



ENUMCLAW FIRE DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2021 Call Volumes Have Enumclaw Firefighters Scrambling

ENUMCLAW, WASH. – The Enumclaw Fire Department reports that emergency call volumes increased 12.6% in 2021 compared to 2020. That number jumps to almost 40% compared to 10 years ago.

Another issue is concurrent calls, or emergencies that happen at the same time. In 2021, these types of calls accounted for 20% of all 911 calls for the Fire District.

“We have a responsibility to communicate both good news and bad,” said Fire Chief Randy Fehr. “And, the truth is that we are struggling and response times are starting to increase. The good news is that we have a plan to reverse this trend.”

Chief Fehr is talking about hiring additional firefighters to respond to emergencies. Enumclaw firefighters support this move, and the funding request to go with it.

“We’re making every effort to ensure our community gets the highest level of service possible,” said Firefighter Lance Hardersen. “Our staffing levels are falling short of the community’s needs. With 911 calls at an all-time high, we need more personnel now to keep up. A lot of our firefighters live right here in Enumclaw; we know a decrease in our current level of service will not be an acceptable option for our neighbors. We are at that point.”

EMS accounts for 74% of all calls for the Fire District. In 2021, the Fire District spent \$203,673 in overtime to have enough firefighters on duty to manage emergency call volumes. Overtime pay compensates emergency personnel at time and a half their wage.

The attraction of working overtime is losing its shine for some firefighters. They have asked for more staffing, and the Fire District wants to help. The Board of Fire Commissioners is discussing placing a fire levy lid lift before voters on the August 2, 2022 Primary Election ballot.

Daily operations at the Enumclaw Fire Department are funded by a fire levy of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Over time, the fire levy rate falls as property values rise to limit the fire district to roughly the same amount of levy revenue per year plus a one percent increase allowed by law.

For example, voters last approved a fire levy of \$1.50/\$1,000 in 2016, and that amount has fallen to \$1.36/\$1,000 in 2022. Inflation is 6% for the area and revenue is simply not keeping up with the demand for or cost to provide service.

The Fire District continues to discuss asking the community to return the fire levy to \$1.50/\$1,000. Revenue would be used to increase staffing from four to five firefighters per shift. With three shifts per day, the agency would need to hire five firefighters total to account for vacations, holiday and sick leave.

With five firefighters, the Enumclaw Fire Department would be able to staff a fire engine and a medical aid unit 24-hours a day. Currently it operates with two on an engine and two in an aid car. The National Fire Protection Association requires three firefighters on scene to enter a burning building and check for survivors. If a third is at the scene of a fire, then only one is the aid car which impacts the Basic Life Support services the agency provides – and EMS accounts for 74% of all calls for the Fire District.

“Enumclaw is cut off from other parts of the county. It’s difficult for neighboring agencies to provide mutual aid to our community in an emergency. We want to be able to take care of our own, and not have to rely on outside help from far away all the time,” said Chief Fehr.

The Board will vote at its meeting in mid-March whether or not to place the lid lift on the ballot. The 13-cent fire levy lid lift would cost \$5.42 per month (\$65 a year) for the owner of a \$500,000 home. Please note that the assessed value of a property is lower than its market value.

More information on the fire levy lid lift can be found on the Fire District’s website at www.enumclawfire.org. Chief Fehr also welcomes your questions at (360) 825-5544 or rfehr@enumclawfire.org

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The Enumclaw Fire Department provides fire and life safety services to 22,500 people over 56 square miles. EFD relies on full-time and volunteer emergency personnel to respond to an average of 2,500 calls a year, 74% of which are for emergency medical service. Firefighters are highly-trained to provide quality emergency services often found in larger communities, such as technical rescue, hazardous material spills, auto extrication, fire prevention and life safety programs.