and visionary in the fire protection engineering community." He was the most important fire protection engineer of his generation.

Phil joined Hughes Associates (HAI) in 1985, became Vice President in 1992, and was President/CEO from 1996 until the time of his death. He provided technical leadership throughout his career at HAI. It could be said that growing HAI according to his vision was Phil's primary means of transforming the profession. As President, he transformed HAI from a small, highly regarded fire science and engineering firm into a respected, full service fire protection engineering organization with an international footprint.

Phil also provided significant leadership in the broader fire safety community through his participation in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). "Phil will be remembered as one of the most outstanding leaders that NFPA has ever had," said NFPA President Jim Shannon. "He was an extraordinarily effective advocate for fire safety and the most respected person in fire protection engineering of his generation. He served in leadership positions on NFPA's board, chaired the Standards Council, and received our highest honors, the Paul C. Lamb Award and the Standards Medal. His contributions to NFPA and our mission are incalculable" said Shannon. Phil had a long professional history with NFPA, serving on many Technical Committees, including Gaseous Fire Extinguishing Systems, Merchant Vessels, Water Mist Fire Suppression Systems, Halon Alternative Protection Options, Fire Investigations, and Fire Tests.

Phil was a member of the Fire Investigation Committee during the writing of the first and second editions of NFPA 921, the landmark NFPA publication that

fundamentally changed how fire investigations are conducted and are used in the judicial system. He and other engineers on the committee assured the scientific rigor and underpinnings of the new guide, establishing the credibility of the document.

His participation in the Gaseous Fire Extinguishing Systems, Water Mist Fire Suppression Systems, and Halon Alternative Protection Options Technical Committees grew out of the challenge to eliminate the use of Halon, a fire suppression agent which was a stratospheric ozone depleting gas. He also served on several international organizations involved with the replacement of Halon: member and Chair of the U.S. TAG for the International Standards Organization (ISO) technical committee activities on Halon replacements; advisor to the U.S. delegation of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Fire Protection Subcommittee; Halon Sector Expert to the World Bank; chair of the Technical Committee, Halon Alternatives Research Corporation; and member of the United Nations Environment Program's Halon Technical Options Committee. His contributions were recognized by the US EPA, who awarded him two Stratospheric Ozone Protection Awards for his work to provide alternatives to Halon.

Phil graduated with a BS in fire protection engineering at the University of Maryland in 1977. Immediately after graduation, he served as a research assistant in the Department, working with Dr. John Bryan on the second phase of the Project People studies until 1980. During his time at the University of Maryland he served the Chillum Adelphi Fire Department, rising through the ranks as Lieutenant, Captain, Assistant Chief and Deputy Chief. Later, Phil served as a part-time instructor in the Department of Fire Protection Engineering where he taught Fire Modeling/Fire Dynamics.

He left the University to work with Ken Dungan at Professional Loss Control (PLC) in Oak Ridge, TN in the early 1980s, where he was first licensed as a Professional Engineer (PE). His work at PLC focused on industrial fire protection principally in the power generation sector. His work included a period analyzing fire protection of power plants in South Africa. He then returned to Maryland to work at Benjamin-Clarke Associates in 1983. His work there focused on the use of computer-based fire modeling to evaluate the fire hazards of materials. This was an age in computers and fire modeling when only those in academia or government research laboratories had access to the mainframe computing power to do fire modeling. Phil was a pioneer in the use of fire modeling in the private sector, first using remote timeshare mainframes and then using the then new HP 9000. Similarly, he pioneered the use of small- and large-scale fire testing to solve fire problems in the private sector. At that time these tools were essentially only utilized by large institutional laboratories.

When Phil arrived at HAI in 1985 he continued his pioneering work both in modeling and experimentation. He conducted many full-scale fire tests on the Naval Research Laboratories USS Shadwell fire test ship in Mobile Bay Alabama in work to improve shipboard fire safety. His work at HAI involved a

wide range of topics at the forefront of fire protection engineering research and application. He maintained close working relationships in the fire science community and actively moved fire science into fire protection engineering practice.

Phil grew up with three sisters and a brother in Delaware Co., PA. He was an altar boy in his Catholic Church and took an early interest in cars that continued throughout his life. He was an avid Baltimore Ravens fan and was found to be hoarse on many Mondays in the fall. When his voice was fit, lunchtimes were filled with football stories and discussions. Phil was also a serious fisherman, enjoying fishing trips to Canada in the summer and the Florida Keys in the winter. He organized many of these fishing trips, enjoyed by HAI employees and Phil's family and friends. Many of them remember Phil most fondly with a fishing rod in his hand.

Linda and Phil were married in 1986. Linda was the center of his world and he was proud of his children: Jessica, Nicholas, Christopher and Maria. Phil was a man of great intellect, vision, and drive. He was immediately identifiable to those he met as a person of exceptional talents and motivation. A leader in all he did, he inspired others to contribute their talents and energy, never micro-managing or dictating how a task should be accomplished. He was demanding, yet he was generous to everyone around him. He has made the world a better place for those around him, as well as many millions who will never know who he was. Those of us who knew him will never forget him.