

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

**WEST PIERCE FIRE & RESCUE**  
3631 DREXLER DRIVE WEST  
UNIVERSITY PLACE, WA 98466

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## Our Mission

West Pierce Fire & Rescue is a community partner dedicated to saving lives, improving health and safety, and protecting property.

## Our Vision

To be a progressive community and industry leader that readily adapts to the needs of current and future generations.

## About West Pierce

WPFR protects 31 square miles and serves a population of approximately 100,000 people. WPFR provides service to the cities of Lakewood and University Place, which are incorporated within the fire district and contracted services to the Town of Steilacoom. There are six fire stations that operate 24 hours per day and are located strategically throughout the District.

Services provided to the community include: fire suppression, emergency medical services and transport, technical rescue, hazardous materials response, emergency management and preparedness, fire prevention, inspections, code enforcement, fire investigation, and community risk reduction education.

WPFR protects many bodies of water throughout the District. Three boats are in service to respond to incidents occurring on Puget Sound and on any of the many lakes. Due to the different types of water responses, WPFR has specialized teams, including marine pilots, divers and rescue swimmers.

# Letter From The Chief

***In 2023, we were in front of our community asking for their support of the Maintenance and Operations (M&O) Levy.*** Fortunately, they turned out with great support. The M&O levy supports nearly a third of the fire district's operations. Without the support of our community and the funding this levy provides, our services would have been greatly reduced. The renewal of the M&O levy will provide dedicated funding for the next four years.

Over the course of the last four years, we have worked diligently to increase services in the community. This was accomplished by adding an additional medic unit, a second Battalion Chief, and two part-time squads. New programs were implemented to address wildfires in the urban areas as well as a Connected CARE program. This program is staffed by a nurse who can help divert nonemergent patients out of the 9-1-1 system. With the renewal of the M&O levy, we will be able to continue supporting all of these vital community resources through 2027.

West Pierce Fire & Rescue is very proud of the services we provide to the communities of Lakewood, University Place and Steilacoom. We greatly value the partnership we have developed with the community and look forward to earning your continued support.



*Jim Sharp, Fire Chief*



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*The renewal of the M&O levy will provide dedicated funding for the next four years.*

# Incident Response

**In 2023, WPFRR responded to 17,809 calls for service, where nearly 80% were for medical aid.** Of the call type categories, the Fire & Hazards category represents high-risk, lower frequency calls. These calls place responders in dangerous situations, require more resources and pose significant risk to the community.

These types of responses include all types of fires, combustible/flammable liquid spills and leaks, chemical releases, structural collapse, and electrical issues, such as downed power lines. Many of these calls require specialized training to mitigate them safely. While crews respond to fewer fire and hazardous conditions calls than medical aid, WPFRR averages five of these incidents per day.

West Pierce Fire & Rescue responds to a variety of emergencies and firefighters are trained to respond to each and every one of them. Every firefighter is an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and nearly one-quarter of them are trained to the level of Paramedic. There are also firefighters specially trained in technical rescue, hazardous materials response, water and dive rescue.

In addition to 9-1-1 responses, WPFRR Chaplains spend their time meeting with residents in need, supporting WPFRR personnel and their families, training responders on the importance of self-care, and assisting with District events and trainings.

Rest assured, when 9-1-1 is called for an emergency, WPFRR will Respond Efficiently • Execute Flawlessly • *BE NICE!*

## 2023 Timeline

### New apparatus: February-August

New pieces of WPFRR's fleet were replaced and put in service in 2023. Engines 22 and 24 went in service in February, Battalion 31 in June and Ladder 21 in August. These vehicles play a crucial role in emergency response and the larger pieces take approximately two years to build, outfit and deliver.

### Red Knights Recruit Academy: May

Newest firefighters graduated after 13 weeks of training before going to shift to serve the community. This was the last Red Knights Recruit Academy before the Pierce County Fire Training Consortium was formed.

### Youth Academy: June

The 5th annual Youth Academy program was held to expose high school students to career opportunities in the fire service.

### Pierce County Fire Training Consortium: July

The Pierce County Fire Training Consortium (PCFTC) was created to collaborate and streamline training efforts among five local fire districts. Their responsibilities include recruit academies, fire operations training, certification testing, as well as professional development.



## Maintenance & Operations Levy: August

A four-year Maintenance & Operations levy was passed to replace the current one that was set to expire. This accounts for 30% of WPFR's operational budget.

## West Pierce Emergency Management Coalition: September

A new website was launched as part of the partnership between the cities of Lakewood and University Place, the Town of Steilacoom and WPFR. This site will be used for the public in preparation for and during a large-scale emergency.

## Community Risk Reduction School Programs: October

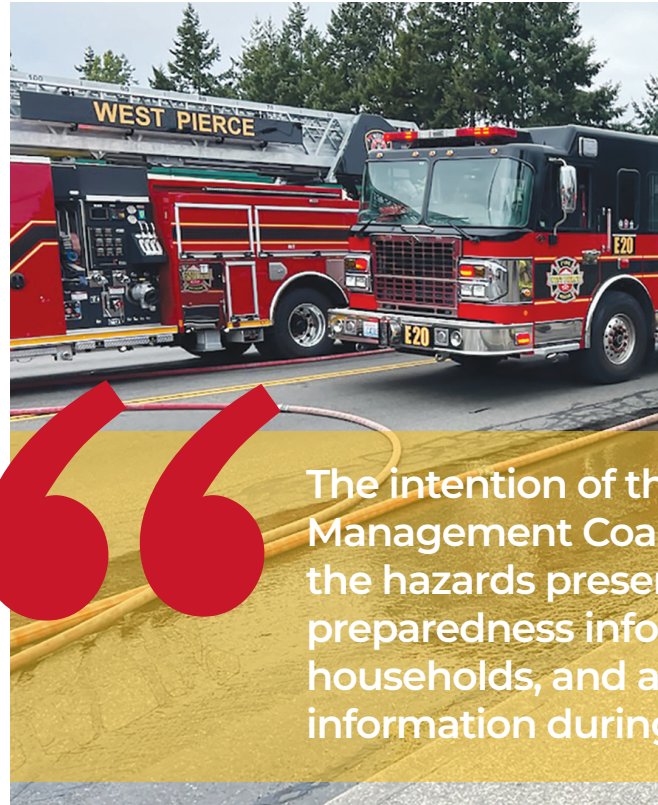
Public educators returned to the classroom and taught in 20 schools within the fire district. They visited 287 classrooms throughout the Clover Park, University Place and Steilacoom Historical school districts.

# West Pierce Emergency Management Coalition

***West Pierce Fire & Rescue's Emergency Management Division had an impactful year in 2023.*** The team continued to strengthen partnerships with jurisdictions within the West Pierce Emergency Management Coalition, which consist of the cities of Lakewood and University Place, and the Town of Steilacoom. These partnerships continue to find innovative ways to streamline coordination processes between agencies that support a response.

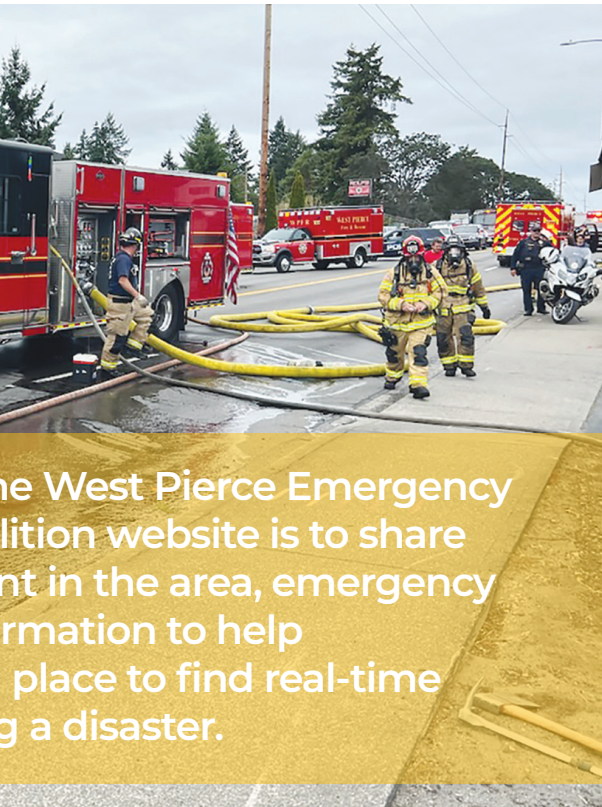
One of the major achievements this year was the development and launch of the West Pierce Emergency Management Coalition's website, [www.westpierceemergency.org](http://www.westpierceemergency.org). This website compiles emergency management-related information that is useful to the community in a centralized location. The intention of the website is to share the hazards present in the area, emergency preparedness information to help households, and a place to find real-time information during a disaster. The webpage can also be translated into several languages making it accessible to all members of the community.

Effective alerts and warnings have also been a strong focus. Lakewood, University Place and Steilacoom utilize the CodeRED



The intention of the Management Coalition is to share the hazards present in the area, emergency preparedness information to help households, and a place to find real-time information during a disaster.

system to send emergency alerts to the community. Utilizing CodeRED was instrumental during the Fort Steilacoom Park wildfire in August 2023. The City of Lakewood and West Pierce Fire & Rescue worked together to send out an alert on the recommendation to evacuate. This incident was an example of how the coalition coordinates effectively and efficiently during large-scale incidents. In addition to the emergency alert, all agencies within the West Pierce Emergency Management Coalition coordinated resource requests and other support functions for the incident. Large events like this also require assistance from other partners like the Pierce County Department of Emergency Management, school districts, the Red Cross and utility companies. Each incident provides an



The West Pierce Emergency Services website is to share information in the area, emergency information to help the community find real-time information during a disaster.

opportunity for plans to be practiced, establish new best practices and improve for future events.

Multiple trainings, including a multijurisdictional tabletop exercise, were hosted throughout the year. The goal was to educate personnel on established processes on what resources are available for support during a large incident.

The Emergency Management Division took huge strides in 2023 to develop a program that is innovative, collaborative, progressive and coordinated. The team is committed to building on the success of 2023 and growing the program further in 2024 to best serve the community.

## 2023 Responses

### ➤ Emergency Medical Services: 14,096

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) calls are for medical aid responses that include caring for a patient. This could range from a cardiac arrest to a motor vehicle collision to difficulty breathing, and a variety of calls in between.

WPFR also handles transporting patients to the hospital. Approximately 45% of all EMS patients were transported.

### ➤ Fire & Hazards: 2,161

This category is a combination of call types, such as fires, combustible/flammable liquid spills and leaks, chemical releases, structural collapse, ruptures, explosions, etc.

While these numbers do not represent the majority of WPFR's call volume, they are of high risk to firefighters and the community. They take additional resources and result in an average of five calls per day.

### ➤ Good Intent & Service: 1,552

Good intent calls may include responses where firefighters were dispatched and canceled en route, such as controlled burning and steam, or other gas mistaken for smoke.

Service calls may include patient assists (such as a person who has fallen out of bed), lockouts with hazard, water problems, smoke or odor problems, animal rescue and public agency assistance.

## TOTAL CALL VOLUME: 17,809

# Pierce County Fire Agencies Collaborate On Training Efforts

***Hiring and training firefighters is an enormous undertaking requiring the work and collaborative efforts of an entire organization.*** Developing training content and instruction, IT support, facilities maintenance, fleet and vehicle maintenance, administrative support and logistical considerations take immense effort and coordination to succeed. West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) is no stranger to this and through the past several decades has worked to continuously improve the training quality and find new and innovative ways to train new recruits.

In 2006, Lakewood Fire District 2 began running its own recruit training program, known as the Red Knights Recruit Academy. The program immediately became a regional success, hosting recruits from the Puget Sound region and other parts of Western Washington. It quickly earned a reputation for being a quality recruit academy. This program successfully completed 14 recruit academies over 18 years, producing hundreds of highly trained firefighters through its existence. The final Red Knights Recruit Academy class graduated in May 2023.





Over the years, a combination of factors including the increase in service demand from the public and high retirement rates created a massive need for recruit training regionally. Given the frequency of hiring to maintain operational readiness, the volume of resources required to train recruits, and a need to improve interoperability and safety among Pierce County fire agencies, West Pierce, Central Pierce, East Pierce, Graham and Orting Valley fire departments began a regional discussion on how to accomplish this collaboratively. The result of these discussions was the development of the Pierce County Fire Training Consortium (PCFTC).

These agencies work together on a regular basis and it makes sense to collaborate to streamline efforts. As call volume continues to rise, along with higher demand on resources, the need to train together improves how firefighters operate on emergency scenes. The development of firefighter training begins with the recruit academy, which was the first component to building the PCFTC. The result of this work was the development of “The Forge” recruit academy. The recruits are known as the Spartans. Duty, Discipline and Endurance comprise the core values of the recruit class and represent the duty of service to the community, the discipline it takes to be successful and the endurance to make it to the end of a successful career and beyond.

The first class of Spartans graduated on February 1, 2024, marking the completion of the first-ever PCFTC recruit academy and the first time in Pierce County’s history that such a collaborative achievement has been accomplished. The benefit of conducting a regional recruit academy allows for organizations to combine resources to manage such a heavy lift. Historically in



a typical year using traditional fire-based resources, local fire departments have only trained 50–60 recruits per year. The PCFTC has the capacity to double that number annually.

This new collaborative training model is a benefit to the community, as these collaborative efforts result in improved working relationships, and improved interoperability and resource reliability. Fire districts frequently request mutual aid support from other agencies during incidents, as no single agency could manage a significant event and continue to manage other smaller emergencies at the same time. By training together, the agencies are improving service to the collective communities by ensuring there are no gaps in service. While programs are continually being built out, the PCFTC is taking great strides to initiate these improvements to continually improve the service each agency provides to its community.

# Wildfire Risk In West Pierce

***In the summer of 2023, two fire incidents showed the relevancy and accompanying dangers of brush fires.***

Both of these incidents created substantial challenges for responding crews where fires in vacant land spread quickly, threatening nearby homes and structures. The term “wildland-urban interface” (WUI) is used by the U.S. Fire Administration to describe this transition zone.

WPFR and its regional partners face these challenging wildfires more often due to increasingly hot, dry summers. WPFR continues developing and improving strategies to better prepare in addressing these challenges through awareness, training, specialized vehicles and equipment. Fortunately, grant funding was secured in 2023 to provide WUI training for all WPFR personnel.

In early August, nine homes were destroyed in the Jamestown Mobile Home Park in Lakewood when a brush fire rapidly spread. Crews initially faced tall flames that threatened nearby apartment buildings. The winds then shifted, causing the fire to move quickly towards the homes in Jamestown instead of moving in its original direction. Unfortunately, the fire resulted in the tragic deaths of two residents who were unable to escape the rapidly moving flames. Additionally, many other residents were either displaced or lost their homes.

Weeks later, a fire at Fort Steilacoom Park in Lakewood took a collaborative effort



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**WPFR continues to address and prepare for these WUI events with concerted efforts to outfit firefighters with training, equipment, and vehicles to support them in operating safely and effectively in such challenging environments.**

from WPFR personnel and mutual aid from multiple fire and law enforcement agencies. These efforts included helicopters equipped for aerial firefighting provided by the Department of Natural Resources. Additional WPFR personnel worked on planning, communication, public information, alerting and evacuations. Although the fire burned approximately 40 acres of the park, none of the threatened homes were damaged.

WPFR continues to address and prepare for these WUI events with concerted efforts to outfit firefighters with training, equipment, and vehicles to support them in operating safely and effectively in

such challenging environments. WPFR anticipates putting a newly acquired second brush fire vehicle in service in early 2024. Additionally, all new recruit firefighters attending the Pierce County Fire Training Consortium Recruit Academy will graduate with industry-recognized wildland training.

Despite the challenging weather and fire conditions during both events last summer, WPFR is proud of the firefighters for their tireless efforts in suppressing the fires. WPFR is committed to improving firefighter safety while improving the effectiveness in fighting fires in the wildland-urban interface.



# Connected CARE Coordinator Named Health Care Hero

***In February 2022, the Connected Community Access, Referral and Education (CARE) program was implemented.***

This program was created to empower residents within West Pierce to manage their health care, mental health and social needs by assisting them with access to the proper community resources, which helps to eliminate the overutilization of the 9-1-1 system. WPFR is proud to announce Karen Gilbert, registered nurse and Connected CARE coordinator, was named a Health Care Hero by the Puget Sound Business Journal.

Gilbert's work is similar to a nurse case manager in the hospital setting. However, she sometimes responds to 9-1-1 scenes with firefighters to assist with highly complex medical, mental health and substance abuse cases, among others, as an additional resource. She spends much of her time working with the patient, firefighters and the rest of the patient's care team to improve communication and coordination of medical care. This work serves to improve patient health outcomes as well as reduce the reliance of these calls on the 9-1-1 system and emergency rooms.

Gilbert created and implemented a referral program, where firefighters can request her assistance to provide the best care for patients who may not have emergent



needs. Referrals are sent to Gilbert directly from firefighters and paramedics on emergency calls when they identify individuals that may benefit from the program. Referrals include patients of any age, even pediatrics. Some examples include high utilizers of the 9-1-1 system for nonemergent hospital transports, patients who live alone and begin to have declining health and reliance on additional resources, patients with complex social and medical conditions where traditional fire department resources are inadequate, or a patient who is having mental health challenges and doesn't know how to navigate the local health care system.

Within two weeks of the Coordinated CARE program's implementation, Gilbert was already making a difference. Firefighters ran a call on a complex medical patient with nonemergent medical needs. The patient did not know how else to receive help other than calling 9-1-1. Within a day

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*Since the program was implemented nearly two years ago, there have already been more than 700 referrals.*

of receiving the notification about this patient, Gilbert was able to access the patient's medical records, better understand the complexity of his issues, and develop a care plan for firefighters that integrated with the rest of his care team. This was something WPFR had never had the capacity to effectively do prior to Gilbert coming on board. She immediately impacted patient outcomes and provided firefighters a much-needed resource.

Since the program was implemented nearly two years ago, there have already been more than 700 referrals. WPFR is very proud of Gilbert's efforts and accomplishments and is extremely excited to see her awarded as a Health Care Hero.



## 2023: By The Numbers

West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) provides a variety of services to the community, which include: fire suppression, emergency medical services and transport, technical rescue, hazardous materials response, emergency management and preparedness, fire prevention, inspections, code enforcement, fire investigation and community risk reduction education.

In 2023, WPFR is proud to have served the community in a variety of ways, including those listed below. While these do not include 9-1-1 calls, it shows the amount of work WPFR personnel do every day to continually ensure the safety of the community.



**329**

public records  
requests fulfilled



**61**

fire investigations  
completed



**1,586**

fire inspections  
completed



**26**

Car seats installed



**150,000**

grant dollars awarded



**410**

bike helmets & life  
jackets fitted



**612**

smoke alarms  
installed



**498**

project plans  
reviewed



**28**

community events  
attended



# 65

National Night Out parties attended



# 287

school classrooms visited



# 36

Safe Sitter students graduated

## Training Hours

Being properly equipped and trained to handle any incident is crucial. These categories reflect the training firefighters maintain annually.

### ➤ Fire Suppression: 16,485

Operations level training for firefighters, such as training center drills, live fire, firefighter rescue, active shooter, etc.

### ➤ Emergency Medical Services: 5,992

Continuing medical education for Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) and Paramedics.

### ➤ Recruit Training: 9,434

All training, for recruits and instructors, during the Red Knights and Forge Recruit Academies.

### ➤ Hazardous Materials: 3,528

Hazardous conditions training, at the operations level for all firefighters and specialty training for WPFR's Hazardous Materials Technicians.

### ➤ Officer Development: 3,328

Continuing education and leadership training as personnel move up in rank, whether when promoted or acting in a supervisory position.

### ➤ Driver/Operator: 1,938

Emergency response vehicle driving training.

### ➤ Water Rescue: 1,200

All water-related training fields, such as rescue swimmer, dive and marine pilot programs.

### ➤ Technical Rescue: 1,525

Specialized training, including trench rescue, rope and rescue rigging, structural collapse and confined space.

## TOTAL TRAINING HOURS: 43,430

# Employee Recognition

## Retirements and resignations

Captain Darren Cole  
Captain Lynda Henderson  
Captain Todd Rohde  
Captain Garret Smith  
Captain Travis Smith  
Captain Jason Wilson  
Firefighter/Paramedic Ron Bahr  
Firefighter/Paramedic Dan Brown  
Firefighter/Paramedic Vi Diamond  
Firefighter/Paramedic Tony Sole  
Firefighter/Engineer Allen Koenig  
Administrative Assistant Julieta Chacon

## Promotions

Assistant Chief Michael Dobbs  
Battalion Chief Matt Garrels  
Captain Marney Fuller-VanSlyke  
Captain Clint Jenkins  
Captain Rob Mayzak  
Captain Kelly McElroy  
Firefighter/Engineer Kenny Bergsma  
Firefighter/Engineer Jason Carr  
Firefighter/Engineer Victor Figueroa  
Firefighter/Engineer Brianna Moore  
Firefighter/Engineer Jake Stroud  
Firefighter/Engineer Justin Tinsley  
Firefighter/Engineer Ken VonStein  
Finance Specialist Randi Force

## New hires

Firefighter Cody Barnett  
Firefighter Kyle Bettis  
Firefighter Skylar Brown  
Firefighter Jacob Campbell  
Firefighter Denver Coleman  
Firefighter Nicolas Cutlip  
Firefighter Travis Damp  
Firefighter Zacharie Harvey  
Firefighter Derek Herness  
Firefighter Andrew Hinojos  
Firefighter Logan Kitselman  
Firefighter Cade Lucero  
Firefighter Richard Madrid  
Firefighter Kyle Peterson  
Firefighter Kelby Smith  
Firefighter/Paramedic Quinten Johnson  
Firefighter/Paramedic Lorene McCreary  
Firefighter/Paramedic Trevor McDonald  
Firefighter/Paramedic Vincent Orellana  
Firefighter/Paramedic Collin Pederson  
Firefighter/Paramedic Kolby Saucedo  
Firefighter/Paramedic Benjamin Smargiassi  
Firefighter/Paramedic Madison Wood  
Administrative Assistant Sara Coleman  
Administrative Assistant Lacey Zuber  
Emergency Management Coordinator  
Nathan Johnson  
Mechanic LeeFrancis Samson



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